RECONCILING THE NATION: 2016 FEDERAL ELECTION STATEMENT

RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA
THIS ELECTION RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA SEEKS FIVE KEY COMMITMENTS:

1. Investment in respectful relationships with Australia’s First Peoples

2. Support for constitutional recognition and discussion on treaties and agreement making

3. Recommitment and expansion of the Closing the Gap targets

4. Investment in public anti-racism campaigns

5. Development of a deeper reconciliation process to achieve truth, justice and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA IS THE NATIONAL EXPERT BODY ON RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA AND OUR VISION IS TO WAKE TO A JUST, EQUITABLE AND RECONCILED AUSTRALIA.

We aspire to enable all Australians to contribute to the realisation of the five dimensions of reconciliation.

We are dedicated to building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We connect people through shared experiences, expectations and knowledge, and we educate people about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, identities and successes.
THE STATE OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA

As outlined in The State of Reconciliation in Australia report, Reconciliation Australia defines reconciliation through five interrelated dimensions. These include:

- **Race relations**: All Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences, which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.

- **Equality and equity**: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participate equally in a range of life opportunities, and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.

- **Institutional integrity**: The active support of reconciliation by the nation’s political, business and community structures.

- **Historical acceptance**: All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and the impacts of these wrongs. Australia makes amends for the wrongs of the past and ensures these wrongs are never repeated.

- **Unity**: An Australian society that values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of a shared national identity.

To achieve reconciliation in Australia, the five dimensions must be woven together. The condition of reconciliation in this nation will only ever be as strong as the weakest dimension.

This election, Reconciliation Australia seeks the following commitments from all major parties, and calls on the next Federal Government to enact these commitments as a matter of priority.

- Invest in respectful relationships with Australia’s First Peoples;
- Support constitutional recognition and discussions on treaties and agreement making;
- Recommit to and expand the Closing the Gap targets;
- Invest in public anti-racism campaigns; and
- Develop a formal truth and justice process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

THE REDFERN STATEMENT

On 9 June 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative organisations, together with Reconciliation Australia and over 50 other supporting organisations, issued an urgent call for a more just approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Known as The Redfern Statement, this reaffirms that the next Federal Government has an unprecedented opportunity to meaningfully address disadvantage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and in turn, advance our nation’s progress on our reconciliation journey.
INVEST IN AND GROW RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS WITH AUSTRALIA’S FIRST PEOPLES

THE ISSUE
Reconciliation Australia knows that stronger relationships built on trust, shared knowledge and respect are essential to creating a more prosperous and reconciled nation for all Australians. If government investment is to deliver sustained, positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, government must work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative bodies. This approach must include funding for the national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples – until they are able to be self-sustaining. These efforts must also be underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly the right to self-determination.

WHAT WE KNOW

• Respectful and sustained engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the cornerstone of successful policies and programs.

• A solid body of evidence shows that policies developed through genuine collaboration and partnerships are more likely to succeed, creating a sense of ownership and empowerment among those affected.

• The recent roll-out of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy brought about significant angst and confusion for a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Much of this could be attributed to limited consultation and engagement with affected communities.

• Some $534 million was cut from the Indigenous Affairs budget in 2014, including funding for the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples. As a result, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations continue to face significant challenges in service delivery, limiting essential frontline services such as Aboriginal Legal Services.

• The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most comprehensive international tool to advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples and is underpinned by the right to self-determination. As the Declaration states: ‘...control by Indigenous peoples over developments affecting them and their lands, territories and resources will enable them to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions, and to promote their development in accordance with their aspirations and needs’. Australia supports the Declaration but it has not been implemented to full effect within Australia.

ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT

• Restore the $534 million cut from the Indigenous Affairs portfolio in the 2014 Budget to invest in key priority areas.

• Fund and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations, specifically the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples.

• Reform the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and other Federal funding programs, with view to greater emphasis on engagement and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION AND IMPORTANT DISCUSSIONS ON TREATIES AND AGREEMENT-MAKING

THE ISSUE

Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a long-sought milestone on Australia’s reconciliation journey. Today, an historic opportunity to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia in the Constitution lies before us.

The Referendum Council is about to commence a consultation process to discuss and build recommendations for the model for constitutional recognition. The Federal Government must take swift action to implement the recommendations of the Referendum Council’s consultation process, rather than repeating ineffectual government responses, such as those seen around the Report from the Expert and the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition.

In addition to constitutional recognition, matters such as treaties, agreement-making and sovereignty are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Until these matters concerning the colonisation of Australia are addressed, reconciliation will remain unfinished.

WHAT WE KNOW

• The model for constitutional recognition must be meaningful and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

• Support for constitutional recognition is high. More than three in four non-Indigenous Australians, and almost nine in 10 Indigenous Australians, say they would vote ‘yes’ in a referendum if held today.

