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Director  
Employment Services Beyond June 2015  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Location Code C50MA4

22 March 2013

Dear Director

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Employment Services – building on success Issues Paper*. We welcome the emphasis in the Issues Paper on achieving sustainable employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers and would like to share our approach to achieving this through the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program.

A RAP is a business plan which outlines actions to build *relationships*, demonstrate *respect* and create *opportunities* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This framework is based on the philosophy that sustainable opportunities, including employment, can only be achieved in an environment of relationships and respect.

We outline the benefits of RAPs in this submission and recommend that:

1. Government incentivise and encourage jobs services providers to develop a RAP;
2. Government subsidies to employers who are likely to employ significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff be limited to organisations with RAPs.

**Recommendation 1: We recommend the Government incentivise and encourage jobs services providers to develop a RAP.**

Reconciliation Australia recognises the improved employment outcomes delivered through the current employment services system, particularly for those who are considered to be highly disadvantaged. However, we consider that outcomes could be improved even further through increased efforts to build a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture among staff in job service providers and an increased focus on building stronger relationships between providers and their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Reconciliation Australia considers RAPs to be the most effective mechanism to achieve these outcomes. A RAP would assist providers to develop a workplace culture that better understands barriers to employment and provide a service that is more respectful and supportive. Improved and more appropriate service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers and stronger relationships with the local community would, in our view, result in improved employment outcomes.

*The Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2012* (the report) confirms that the RAP program is an approach that works. The inaugural survey of the attitudes of employees in RAP organisations, conducted as part of the report, shows that the RAP program is transforming attitudes and behaviours and creating work environments that respect and value the cultural contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Nearly 5000 employees completed the Australian Reconciliation Barometer survey and the results when compared with the general community are overwhelmingly positive. Employees in an organisation with a RAP:

- Have more frequent contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (66 per cent compared to 41 per cent in the general community);
- Are more likely to trust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (71 per cent compared with 13 per cent in the general community);
- Are less prejudiced (9 per cent compared to 70 per cent in the general community);
- Are more likely to be proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (77 per cent compared with 51 per cent in the general community)

In addition, 95 per cent of surveyed employees in RAP organisations believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous staff is good compared with just 46 per cent in the general community.

In short, RAPs are changing workplace culture and attitudes and are laying the foundation for significant economic and social outcomes. These outcomes across the 358 RAP organisations that were registered in the program by September 2012 include:

- 18,972 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed;
- \$58.2 million worth of goods and services purchased from accredited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses;
- \$14.7 million provided to support education scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- 354 partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; and
- \$15 million worth of pro-bono services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2012 is available at: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/getfile?id=1917&file=Final+RAP+Impact+Measurement+Report+2012.pdf>

**Recommendation 2: We recommend that government subsidies to employers who are likely to employ significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff be limited to organisations with RAPs.**

Reconciliation Australia agrees that employers are central to the employment services system and note that under current arrangements providers can offer a range of Government subsidies to encourage employers to participate and cover the cost of employing someone with limited work experience.

As outlined above, organisations with RAPs are more likely to have a workplace culture and the necessary employment initiatives to deliver more sustainable and cost-effective long-term employment outcomes.

We consider that having a RAP should be a precondition to receiving government subsidies for any organisation that is likely to employ significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. This requirement would effectively set a minimum standard for potential employers that would ensure that government funds are targeted to organisations with the greatest chance of delivering cost-effective and sustainable employment outcomes.

Kind regards

Reconciliation Australia