



Reconciliation
A U S T R A L I A

May 2012

Submission to the National Anti-Racism
Partnership

National Anti-Racism Strategy

1. Introduction

Reconciliation Australia is the national organisation building and promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community. We believe that a reconciled Australia is one where:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised appropriately as Australia's First Peoples
- our society understands and values the history, culture, rights and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- genuine partnerships in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and respected are the norm and
- the success and well-being of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are part of everyday life.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to report experiencing high levels of racism. This is a significant obstacle to achieving a reconciled Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participate fully in the economic and social opportunities enjoyed by the wider community.

We consider that, at its core, racism reflects a breakdown in a relationship and a lack of understanding and respect for another person's culture. We therefore believe that stronger relationships, built on shared knowledge and respect, are a key part of reducing the level of racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Reconciliation Australia's expertise lies in changing attitudes and building better relationships. This submission draws on our experience with the Reconciliation Action Plan program and the Australian Reconciliation Barometer to address the following questions from the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy Discussion Paper:

Q. How could we better acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? Section 4 of this submission suggests a number of ways in which we can acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; from constitutional reform to performing acknowledgements of countries in our workplaces or schools.

Q. Can you give examples of strategies that you have seen used or been part of that have been successful in preventing or reducing racism? Why were they effective? In section 5 we outline the approach we have taken through the Reconciliation Action Plan program to create workplace cultures that value relationships, demonstrate respect and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Finally, section 6 of the discussion paper highlights the importance of measuring progress towards addressing racism. The Australian Reconciliation Barometer contributes to this by identifying the attitudes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians hold about each other and about reconciliation in this country.



2. Summary of Recommendations

Reconciliation Australia recommends to the National Anti-Racism Partnership that the National Anti-Racism Strategy:

- 1. Support the campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution**
- 2. Encourage:**
 - i) the widespread practice of acknowledgement and welcome to country protocols and**
 - ii) the promotion and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, including through participation in National Reconciliation Week**
- 3. Include Reconciliation Action Plans as an effective strategy for addressing racism in workplaces, schools and universities**
- 4. Utilise the Australian Reconciliation Barometer to track progress towards reducing racism and identify priority areas for action**



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3. Racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

There continue to be high levels of racism in Australian society. Raising the issue of racism is uncomfortable for many Australians and is even resented. Yet we were reminded by the comments of Dr Charles Teo during the 2012 Australia Day Address that for many Australians of different origins and backgrounds it is an ongoing reality in their lives.

There is evidence that the depth of racist experiences suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may be greater than that experienced by other groups in society¹. Reconciliation Australia conducts the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (Barometer) every two years to measure the attitudes and values of Australians on a range of reconciliation related issues. In the 2010 Barometer, 93 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were surveyed believed that the levels of prejudice towards them are very high or fairly high. A high proportion of general community respondents agreed with this; 71 per cent believed that the level of prejudice that Australians hold towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is very high or fairly high.

Racism negatively impacts individuals, the community and, more broadly, hinders the reconciliation process in Australia. On the individual level, we know that racism can create stress and fear which impacts on mental health. There are also emerging links between racism and diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and drug and alcohol abuse². Racism also damages community cohesion because people feel less confident to do everyday things such as access health services, attend school or apply for a job. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social survey found that people who had experienced racism were less likely to trust the police, their local school, their doctor and/or hospital and other people in general³.

Racism is also very damaging to the process of reconciliation in Australia. Reconciliation is about building better relationships and greater respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. However, when someone holds or expresses a racially discriminatory view it reflects a lack of understanding and respect for someone's culture, beliefs and background.

Reconciliation Australia strongly supports the emphasis within the Anti-Racism Strategy on creating awareness of racism and how it affects individuals and the broader community. Racism is often invisible to those who are not experiencing it and findings from the 2010 Australian Reconciliation Barometer indicate that non-Indigenous Australians underestimate the impact of racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (81 per cent) were much more likely than non-Indigenous Australians (33 per cent) to believe that racism is a contributing factor to the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

¹ Mansouri F, Jenkins L, Morgan L, Taouk M (2009) The Impact of racism upon the health and wellbeing of young Australians, Melbourne: Foundation for Young Australians.

² VicHealth (2008) 'Ethnic and race-based discrimination as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing', accessed 7 March 2012 from: <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Publications/Freedom-from-discrimination/Ethnic-and-race-based-discrimination-as-a-determinant-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing.aspx>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) The Health and Welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oct 2010 (ABS catalogue number 4704.0) Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.



