

Australian Reconciliation Barometer: The Quick Guide

COMPARING THE ATTITUDES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND AUSTRALIANS OVERALL





RESEARCH PREPARED BY AUSPOLL PTY LTD FOR RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA



WHAT IS THE AUSTRALIAN RECONCILIATION BAROMETER?

The Barometer is a national research study that looks at the relationship between Indigenous and other Australians. Designed to be repeated every two years, the Barometer explores how we see and feel about each other, and how perceptions affect progress towards reconciliation and closing the gaps.

This is the first time we have compared core attitudes and values of Indigenous Australians to those of other Australians. The Barometer is an indicator of how we see ourselves and where we aspire to be as Australians.

This brochure highlights some key findings of the first biennial Australian Reconciliation Barometer, conducted for Reconciliation Australia by Auspoll and completed in September 2008. To read the full Barometer and details of how the research was done go to www.reconciliation.org.au

THE RELATIONSHIP IS IMPORTANT

Indigenous and other Australians agree that the relationship between us is important. We hold a common view about how things are going.

The relationship between Indigenous and other Australians is important for Australia



The relationship between Indigenous and other Australians today is good.



The relationship between Indigenous and other Australians is improving



Michael Long and Kevin Sheedy

The partnership between AFL greats Michael Long and Kevin Sheedy has been described as the 'blueprint' for successful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians. As sports writer Martin Flanagan puts it, 'no portrait of Long is complete without Sheedy and the opposite is also true.'

Kevin Sheedy became coach of Essendon Football Club in 1981, Michael Long joining the side eight years later. In 1993, the team won an historic premiership with the Aboriginal flag flying behind the Essendon goals.

Sheedy was responsible for changing the culture of the game in the lead-up to the 1993 victory by actively championing Aboriginal players and what they bring to the game. Long, with Sheedy's support, took it even further three years later by challenging on-field racial abuse and inspiring the development of the first racial code of conduct in Australian sport.

The personal connection between the two men, which continues to this day, is founded on a close friendship, trust, shared success and deep, mutual respect. Long says Sheedy is a 'father of reconciliation'.



Former Essendon Bombers coach Kevin Sheedy (r) with Michael Long at press conference in Sydney before the match with the Swans, 19 August 2004. Sydney NSW. AFL. Photo: Marc McCormack. *Newspix - old pix ref: 16136637*

'What he has done is leave a legacy that has changed the nation. It's made people think differently about who they are. It's gone beyond the boundaries of football.'

'He's a great listener a great thinker and he has a genuine love of Aboriginal people. As my father says, he's always welcome around our fire (although he'll have to get the wood).'

And Sheedy has said of Long: 'I enjoy Michael teaching me about life, including how to coach. He's taken me into new dimensions.'

'I'll admit I don't understand all of what they're about (Aboriginal Australians) but I understand enough to respect their beliefs.'

TRUST BETWEEN US IS LOW

Although we agree the relationship is important, we don't trust each other and this affects how we think, feel and act.



Booroongen Aged Care Facility

Trust hasn't historically played a big part in the relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of the New South Wales town of Kempsey.

In the 1967 referendum on whether Indigenous people should be counted in the census of the Australian population, Kempsey had the highest number of 'no' votes in the country. The town's swimming pool, hospital and cinema were segregated and just outside town was the notorious Kinchella boy's home, where Aboriginal boys removed from their families were sent by the welfare officers.

Today, many of those who have lived through this history of division and mistrust now live together under the same roof – at Kempsey's Aboriginal owned and operated Booroongen Aged Care facility.

Sharing such close quarters, united by their similar needs, the fifty percent Aboriginal and fifty percent non-Aboriginal residents of Booroongen find themselves building relationships they may never have otherwise had.

'I remember one resident coming in, a white bloke who had been a welfare officer,' recalls Booroongen's CEO Gary Morris, 'one of the ones taking kids here away from their families in the past. Not long after he came I looked out the window and he was sitting on a bench with his arm around an old Koori lady – reconciliation in action. Booroongen brings people together who might never have spoken...but here they are, sharing a cuppa like old mates.'



