

Water Story Series Q&A: Leanne Collingburn and Joe Hedger

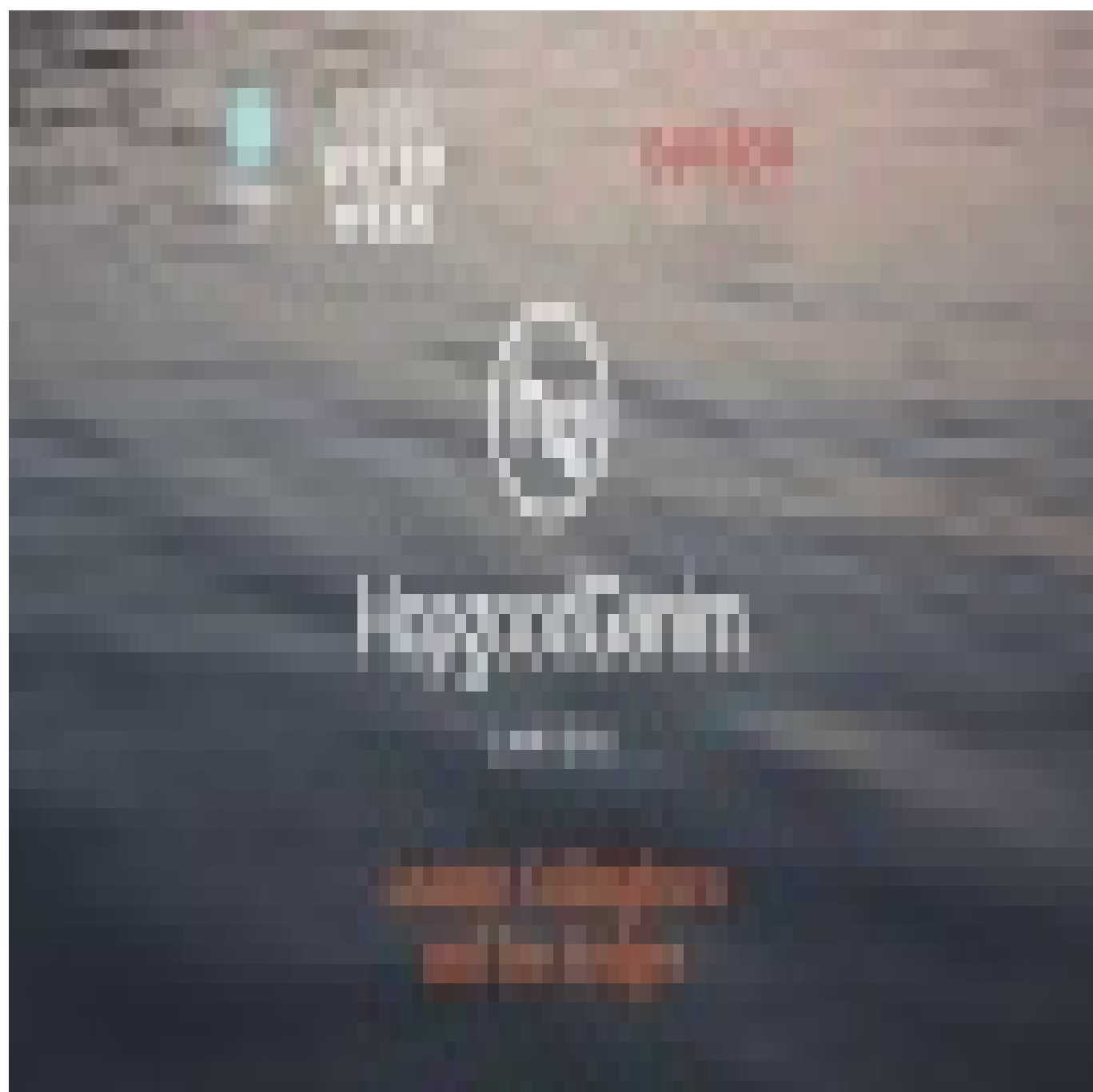
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6 min. read

This [National Water Week](#), HopgoodGanim Lawyers have partnered with [Caxton Legal Centre](#) for a Justice in Focus: Water Stories series. Through interviews with guest speakers, we explore multi-disciplinary responses to environmental disasters and climate change in Australia, particularly in Queensland and Northern New South Wales.

