

Measuring What Matters Consultation

Submission of Tati Tati Kaijein Traditional Owner Organisation

Written by Melissa Kennedy and Sangeetha Chandrashekeran

Meeting details

Tati Tati Kaijein, Traditional Owner Owned and Operated Not-for-

Meeting host contact details [phone or email]: Melissa Kennedy [REDACTED]

Meeting host

- ☐ Member of Parliament
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ Non-government organisation
- ☐ Business
- ☒ Academic
- ☐ Community group
- ☐ Individual
- ☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.

Meeting date: March and May 2023

Meeting location: Robinvale, Victoria

Participants attending:

- ☒ Member of a community organisation
- ☐ Businesses
- ☒ Academics
- ☐ Union members
- ☐ Individuals
- ☐ Other Click or tap here to enter text.

Number of participants: 12

We are co-developing research with University of Melbourne on the question of what matters to Tati Tati Traditional Owners. Tati Tati Traditional Owners have identified a need to understand the intergenerational opportunities and benefits that come from greater self-determination on their Country. Our project is co-designed by researchers at the University of Melbourne, the Australian Research Council Lifecourse Centre of Excellence and us as First Nations researchers who are leading debates on cultural flows. We seek to model Tati Tati water-related cultural economic futures using agent-based modelling. Tati Tati Traditional Owners' Country is on Millu (Murray River) near Robinvale (Vic). This project will quantify the intergenerational opportunities and benefits that come from the return of water and control of resources to Traditional Owners. We utilise an agent-based modelling platform, which allows us to model complex scenarios with multiple facades or layers.

While the proposed Treasury themes and framework may capture helpful data for and insights on what matters, there still lies the central problem with measuring Traditional Owner outcomes against universalising frameworks and values created by non-Indigenous people. It is difficult to include cultural understandings or protocols.

Wellbeing is culturally bound and is shaped by many aspects of life, including experiences, beliefs and values. As such, in order to accurately measure wellbeing for a specific cultural group, it is necessary to understand the experiences, beliefs and values that influence the conception and experience of wellbeing of that group (Garvey, et al., 2021). A wellbeing tool including domains relevant to Indigenous Australians is required (Butler et al., 2019). Noting that Indigenous peoples' concepts and understanding of health and wellbeing are holistic; however, wellbeing is not experienced uniformly across all Indigenous populations (Gall et al., 2021).

There are two crucial components of well-being are often excluded from policy because of their relative difficulty to measure and manage. These are equity and the interrelationships between humans and the environment. Betley et al. argue that well-being frameworks that do not consider the environment, or interrelationships between people and their environment, are not truly measuring well-being in all its dimensions for First Nations communities (2021).

For many First Nations peoples, culture and cultural identity is essential to social and emotional wellbeing (DPC, 2017). Gee et al. found that, for Indigenous communities, being able to work on Country provides a sense of achievement, self-esteem, self-reliance, and strong personal identity (2014). Notable frameworks have been developed to reflect these values include: the Mandala of Health Model (Hancock & Perkins, 1985); the Rumbalara Indigenous Wellbeing model (Kingsley et al., 2013); and the Butterfly Model of Health for an Ecosystem Context (VanLeeuwen et al., 1999).








Place-based approach

These and many others set a strong base for capturing and analysing Indigenous indicators of wellbeing, however, it is difficult to apply any one framework in a way that suits individual and diverse Nations. For Tati Tati, significant work has already been done to determine similar values and outcomes of Nation wellbeing as part of their Cultural Flows program, that is place-based and directly informed by the Traditional Owners of Tati Tati Country.

The Tati Tati Cultural Indicators of Wellbeing are a way to assess if Traditional Owner priorities are being achieved in a specific program or proposal in a way that is both measurable and culturally appropriate. By measuring outcomes against cultural indicators, we effectively determine the benefits of Traditional Owner water management. Table 1 below details the cultural indicators relevant to water management and gives examples of how they may develop as program outcomes. We are proposing to undertake this framework to create a methodology to capture the wellbeing outcomes and realities of Tati Tati peoples for our UOM program.

Where more consideration is required is how to adequately capture wellbeing outcomes over time, including setting a baseline prior to the program commencing. Analysing how wellbeing is changing, and that the drivers of that change are, will be critical in meaningfully understanding the cultural and physical benefits for wellbeing.

Table 1: Tati Tati Cultural Indicators. Source: Tati Tati Kaiejin.

Cultural Indicator	Description:	Examples of outcomes:
 Healthy Mob	<p>The emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of Traditional Owners has improved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased power over decision-making processes has increased emotional well-being. ✓ Time spent on Country results in improved health due to increased physical activity. ✓ Strengthened connections to place and community enhance outcomes of well-being.
 Cultural Economies	<p>Cultural economies are re-established and strengthened.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ownership/management of water has led to employment opportunities for Traditional Owners. ✓ Activities on Country have enabled spaces for yarning, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge sharing. ✓ Cultural water has been utilised to grow native food and medicine for use, trade, or sale.
 Self-Determination	<p>Nation power, agency, and capacity is improved within water-related program objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Management and decision-making processes of water landscape are self-determined by Traditional Owners. ✓ Nation capacity is increased with additional income/employment associated with water allocations or management.
 Healthy Country	<p>Conditions of Country are improved, achieving Nation natural resource management goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ TO determined environmental or cultural watering has increased the health of water plants and native vegetation. ✓ Culturally significant aquatic species abundance has increased with cultural flows or watering objectives.
 Responsibility to Country	<p>Nation responsibilities to Country and ancestors are upheld and maintained in a culturally safe way.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nation aspirations of improving the health of Country at specific locations are achieved. ✓ Traditional practices and ceremony that involved water are restored. ✓ Elders have upheld their responsibilities of intergenerational passing of knowledge.
 Connection to Place	<p>Increased connection to place through on Country activities or traditional practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Program implementation enables Traditional Owners to work on-site at significant locations. ✓ Elders re-visited areas where Nation histories were remembered.
 Cultural Experiences	<p>People and culture are strengthened through experiences and traditional practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Opportunity for Nation gatherings with water-related programs ✓ Knowledge of Caring for Country increased with more time spent implementing water management programs

Based on our consultations with Tati Tati Traditional Owners we can say the following:

Measurements of what matters need to be derived bottom up rather than top down. The key question is what matters to our mob and that is derived through careful and trusted engagement.

Without this engagement there is a danger that we could be seen to be meeting targets around prosperity, inclusion, sustainability etc without necessarily meeting the needs identified by our mob and for our mob. We also find that what matters to our people is based on Country or place. It is preferable for us to work out what matters using a place based approach and then to think about how this fits into the themes you have identified (prosperous, inclusive, sustainable etc) rather than for us to say how these themes matter. We prefer community scale indicators of wellbeing, rather than individual-scale assessments and target-based approaches. We also prefer more holistic assessments of what matters. For example, we cannot decouple our culture from economy. We do not support the idea that jobs, employment etc sit apart from our Country (land and waters) and from our emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The idea of “cultural economy” that we use refers to the the health and wellbeing of our people; spirituality; land and water and natural resources; having freedom power and authority; being able to communicate and interact with each other; cultural knowledge; cultural protocols; customary law, language, stories, song and dance. The economy, as you describe it, is always embedded within culture.

For Tati Tati, based on yarning that we are doing for our research, the following are the key high level things that matter:

- Being on Country
- Wellbeing
- Kinship and Family Connections
- Intergenerational knowledge sharing
- Building Capacity and Resourcing, including recognising our Nation authority
- Access, equality and respect

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