Des Spackman in his room at the Booroongen Aged Care Facility. *Image by Rachel Landers.*

Director of care Debra Urquhart says the spirit of sharing is what sets Booroongen apart. 'We have lots of cultural activities, but they aren't just for the Aboriginal residents. All the men go down to the swamp and have men's time; they have storytelling and sit around the fire. No one is excluded, everyone has a story to tell. At the same time many of the Aboriginal residents have learnt to love playing bingo.' The divisions and differences, says Debra, 'just aren't important any more.'

WE HAVE MORE IN COMMON THAN WE THINK

Indigenous and other Australians see many things about ourselves very similarly and in line with how we see the Australian identity.

Both groups see themselves as:

Good at sport

National sample 92% 

Indigenous sample 96% 

Good humoured

National sample 92% 

Indigenous sample 94% 

Friendly

National sample 92% 

Indigenous sample 89% 

But we don't recognise these qualities so much in each other. For example, only half (51%) of Australians overall see Indigenous people as good humoured. And only half of Indigenous Australians (52%) see Australians overall as welcoming.

Ngurra Kuju Walyja, One Country, One people, Canning Stock Route Project

Sometimes it can seem that we see the world so differently. Looking at the vast expanse of the Western Desert, Indigenous traditional owners see a place rich with life and stories. Others, like the first white explorers, saw the same country as barren, harsh and dangerous.

Today, these two quite different ways of seeing are being brought together by a unique team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who are sharing their skills, knowledge and experience to tell the story of this remote part of our country.



Filmmaker and mentor Nicky Ma (left) working with emerging Indigenous filmmaker Clint Dixon.

The Western Australian arts and history project, Ngurra Kuju Walyja – translated as ‘one country, one people’ – relies on close professional mentoring relationships such as the one between non-Indigenous filmmaker Nicky Ma and young Indigenous filmmaker Clint Dixon.

‘The process is a two way street,’ says Nicky, ‘one can learn as much as one can teach. But what we most have in common with each other is a need and a want to share.’

‘I knew straight away we had a connection,’ says Clint, a Bardi/Yawuru man from Broome. ‘We both love documentaries and I’d like to make documentaries one day. Nicky encourages me to follow that dream.’

‘We have a common goal,’ Nicky says, ‘and by bringing our different world views to that we broaden each others views.’

‘What we most have in common?’ says Clint, ‘a sense of humour!’

THERE'S PENT-UP ENERGY TO LEARN AND TO SHARE

The research shows both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians agree it's important to learn about Indigenous history and culture. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are open to sharing their history and culture, and want all Australians to take pride in it. Other Australians want to know more but are afraid to ask. Once again, lack of trust discourages us from acting on our inclinations to share.

It is important that all Australians know about Indigenous culture



I think it is important that all Australians know the history of Indigenous people in Australia



Indigenous culture is important to Australia's identity as a nation



Indigenous people are open to sharing their culture with other Australians



Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Michael Hohnen

Thirteen years ago, after meeting Indigenous musicians Mandawuy Yunupingu and Archie Roach, Michael Hohnen packed up his double bass and a comfortable life in Melbourne and travelled to Darwin.

'I'd had a good education but knew very little about Aboriginal people in Australia. Their presence struck me as different and strong.'

What Michael discovered was a world totally different from what he had expected, a world that 'couldn't be understood in the same way that I understood my own world.'

'I saw that to gain the understanding I wanted, I had to clear my mind of all preconceptions, to be non-judgmental - in a similar way to when you enter another country.'



Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Michael Hohnen share a unique musical collaboration built on friendship and respect.

Michael discovered that this other culture shared his love of music and this gave him the means to relate to Indigenous communities and individual musicians. In this way, over the last 12 years, a close friendship and partnership has developed between Michael Hohnen and Gurrumul Yunupingu.

'Gurrumul has allowed me into his world and the interaction of two musicians has created two close friends who admire each other's talents, and respect each other's different cultural perspectives.

'It has created what I feel is a unique story of success for both of us, but also a story that may be experienced by many other Australians.'

Speaking through his music, Gurrumul describes the significance of the relationship between Indigenous and other Australians in this way:

Please hold my hand, trying to bridge and build Yolngu culture

I am Gurrumul

United we stand, divided we fall

Together we'll stand in solidarity.

