

## Fact sheet: The benefits of employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

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Being an employer of choice is essential in the face of skills gaps, skills shortages, an ageing workforce, and public and private sector competition.

### Addressing labour shortages

In regional areas facing skills shortages and where it is expensive to fly staff in and out, employing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have a positive impact on human resource budgets. This is the situation for many mining companies, banks and retail businesses. Many businesses see employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a pathway to building a sustainable, local and dedicated workforce.

### Expanding your talent pool

The growing number of young working-age Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is a valuable source of labour and talent for Australia's workforce, and one that is essential for the future. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia is growing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population and has a very different age profile: about 56 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are aged under 25, compared with around 33 per cent of the rest of the population.

### Representing the community where your organisation operates

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are the fastest growing part of the Australian population. When an organisation employs a workforce that is representative of the community in which it operates, it helps to develop trust in the organisation and better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers. This will likely lead to a deeper relationship where customers' needs are fully met and interactions with them are more efficient.

### Greater diversity in thinking and experiences

The unique skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can add significant value in the marketplace and play a major role in helping your organisation take advantage of local opportunities. Further, developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy allows your organisation to tap into the perspectives, experience and knowledge of your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. This can add substantial value to business outcomes, particularly for organisations vying for business from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

### Developing new markets

Employing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can provide insights into niche market opportunities that may not be obvious to non-Indigenous Australians.

### Compliance requirements and regulations

Few front-line staff in large organisations can say they have a strong understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customer needs. Breaches of consumer protection and other laws may result when customer needs are not appropriately met.

### Winning government and corporate tenders

Many government departments and private businesses offering work to tender now ask for evidence to show how a tendering company is investing in greater equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Having a wholistic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy and supplier diversity strategy—with successful outcomes—will assist your organisation in positioning itself to win these tenders.

### **Expanding the knowledge and awareness of non-Indigenous staff members**

Helping non-Indigenous staff members gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultural issues can be the key to new business opportunities, as it enhances knowledge and awareness of, and ability to engage with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. Improving cultural competency—not only in the workplace but also in delivering products, services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities—will ensure your business has the best chance of reaching its target market.

### **Meeting corporate social responsibilities and objectives**

Improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobseekers is a key element in ensuring their economic independence, which will address the long-term disadvantage experienced by First Australians. Employers have a critical role to play in supporting this process; for example, by employing local people in local jobs. Employers can also support better education and training outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by making links with local Indigenous communities and involving them in accredited employment-based training programs such as traineeships and apprenticeships.

### **Staff engagement and satisfaction**

Employees are increasingly aware of, and interested in, the social responsibility of their employer and want the opportunity to play a meaningful role through their workplace in closing the equality gap. Employees who work in an inclusive and culturally diverse organisation are more satisfied and engaged in their employment.

### **Shaping public and industry policy**

Having good relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has led to trusted companies being consulted and included in discussions about developing policy in areas such as employment, regulation, consumer affairs, health and tax.

Below are specific business benefits for the following industries:

- tourism
- mining and resources
- retail

## Tourism

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*The information contained in this resource is based on Queensland tourism industry research.*

### **Sustainable labour force**

Long-term labour and skills shortages in the tourism industry mean employers need to think strategically about building a workforce for the future. With the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia growing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population and having a very different age profile compared with the non-Indigenous community, many tourism operators see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment as a pathway to building a sustainable, local and dedicated workforce, especially in regional and remote areas.

### **Unique skills and knowledge**

The unique qualities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees can enhance the visitor experience and add value to tourism services and products, providing a point of difference between employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and competing businesses. When visitors actively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and products, they're more likely to feel that they've experienced something genuinely and uniquely Australian. Visitors' demands for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience appears to be consistent and somewhat resilient to industry fluctuations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make excellent guides, as storytelling and oral communication is a large part of their culture. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and ethics can assist tourism operators to manage land and marine resources.

### **Diversity in the workplace**

Positive experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees by both patrons and co-workers reduces stereotyping and fosters a better understanding of the diversity of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Diversity in the workplace can be the key to new ideas and innovation for tourism enterprises.

### **Developing new markets and networks**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees can provide insights into niche tourism market opportunities. They are also best placed to deliver key messages about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their cultures, and assist in developing new community networks and relationships that will provide a unique tourist offering.

## **Mining and resources**

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*This information is from the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining.*

### **Land access**

Mining must take place where ore deposits occur—there is little opportunity to choose the location of a mine on the basis of optimum social, environmental, logistical or economic factors. Sixty per cent of mining in Australia occurs near Indigenous land and many of the new mines that will be developed in the future will likely also be on land subject to native title. Establishing good relationships with Traditional Owners is therefore essential to enabling ongoing access to the land where mineral resources are located.

### **Regional workforce**

The majority of Australian mining operations are in remote and rural areas where it is difficult to access skilled staff. There has been a recent trend towards fly-in fly-out (FIFO) operations, but these too have a number of disadvantages for companies. By supporting and promoting education, training and other local initiatives that increase skills within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, companies will contribute to the development of a skilled local workforce and a prosperous local economy. The benefits to companies of having a skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and a strong regional economy include:

- access to a mobile pool of local employees who can move between different businesses as demand or personal preferences dictate
- access to a selection of locally based services and supply enterprises
- competitive forces that lower costs of service and supply to the mine and the community
- diverse local capacity for non-core business contracting
- a stable, mature workforce of reliable, locally committed employees living at home
- a pipeline of young, skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.

### **Industry reputation**

Taking a partnership approach to encouraging employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is a way of improving the reputation of the minerals industry globally. Successful partnerships send a signal that a company has credentials in fair and successful negotiations with Indigenous communities, and the company is likely to find its reputation enhanced beyond the boundaries of Australia.

## Retail industry

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*"I would absolutely encourage participation in Indigenous employment programs for multiple reasons. Organisations get the benefit of better community engagement and a deeper understanding of our First People. It really does prepare people for careers and jobs within the organisations that they work in, providing another whole pipeline of potential employees."*

Estelle Olstein, National Diversity Manager for Woolworths

### **Representing the community where your organisation operates**

Australian retailers receive great profit return if they represent the communities where their organisations operate - by having a workforce that represents the community, families are more likely to shop at their local stores.

### **Labour shortage and higher retention rates**

The retail industry has a high demand for part-time employees. Woolworths has reported that recruits from its pre-employment training program tend to be more prepared for what is expected of them and more work-ready. The organisation's work-ready program has also contributed to Woolworths enjoying higher retention rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander new recruits compared to non-Indigenous employees.

### **Social return**

Australia's \$240 billion retail sector employs over 1.2 million people. As in the majority of industries within Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly under-represented in retail. A recent Deloitte Access Economics report noted that the retail industry in the Fitzroy region of Queensland would need only an additional 75 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be employed out of a total retail workforce of 9,800 to close the gap in equality in retail jobs in that area.