4. How could we better acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are among the oldest living cultures in the world and a vital part of Australia's identity. Acknowledging and celebrating the rich history and ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a strong strategy against racism because it fosters understanding and respect.

This work is so important because the results of the 2010 Barometer show that there is still a widespread lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture among the general community. Of those surveyed, 62 per cent felt their knowledge about the history of Australia's First Peoples was low, while almost three quarters felt they had low levels of knowledge with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

We can acknowledge the contributions to Australia of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the national level through amending the Constitution as well as in our workplaces, schools and community groups.

1. Constitutional Recognition

In September 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard established an expert panel (the Panel) to consult with the community and report back with recommendations about how to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, as the First Peoples, in the Constitution. On 19 January 2012, the Panel presented their report, which recommends changing the Constitution to:

- recognise the continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- remove racist elements
- prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or ethnic or national origin.

On 15 February 2012 the Prime Minister announced that Reconciliation Australia will lead the campaign for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A broader public awareness campaign allows us to have a national conversation about how to appropriately recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and how we can create a more inclusive society from our highest legal document down. The campaign will involve a strong element of community education aimed at building understanding and appreciation of cultural differences. As such, the campaign itself will contribute to addressing racism and advancing reconciliation.

However, ensuring a successful referendum outcome is critical as it would enshrine in the Constitution the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures as the First Australians. The proposed changes would also remove clauses that can allow acts of discrimination based on race.

Recommendation 1: That the National Anti-Racism Strategy supports the campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution



2. Acknowledgements and Welcomes to country

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to welcome visitors to their traditional land. It can take many forms, depending on the particular culture of the traditional owners. It can include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way of showing awareness of and respect for the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held, and of recognising the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their Country. At a meeting, speech or formal occasion the speaker can begin their proceedings by offering an Acknowledgement of Country. Unlike a Welcome to Country, it can be performed by a non-Indigenous person. The most meaningful Acknowledgements of Country are those that are personal and reflect an understanding of the importance of the protocol.

It is important to practice these protocols because they promote recognition and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and help foster respect between the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the broader Australian community. Arrernte Aboriginal elder Walangari Karntawarra has said of the protocols that: “Acknowledgements of Country are important because they help to break down barriers by allowing people to recognise each other in a comfortable way⁴.”

Many organisations have already incorporated the practice of Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols into their meetings or public events. For examples, as part of their 2010 RAP, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship incorporated traditional Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocols into all of their citizenship ceremonies. As well as strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians, the protocols are helping to educate Australia’s newest citizens about the history and culture of Australia’s First Peoples.

As at September 2011, over 250 organisations had committed to practice these protocols through their Reconciliation Action Plans. Many schools around Australia also practice acknowledgements of country during assemblies or other events. Reconciliation Australia is encouraged by the increasing practice of protocols however we also believe that there is an opportunity to extend the practice to more workplaces, schools, universities, sporting, faith and community groups.

3. Promotion and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

The promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is an integral part of fostering understanding and respect within the Australian community. We can all take action within our workplaces, schools, sporting and community groups to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This may include distributing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media resources and calendars of relevant events, and displaying and/or promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, flags, books and music. These actions are tangible

⁴ Reconciliation Australia (2011) ‘Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2011’, accessed 10 May from: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans/rap-impact-measurement-report>

and highly visible expressions of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

For example, in 2002, Adelaide City Council members voted to permanently fly the Aboriginal flag, alongside the Australian flag, in Victoria Square in the Adelaide CBD. The square is also now officially known as Victoria Square / Tarndanyangga, the Kaurna name for Victoria Square. Actions like these are an important part of building awareness and understanding among the people who use that space, whether it be an office, a classroom or a public square. They also help make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel welcome and appreciated.

We can also come together to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures during National Reconciliation Week (NRW) and NAIDOC week. NRW is celebrated across Australia each year between 27 May and 3 June. The dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey—the anniversaries of the successful 1967 referendum and the High Court Mabo decision. The week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements and to explore how each of us can join the national reconciliation effort.

Throughout NRW there are opportunities to attend a range of cultural events across the country. Information about these events is available at: <http://reconciliation.org.au/nrw2012/>. The week also provides an opportunity for organisations, schools or community groups to hold their own events such as a barbecue or a morning tea to reflect on the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make.

