



Large-scale cultural and ecological restoration lead by Traditional Custodians

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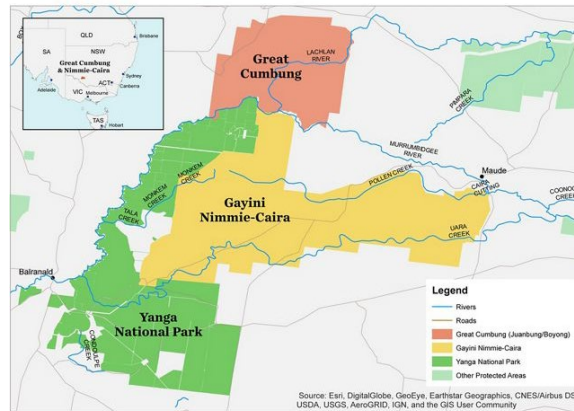
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BACKGROUND

Protected areas under private and Indigenous governance regimes are an increasingly important components of meeting global conservation targets. The 88,000 ha Gayini Nimmie-Caira property covers internationally-significant lignum wetlands, floodplain woodlands, grasslands and shrublands in the Lowbidgee floodplain, southern Australia (Fig. 1), making it one of the largest single private holdings in the under-reserved Riverina bioregion. The AUD\$180 million Nimmie-Caira water saving project, saw the New South Wales (NSW) and Australian governments purchase 19 properties with the aim of delivering environmental flows and ensuring long-term sustainable land management. The NSW Government invited tenders for the future management of the property. In 2018, a consortium of Nari Nari Tribal Council, The Nature Conservancy, Murray Darling Wetlands Working Group and University of NSW successfully tendered for the stewardship of Gayini Nimmie-Caira with an integrated economic, social, cultural and ecological vision for the region. In late 2019, The Nature Conservancy facilitated the legal transfer of ownership of Gayini to the Traditional Custodians, the Nari Nari Tribal Council. For more information visit [here](#) and [here](#).

Figure 1: Location of Gayini Nimmie-Caira and adjoining conservation lands



MODEL FOR CONSERVATION AND WORKING LANDSCAPES

The conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, water delivery and hydrological restoration were objectives that both governments had for the property and as a result a series of legal and management constraints and protections were required. This included the development of a Land and Water Management Plan and environmental water easements to allow environmental water delivery across the property. These restrictions and protections, while allowing for sustainable uses, aligned well with the ambitions of the consortium.

Figure 2: Images of Gayini Nimmie-Caira. For video footage of this internationally-significant wetlands from the air visit [here](#).



SOCIAL & CULTURAL INITIATIVES

The *Triple C: Cultural Connection to Country* Program is a cultural healing initiative for Aboriginal males aged 14-24. The program objective is to connect disassociated youth to Country by hosting small groups of 8-10 participants on country owned and managed by the Nari Nari Tribal Council. Reconnecting people to Country is also undertaken through reinstating traditional practices such as fire, while management of Gayini is undertaken using Traditional Ecological Knowledge and western science – see more [here](#).

THE NEW FUTURE

Large-scale restoration

The strategic cuts to banks former irrigation bays has enabled water to spill onto the floodplain, increasing the diversity of wetland habitats, waterbird breeding opportunities and regeneration events. This represents one of the largest wetland restoration projects in southern Australia.

Adaptive management and monitoring

A Healthy Country Plan has been completed for Gayini which articulates aspirations of Traditional Custodians and provides clear links back to the objectives and outcomes in the Land and Water Management Plan.

Sustainable financing for management

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust offers in perpetuity stewardship payments for entering into long-term conservation agreements (a form of privately protected area) and associated conservation management. This option is being explored for parts of Gayini. Grazing occurs in the commercial zones of the property, and conservation grazing is undertaken as necessary to control herbaceous weeds in accordance with a Grazing Plan and the Land and Water Management Plan. Grazing provides an economic contribution towards land management and supports the improvements in vegetation quality through weed control.