



PO Box 4773, Kingston ACT 2604  
Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace, Parkes, ACT 2600  
**TEL** 61 2 6273 9200  
**EMAIL** [enquiries@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:enquiries@reconciliation.org.au)  
**WEB** [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)

## **Submission to the Australian Government Review of Indigenous Training and Employment**

Reconciliation Australia is the national organisation promoting reconciliation between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our programs focus on building respect, relationships and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We know that economic participation is a key accelerator to achieving better life opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and that greater economic participation is made possible by building respectful relationships. Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program provides a framework to promote such relationships and sustained economic development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Since 2006 the RAP program has engaged over 500 organisations. RAP organisations have committed to 36,371 jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in 2013 RAP organisations employed 25,755 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Not only is the RAP program creating economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples it is also transforming the attitudes and behaviors of other employees and creating workplaces that welcome and support diversity.

Based on our experience, and considering the terms of reference, Reconciliation Australia makes the following recommendations to the Indigenous Training and Employment Review:

### **Recommendation 1: Work with employers to develop positive workplace practices.**

Creating real, meaningful and sustainable employment outcomes requires more than just a focus on job placements. The right workplace environment is central to the successful recruitment, retention and progression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Many barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobseekers come from within the workplace. Employers must address these barriers in their workplace culture, including current employee attitudes and behaviors, and implement targeted mentoring programs to achieve enduring employment outcomes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Access to government funding should require an employer to have an holistic strategy to address these internal barriers and support job progression. This requirement would effectively set a minimum standard for potential employers to ensure that government funds are targeted to organisations with the greatest chance of delivering cost-effective and sustainable employment outcomes.

Reconciliation Australia's Workplace Ready Program (WRP) has successfully supported more than 40 organisations to develop approaches to remove internal barriers to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As part of the program we are developing a *Building Workplace Capability Framework* to provide organisations with practical tools to assess their workplace culture and implement strategies to achieve a culture of inclusion. Participants in *WRP Employment Dialogues* consistently note that greater emphasis must be placed on sharing good practice across industries. Reconciliation Australia also facilitates opportunities for private, public and community organisations to share good practice through RAP Learning Circles, Reconciliation Industry Networking Groups and WRP Employment Dialogues. These and other opportunities for sharing good practice are critical to developing the innovative industry-based solutions required.

### **Recommendation 2: Invest in strengthening Indigenous leadership and governance and empower local decision-making and accountability.**

Policies developed in a respectful way, through genuine collaboration and partnerships, are more likely to succeed and be sustainable because they create a sense of ownership and empower those affected. If the government is to address the myriad of ineffective programs and issues such as "training for trainings sake", Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must be empowered to inform, design and implement community and economic development strategies. The *Indigenous Governance Awards*, run by Reconciliation Australia and BHP Billiton, demonstrate that strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, backed by solid Indigenous leadership and governance structures, are effective in finding solutions to complex issues—issues that have long confounded governments and mainstream organisations. Government investment to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance and to facilitate Indigenous-led place-based solutions is critical. This will empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to devise and drive sustainable, effective local programs and agendas. Ongoing investment in the *Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre* and the *Australian Indigenous Governance*

*Institute* would provide a much needed national and Indigenous-led approach to the provision of leadership and governance capacity development and training to support targeted, high quality and place-based initiatives.

**Recommendation 3: Support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led social enterprises to deliver intermediate labour market (ILM) programs for the long term unemployed.**

Any strategy to address unemployment should aim to reduce the likelihood of someone becoming unemployed and assist those unemployed or not in the labour force to get a job. It is important to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students transition effectively from school to further education and training or to work, and that recently unemployed people secure employment as quickly as possible. Those who have been out of the workforce for longer periods of time or who face multiple barriers to employment will require more intensive assistance and a targeted approach to securing employment. Reconciliation Australia believes that social enterprises delivering ILM programs are an effective model to support long term unemployed people to develop the soft skills required to enter and stay in the workforce. Where possible these social enterprises should be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled. Given the need for ILM programs to strike the right balance between overall commercial or service delivery demands and the needs of individual participants, we urge the Australian Government to adopt policy and funding arrangements to stimulate the Indigenous social enterprise sector. This will require investment in business development initiatives combined with operational/start-up funding and assistance for employers involved in transitioning participants into sustainable employment. Social Ventures Australia and Reconciliation Australia, with support from Indigenous Business Australia, have developed a model for an *Indigenous Social Enterprise Fund*, which provides a unique matched investment model that brings together government, private and philanthropic investors to invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social enterprises.

**Recommendation 4: Invest in collaboration and the development of collaboration skills and capacity.**

Achieving sustainable employment outcomes requires governments, employers and community to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Everyone involved needs to work effectively across a diversity of values, cultures and sectors. The skills needed to “work together” are specific and unique. To date, little attention has been paid to building such skills across sectors and communities. Social Leadership Australia (SLA) and Reconciliation Australia have partnered to build the capacity of leaders to facilitate collaboration across diversity and Indigenous affairs through the *Leading Together* initiative. The program will equip leaders with transferable skills and awareness to collaborate across difference in complex environments. Reconciliation Australia encourages governments to invest in the professional development of public and community sector leaders in Indigenous affairs by supporting them to undertake the program.

**Conclusion**

Reconciliation Australia considers that developing place-based and industry specific strategies that support and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential to achieving better employment outcomes and to ensure training and employment services are targeted effectively. Reconciliation Australia will soon release a report on the economic benefits of closing the gap in Indigenous employment outcomes, which highlights industries where opportunities to improve Indigenous employment outcomes lie. Developing targeted strategies to increase Indigenous employment in industries that are forecast to grow is likely to be an effective means to addressing long-term unemployment. This will require collaboration between government, business, community organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At a recent *WRP Employer Dialogue*, employers noted that the biggest barrier they face in progressing employment outcomes was the lack of flexibility within government funding contracts to adapt approaches and timings to real situations. This in turn impacts on their ability to effectively engage with service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Governments must be prepared to allow and enable greater flexibility in their funding. In addition, Reconciliation Australia believes the guiding principle for any recommendations made by the Review should be the empowerment and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in the design and development of policies and programs.

Reconciliation Australia will release a detailed position paper on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic participation in early 2014. We are available to discuss the paper and our recommendations further.