Recommendation 2: That the National Anti Racism Strategy encourage:

- i) the widespread practice of acknowledgement and welcome to country protocols and**
- ii) the promotion and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, including through participation in National Reconciliation Week**



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5. Can you give examples of strategies that you have seen used or been part of that have been successful in preventing or reducing racism? Why were they effective?

The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program

Changing a workplace culture takes time and there is no quick fix to address the problem of racism within workplaces, schools and the broader community. The Reconciliation Action Plan program provides organisations with specific and measurable ways through which to build understanding, relationships and respect. The program is an effective way to address racism or racial discrimination because, at its core, a racist act reflects a lack of understanding and respect for another person's culture. We believe that incidents of racism are far less likely to occur in organisations that have built respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The RAP program began in 2006 with eight forward thinking Australian organisations. There are now over 300 RAP organisations from across the Corporate sector, Federal, State and Local Governments, not-for-profit organisations and peak organisations and schools and universities. Today, more than 1.6 million Australians work or study in an organisation that has a RAP.

A RAP is a business plan that documents what an organisation is doing, within its realm of influence, to further reconciliation in Australia. Actions are organised under three core areas:

1. Relationships

Most RAPs contain specific actions aimed at developing deeper relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities through committing to genuine engagement, building partnerships and providing pro-bono support.

2. Respect

RAP organisations build respect by increasing the cultural awareness and competency of their employees, celebrating National Reconciliation Week, and performing Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country ceremonies. Together, these actions create workplaces that respect and celebrate the heritage, values and beliefs of Australia's First Peoples. They lay the foundation for respectful relationships that are based on trust and understanding.

3. Opportunities

RAP organisations are committed to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their workforce. In some RAP organisations the process of meeting employment targets revealed the underlying need for pathways to work, such as traineeships, cadetships and student scholarships. Many RAP organisations also look to procure services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. However to convert opportunities into sustainable outcomes RAP organisations must first focus on building a



foundation of strong relationships and cultural respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In February 2012, Reconciliation Australia released the first RAP Impact Measurement Report which evaluates the collective results of the RAP program, since its inception in 2006. These results are set out in the box below. Later this year, Reconciliation Australia will survey staff from a sample of RAP organisations as part of the Australian Reconciliation Barometer. The survey will measure the impact that the RAP program has had on the attitudes and actions of people working within RAP organisations by comparing them against the national average.

Reconciliation Action Plans – 280 organisations making a difference

Impact (as at 30 September 2011):

- 13,397 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobs filled
- \$26 million worth of goods and services purchased from AIMSC accredited suppliers
- \$9 million provided to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student scholarships
- 170,000 people undertaking cultural awareness training
- 161 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities working with RAP partners

Recommendation 3: That the National Anti-Racism Strategy include Reconciliation Action Plans as an effective strategy for addressing racism in workplaces, schools and universities



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6. Measuring progress towards addressing racism

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer

Reconciliation Australia supports the emphasis within the Anti-Racism Strategy on ongoing evaluation of progress towards addressing racism in Australia. National surveys including the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, the Challenging Racism Project, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the Mapping Social Cohesion report provide important feedback on whether we are making progress in addressing racism.

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer is a collaborative research project between Auspoll and Reconciliation Australia that began in 2007. It is conducted every two years and measures the attitudes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians hold about each other and about reconciliation in this country. It also attempts to shed some light on why we hold these attitudes.

The next Barometer will be conducted in the second half of 2012 and the report will be released in January 2013. As this will be the third in the series, trends on a number of key indicators that relate to racism will start to emerge. A full copy of the 2010 Australian Reconciliation Barometer is available at:

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/archived-pages/barometer2010>

Recommendation 4: That the National Anti-Racism Strategy utilise the Australian Reconciliation Barometer to track progress towards reducing racism and identify priority areas for action

7. Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to report experiences of racism and this limits their full enjoyment and participation in the opportunities available to the wider Australian community. We believe that racism reflects a breakdown in a relationship and a lack of respect and understanding towards another person's culture.

Reconciliation Australia's efforts are focused on building stronger relationships and respect. Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Reconciliation Action Plans are a core part of this work. We also encourage the National Anti-racism Strategy to use the Australian Reconciliation Barometer to track national progress towards building more respectful relationships between Australia's First Peoples and other Australians.

