During the stakeholder consultation phase of the Mersey-Forth Water Management Review it was identified that the Mersey-Forth catchment area is highly significant to the Aboriginal people of Tasmania. Aboriginal artefacts between 38,000 to 48,000 years old have been found in the Forth River valley. The Mersey River and tributaries were resource rich and a focal point of activity.

As a result there are numerous rock shelters, caves and artefacts of high Aboriginal heritage value around Lake Rowallan, Lake Mackenzie and Lake Cethana.

It is recognised that there is currently little known in Australia about the impact of dam operations on Aboriginal heritage sites. Waterlogging, swashing, the impact of currents affecting material, and ice breaking up the ground and moving material are all potential impacts. No studies have been undertaken in Tasmania regarding the impact of inundation.

Aboriginal Heritage Study

Aim of Study

The aims of the Mersey-Forth Aboriginal Heritage Study, undertaken as part of the Mersey-Forth Water Management Review, were to:

- Work collaboratively with the Aboriginal community to gain a better understanding of Aboriginal heritage values on Hydro Tasmania owned and managed land and water in the Mersey-Forth catchments; and
- Investigate management requirements.
Process
To achieve the aims of the study the following actions were undertaken:

- Key Aboriginal stakeholders including the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, Aboriginal Heritage Tasmania and the Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation were consulted in one on one meetings. As a result a more strategic and regional approach to determining values and management was required with the Mersey-Forth catchments ideal for such a trial;
- Stakeholders made it clear that it is important to identify potential Aboriginal heritage issues and to know where and what the heritage sites and values are in order to manage them properly; and
- With support from the Aboriginal community and consultant heritage experts from Entura there have been a number of key outcomes from the study.

Outcomes
The outcomes from the study were:

- An Aboriginal Heritage Values Report for the Mersey-Forth catchments has been completed providing a good understanding of known Aboriginal values on Hydro Tasmania land throughout the catchments. It covers the ethnography of the region, an overview of heritage site types, lists all previously recorded sites and includes some recommendations about management using predictive modelling and impact assessments. The Aboriginal community have asked that the report remain confidential in accordance with established policies. The report will be used internally by Hydro Tasmania for planning and managing activities on their land; and
- A prioritised Action Plan has been prepared to address issues raised by the Aboriginal community. The plan has broader application across the Hydro Tasmania hydropower system and will be used as a guide for Hydro Tasmania to better undertake Aboriginal heritage management in conjunction with their activities in other catchments.

Commitment
Through this study and engagement with the Aboriginal community Hydro Tasmania has learned a considerable amount and established good relationships for ongoing collaboration. Hydro Tasmania is committed to maintaining and enhancing these relationships and through the implementation of the Action Plan for Aboriginal Heritage in Hydro Tasmania catchments will continue to facilitate improved management of Aboriginal heritage across its land and waterways.

For More Information
To find out more about Aboriginal heritage management visit www.hydro.com.au/about-us/publications/cultural-heritage.
To see all the Mersey-Forth Water Management Review technical and social studies go to www.hydro.com.au/MFWMR-studies.

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