• Constitutional recognition and treaty/treaties are not mutually exclusive. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation recommended both developing an agreement making framework (treaty, treaties) and recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples in the Constitution.

ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT

• Act swiftly to deliver a model for constitutional reform following the consultations and recommendations to be made by the Referendum Council.

• Address and implement the recommendations of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which includes constitutional reform (recognition) and an agreement-making framework (treaty, treaties) in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
RECOMMIT TO AND EXPAND ON THE CLOSING THE GAP TARGETS

THE ISSUE

Long-term, consistent and coordinated government efforts are critical to improving life outcomes and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Too often, the search for short-term outcomes or the introduction of underdeveloped ideas sees policy ground shifting rapidly and unpredictably in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

Consistent, well-developed and evidence-based policies and programs work to build trust and support among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and are a prerequisite for successful program implementation.

The Closing the Gap targets, agreed and developed through the Council of Australian Governments, provide a common and transparent framework for all governments to work towards equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, the framework must be more comprehensive and expanded to address a number of new key areas, including the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in prison.

WHAT WE KNOW

- Many of the Closing the Gap agreements funded by Federal, State and Territory Governments have now come to an end.

- These circumstances provide a critical opportunity for the Federal Government to engage collaboratively with States and Territories, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to renew and expand these important investments and agreements.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are extensively overrepresented in our justice system, with a rate of incarceration 13 times higher than non-Indigenous people.

- In comparison with other women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to be killed as a result of violent assault.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent one in every three children in out-of-home care.

- These are national crises that require urgent action.

ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT

- Continue funding to meet existing targets for the Close the Gap Framework.

- Engage with States and Territories and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative bodies to renew and expand investments and agreements under the Closing the Gap framework.

- Adopt justice targets as part of the Close the Gap framework to reduce the high rates of imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- Expand the Closing the Gap targets to address a number of other priority areas, including family violence, disability and children in out-of-home care.
INVEST AND SUPPORT PUBLIC ANTI-RACISM CAMPAIGNS AND RESOURCES

THE ISSUE
Reconciliation can only progress when positive relationships, built on trust and respect and free from racism, exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians across all parts of society.

Racism remains a lived reality for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Racism perpetuates inequalities and can directly or indirectly exclude people from accessing services and opportunities. Racism is a major barrier to achieving our vision for a just, equitable and reconciled Australia. It remains a barrier to governments seeking to close the gap on health outcomes, and to improve economic participation through employment and education.

As a result of past race-based laws and policies, racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is prevalent across many parts of Australian society. Much more must be done to create a zero tolerance approach to racism and discrimination.

WHAT WE KNOW
• Reconciliation Australia’s recent The State of Reconciliation in Australia report showed that eight in 10 Australians see the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians as important.

• Yet a third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had personally experienced verbal racial abuse in the previous six months, while one in four had witnessed racially-oriented physical violence.

• Evidence shows that racism is harmful. It destroys the confidence, self-esteem and health of individuals, undermines efforts to create fair and inclusive communities, breaks down relationships and erodes trust.

ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT
• Fund and support public anti-racism campaigns and resources, such as RACISM. IT STOPS WITH ME.

• Maintain strong legislative protections against racial discrimination and take leadership to promote a zero tolerance approach to racism and discrimination.
TRUTH, JUSTICE AND HEALING – DEVELOPING A DEEPER RECONCILIATION PROCESS FOR AUSTRALIA

THE ISSUE

Australia’s colonial history is characterised by the dispossession and marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This dispossession and marginalisation has occurred through a history of conflict, as well as active policies to segregate and assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

We cannot change the past, but we can learn from it. Reconciliation can only be realised when the Australian community and our national institutions acknowledge the wrongs of the past and understand the ongoing impacts of these wrongs. We can begin to make amends by ensuring these wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are never repeated. Until historical wounds are healed in this way, they will continue diminish our nation’s ability to realise its full potential.

WHAT WE KNOW

- More than nine in 10 Australians believe that past wrongs occurred towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Yet only half agree that past race-based policies have created today’s disadvantage. This indicates that Australians lack a shared understanding of the ongoing impact of our history.

- Many of the recommendations of inquiries documenting the truths of the past, such as the Bringing them Home Report on the Stolen Generations and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, have not been implemented to date. For example, of the 54 recommendations made in the Bringing them Home Report, only 13 have been implemented.

ELECTION COMMITMENT SOUGHT

- Research, develop and adequately fund, in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a national truth and justice process.

- All governments to recommit to implementation of the key recommendations of the Bringing them Home Report and Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reports.

- Maintain and strengthen the current content in the Australian Curriculum on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, in order to ensure future generations learn about our nation’s true history in Australian schools and early learning services. Curriculum reviews should examine opportunities to deepen the content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Weakening or removal of this content would be a step back in Australia’s reconciliation journey.