WE'RE READY FOR ACTION, BUT WHAT ACTION?

Australians want to have more contact with Indigenous people and to contribute to closing the gaps but they don't know how to go about it. Again, lack of knowledge and trust makes non-Indigenous people hesitant about reaching out. For many, so does their fear that it's all too hard.



Leah Armstrong and Mike Scarf

Yarnteen is a not-for-profit organisation in Newcastle that offers training and jobs to Aboriginal people. It creates the opportunities by setting up Aboriginal-owned businesses in partnership with people in the wider community.

Since 1991, Yarnteen (meaning 'all/everybody' in the local Awabakal language) has established a bulk storage facility, a car and boat wash business and a 'camp' offering accommodation and cultural experiences for tourist groups.

Torres Strait Islander Leah Armstrong is the executive director of Yarnteen. She says she didn't think twice about going into partnership with a non-Indigenous man who had the experience Yarnteen needed to set up the bulk storage facility. 'This was never about proving I could do something by myself,' said Leah. 'Noone can do that if they don't have all the skills.'

'Taking on Mike, or any non-Indigenous manager in this business was a risk – it wouldn't have worked if he was only in it for himself rather than sharing our vision.'

Leah believes that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work together most effectively when they both have something to gain. 'It can't be all about helping Indigenous people - the enterprise has to be a win/win' for everyone.'



Mike Scarf and Leah Armstrong at the launch of Yarnteen's Reconciliation Action Plan in February 2009.

She says she helped Mike understand Aboriginal culture and values by explaining them in ways he could relate to. 'Mike is very family oriented and it made sense to him to see our culture in terms of looking after family.'

Mike says he and Leah always talked things through and made sure their expectations of each other were clear. 'It took a while to work things out but we knew we were going in the same direction.'

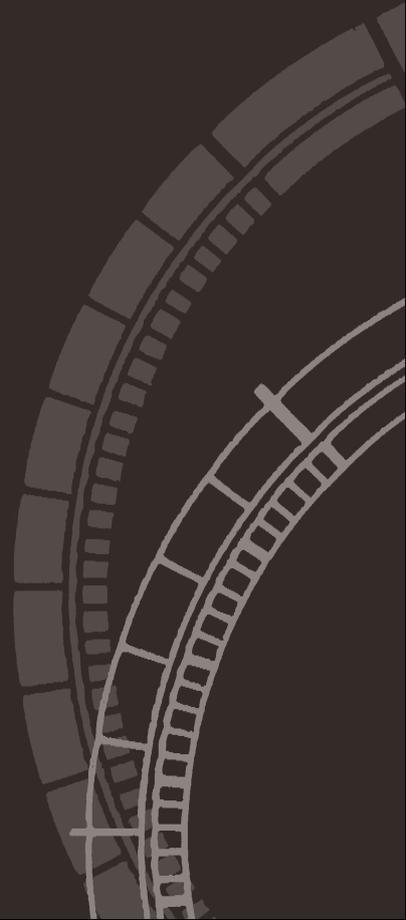
'I was used to working in an environment that was focused on results. I learned from Leah that there are different ways of getting results and that results are about more than the bottom line.'

WHAT CAN I DO?

In your workplace, school and community group or as an individual, there are many things you can do that help close the gap. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Start to learn about Indigenous history, people and culture through our cultural awareness website at www.shareourpride.org.au
- Talk at home, work or with friends about the results of the Barometer and ask each other – how can we start to think and act differently?
- Take part in events or organise your own during National Reconciliation Week from 27 May to 3 June; visit www.reconciliation.org.au for more information.
- Read the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) toolkit at www.reconciliation.org.au/raps and think about developing a RAP in your workplace, school or community group
- Sign up as a friend of Reconciliation Australia through Facebook or MySpace to keep in touch with news and developments
- Take the opportunity to read books and see movies that explore Indigenous history and culture, and the relationship between us as fellow Australians. Check out Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performances and displays at cultural festivals.
- Get involved with your state or local reconciliation group. Contacts are available on our website at www.reconciliation.org.au/srcs

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Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them and their cultures, and to the elders both past and present.

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