



Media Statement

Monday, 21 October 2019

Local Aboriginal artists paint tribute to water in Mid West

A unique collaboration between local Aboriginal artists and staff from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER) has resulted in a painting depicting the value of water to the Indigenous community in the Mid West.

Director General Mike Rowe officially unveiled the painting today at DWER's Geraldton office in celebration of National Water Week, which takes place across Australia in the third week of October each year.

Mr Rowe said the project had produced more than a beautiful piece of artwork.

"The intention behind this painting was to inspire our staff to connect with local Aboriginal people and value the knowledge they offer us as we manage the region's environment and water resources," he said.

"The end result was not only a beautiful and meaningful piece of artwork, but also the development of a connection and understanding between the local Aboriginal community and our staff.

"DWER's recently released Reconciliation Action Plan calls for better engagement with the Indigenous community; this project will stand as an example of what that means in real terms."

The painting, which tells the story of the valuable connection between water, the land and people, took approximately two months to complete and involved four Aboriginal artists and the contributions of 16 DWER staff.

DWER Water Licensing Program Manager Fleur Coaker commissioned the Yamatji artists after spending a month in the Kimberley, where she was inspired by the connection of the Aboriginal community to the land and water.

She said while the painting was uniquely beautiful, the real value of the project was the ability for staff to connect with Aboriginal culture, people and stories while painting alongside the four artists.

"The Yamatji artists surprised us by inviting our staff to participate in painting the piece with them – which created an amazingly positive and collaborative environment," she said.

"Local DWER staff and others visiting for training days were invited to spend an hour or so with the artists, painting and talking – learning about traditional owners of this region and forming friendships.



“Building relationships based on trust, understanding and respect are key for us to meaningfully engage with traditional owners in managing the environment and water resources in this region.”

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DWER Director General Mike Rowe unveils painting produced by staff with Yamatji artists.