



# NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS CONFERENCE 3.0

*From offsetting to nature positive*

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Photo by David Francis



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## ABSTRACT

### Aboriginal Waterway Assessments and the Nature Positive Agenda

One of the objectives of the Australian Government's Nature Positive Plan is to support Indigenous-led conservation and cultural heritage protection. Aboriginal Waterway Assessments (AWA's) are an example of how this objective can be achieved. AWA's enable First Nations Peoples to assess and manage their waterways according to their own knowledge, values, and aspirations. AWA's are a tool for monitoring and improving the health and resilience of waterways. They are also a way of celebrating and strengthening the cultural and spiritual connections between water and people. AWA's align with the principles and priorities of the Nature Positive Plan, such as co-designing and co-implementing solutions, respecting and valuing Indigenous rights and interests, and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem services. The process of completing an AWA involves four main phases: preparation, fieldwork, analysis, and reporting. Preparation involves identifying the waterway to be assessed, engaging with the appropriate First Nations People, planning for the trip and accessing resources. Fieldwork includes visiting the waterway and collecting data on its physical, ecological, and cultural attributes, using a combination of scientific and First Nations methods. Analysis covers the processing and interpreting of the data, identifying the key issues and opportunities, and developing recommendations and actions. Reporting involves presenting and sharing the findings and outcomes of the AWA with the community and other stakeholders, using various formats and media. By conducting AWA's, First Nations Peoples can demonstrate their leadership and innovation in water management and governance. They can provide robust, culturally relevant data to influence the decisions and actions of other stakeholders. AWA's also provide a platform for intergenerational and intercultural learning, knowledge exchange, and relationship building. AWA's are a promising pathway for collaboration between First Nations Peoples, the Australian Government, and other stakeholders, to achieve the shared vision of a nature positive future.

## SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Kay Blades is a Mandandanji woman who descends from the Weribone family of the Southwest region of Queensland. Since retiring in 2023, Kay now channels more of her time, passion and efforts into Aboriginal water interests which began some 10 years earlier in the northern part of the Murray Darling Basin. Actively participating in projects that incorporate First Nations knowledge, leadership, self-determination and rights into water modelling and waterway assessments, Kay continues to champion the intersection of Aboriginal perspectives and environmental conservation. Kay is a member of the MDBA's Cultural Advisory Group (CAG), DCCEEW's Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Water Interests, AIATSIS Human Research Ethics Committee and the Balonne Shire Council's Indigenous Advisory Committee. Kay's continued involvement on advisory committees and projects showcases a tireless commitment to the well-being and representation of First Nations peoples, solidifying her status as a respected figure in the realms of government service, Indigenous advocacy, and environmental stewardship.

Jayne Thorpe is Executive Director of Stablish, a consultancy operating in Southern QLD. Over the past 20 years Jayne has worked with not-for-profits across the natural resources, agriculture, conservation and social services fields. Her work includes grant preparation, project management and governance support. She has a background in the Global Reporting Initiative and has recently been working on projects looking at the risks and opportunities of environmental markets. Last year Jayne had the privilege and pleasure of acting in a project manager role for Aboriginal Waterways Assessment work through the Northern Basin Aboriginal Nations. Jayne is a Certified Environmental Practitioner and has been a member of EIANZ since 2010.