In our first interview of the series, Head of Pro Bono Leanne Collingburn interviews Joe Hedger, who leads Deloitte's Indigenous Services Group, focusing on working with clients and First Nations communities. He is a proud Bundjalung and Yorta Yorta man and is highly respected for bringing the latest trends in strategy, technology and innovation to empower clients and First Nations communities to be future fit in an increasingly complex, disrupted and competitive market.

Watch the full video



Interview extract

In this abridged extract of Leanne's and Joe's full interview, we find out more about their connection to the water, and how Joe felt watching the floods starting to hit the Northern Rivers region in early 2022.

Leanne: "We know the [Bundjalung] community was quite devastatingly impacted by the floods [in February and March 2022]... and it has been reported as the region's worst recorded flood in history. Through social media you tried to rally support and identify what was happening in those communities to your networks. Could you talk about that and secondly, you went back on country, back home to help with that immediate recovery and I just wondered if you could share a little bit about your experience with that as well?"

Joe: "You know, I was sitting at home in Canberra just watching the floods starting to hit Lismore, you know, in a very devastating way. Watching Naomi dealing with the floods, putting a call out; I just felt compelled to find a way to be useful and to help out. Once the waters started to recede, I remember just grabbing everything I could and just packing the car, packing a trailer and going up there, not knowing, you know, if you're able to get into the community, not knowing what state the community was going to be in, not knowing, you know, where you're going to stay but just feeling absolutely compelled to be there for the community to be able to help community because it, you know, for many people, we've lived with floods, particularly up in the Northern Rivers region where floods are not something that are uncommon. But there was just something about this flood that made me have a lot more concern about the community, and feeling that sense of, you know, needing to do something, which a lot of people did. Certainly, it just wasn't me but there were a lot of people in the community and other parts of the country that just felt the need to go up there and help. [For me] it was really Naomi's call out on NITV and thinking that, you know, I've got two options: 'I can sit at home and watch what goes on or you can actually just jump in a car and get up there and find a way to help'."

Leanne: "Something that you also did particularly well during that time was really challenge your audience in terms of what it means to support First Nations communities and what it means to embrace reconciliation and acknowledging country."

Joe: "I think it was just a case of getting people to go beyond just very simple, easy to do, statements about reconciliation. You can't acknowledge country and not acknowledge what was happening in Lismore in the surrounding communities that had just been impacted by some of the most devastating natural disaster events ever to occur in this country. You can't stand behind a reconciliation action plan and not stand behind these communities that need that support more than ever."

Leanne: "Something we've spoken about since the floods, something that really stood out for you was the leadership of First Nations women in the Northern Rivers community in response to the flood crisis."

Joe: "What they did and what I observed and how they continued that for well over six months - that's a beautiful story... Those who sacrificed so much of their own time to provide for others and these were First Nations women not only providing for our communities but for the broader community up there. And when you think about everything our people have been through and what we've endured over the last 200 plus years to have First Nations women who step up and still provide and still support the broader community and still do it in a way that displays this extraordinary

leadership, calmness, resolve, commitment and determination; I just applaud these women."

The views expressed in this interview are personal views and should not be taken as legal advice.

What is the HopgoodGanim and Caxton Legal Centre Water Series?

The [HopgoodGanim Lawyers](#) and [Caxton Legal Centre](#) Water Stories series focuses on learnings and responses during recent flood events in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Across the series we are shining light and provoking wider conversations on land and water management, disaster planning and response. By sharing the water stories of our guest speakers, we hope to better understand our collective responses and preparedness for environmental disasters. This Justice in Focus series will continue across each day of [National Water Week](#) and aims to generate discussion that encourages human-rights centred approaches and forward thinking that incorporates the many voices and stories about people, places and our connection to water.

About the speakers

[Leanne Collingburn](#) is a leading pro bono lawyer, social impact and human rights advocate. As Head of Pro Bono at HopgoodGanim, Leanne is responsible for the firm's pro bono legal contributions to the community. She has been practising exclusively in pro bono since 2014 and has considerable experience in pro bono practice management, social impact and reconciliation programs.

Joe Hedger leads Deloitte's Indigenous Services Group, growing its work on First Nations procurement, climate and sustainability. He is a recognised thought leader in this space. He contributes to innovation, thought provoking issues of national and global importance to inspire new conversations and disruptive thinking.

Pro Bono services, HopgoodGanim Lawyers

HopgoodGanim has a [Pro Bono strategy](#), which is focused on delivering long-term changes in three impact areas: First Nations communities, Environmental disasters, and Domestic and family violence.

Learn more about [HopgoodGanim's Pro Bono services](#), and connect with our [Head of Pro Bono, Leanne Collingburn](#), for more information.

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