



Reconciliation
A U S T R A L I A

27 January 2012

**Submission to the Department of the
Treasury**

2012-13 Commonwealth Budget

1. Introduction

Reconciliation Australia is the peak national organisation building and promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians for the wellbeing of the nation. We believe that a reconciled Australia is one where:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised appropriately as the First peoples of Australia;
- 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.

We consider that stronger relationships, built on shared knowledge and respect, are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples controlling their life choices and participating fully in the economic and social opportunities enjoyed by the wider community.

Reconciliation Australia recognises that achieving this vision requires significant government investment to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the areas of education, health, housing and employment. However, we consider a more detailed analysis of these areas and the overarching 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander budget' to be beyond the scope of our submission. Rather, we have focussed on the following two key areas that are central to progressing reconciliation and would require Commonwealth funding in the 2012-13 budget:

1. The education and engagement strategy for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; and
2. Support for the ongoing operation of the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI)

Our submission takes into account the Commonwealth Government's (hereafter, the Government) strong commitment to fiscal discipline and is consistent with Reconciliation Australia's focus on cost-effective implementation. We believe we have struck the right balance between minimising the financial cost to government and providing adequate resources to ensure successful outcomes.

2. Summary of Recommendations

Reconciliation Australia recommends that:

1. The Government provide funding of between \$4-6 million over two years (2012-13 and 2013-14) for a public education and engagement strategy for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians;
2. With regard to the AIGI:
 - a. The Government provide funding of up to \$3.2 million over four years, commencing in 2012-13, for the ongoing operation of the Institute;
 - b. Officials from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs work with AIGI to develop more detailed costing.

3. Education and engagement strategy for Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

In September 2010, Prime Minister Julia Gillard committed to hold a referendum during the 43rd Parliament or at the next Federal election on the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the Constitution. The Prime Minister established an expert panel (hereafter, the Panel) to consult with the community and report back with recommendations. On 19 January the Panel presented the report, *Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution*, to the Government. In accepting the report the Prime Minister said:

“As a nation we are big enough and it is the right time to say yes to an understanding of our past, to say yes to constitutional change, and to say yes to a future more united and more reconciled than we have ever been before.”

4.1 The importance of a well-resourced campaign to build popular ownership and support

In addition to recommending changes to the Constitution, the Panel’s report recommended a process for the referendum. These recommendations focussed on the need for a public education strategy and include:

“Before the referendum is held, there should be a properly resourced public education and awareness program. If necessary, legislative change should occur to allow adequate funding of such a program.

“The Government should take steps, including through commitment of adequate financial resources, to maintain the momentum for recognition, including the widespread public support established through the YouMeUnity website, and to educate Australians about the Constitution and the importance of constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. **Reconciliation Australia could be involved in this process”**

Reconciliation Australia agrees that a successful referendum will require a properly resourced campaign to raise awareness and facilitate a national discussion. No referendums have been successful without a well-informed, engaged public but, equally, a review of past referendums clearly shows that grassroots, community campaigns are much more successful than politician-led campaigns.

Our research into community attitudes towards constitutional recognition has found that over one third of people (36%) neither support nor oppose constitutional change, suggesting that a large section of the population are either indifferent to, or unsure about, what changing the Constitution means. This is a key issue, as history shows that when Australians are unsure about a referendum question they tend to vote ‘no’. A public awareness campaign is

therefore vital to consolidate the support of those likely to vote 'yes' and gain the support of those who are currently unsure.

4.2 Reconciliation Australia's public education and engagement strategy

Reconciliation Australia's strategy for building widespread support for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians identifies three distinct stages. Building support will take time and our strategy allows for a measured and structured build-up in activities to maximise support and interest while limiting the risk of 'campaign fatigue'.

During the first stage of the public education and engagement strategy, Reconciliation Australia worked alongside the Panel to build awareness of the consultations around constitutional recognition. The Panel requested that Reconciliation Australia work closely with youth and the corporate sector to educate, engage and grow the existing supporter base. Our strategy during this period included:

- Working with many of the 280 organisations that have Reconciliation Action Plans to hold public events and disseminate information;
- Engaging key influencers and ambassadors to stimulate public debate;
- Holding events at schools and universities to raise interest and awareness among young voters;
- Developing content for the You Me Unity website; and
- Working with Auspoll to gauge public attitudes towards constitutional recognition.

Reconciliation Australia has already been funded to implement this stage of public education up until March 2012.

The second stage of our proposed education and engagement strategy will commence if the Government recommends a referendum and will focus on engaging the wider Australian community. Stage two is about building the national conversation to gain popular ownership of constitutional recognition. This can only be achieved if people understand the 'story' behind constitutional reform and personally connect with the issue by having the opportunity to contribute to a more reconciled future for Australia.

The third stage will focus on the months leading into the referendum and will involve a more intensive campaign. This stage will draw on the supporter base built during phases one and two and, in short, it will present a definitive 'yes' vote campaign. Reconciliation Australia is well positioned to play a lead role in public education and engagement on constitutional recognition at a national level and across all demographics. We have strong connections across the business sector and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous community organisations through our network of Reconciliation Action Plan partners. Furthermore, through the Australian Reconciliation Barometer and the research



commissioned specifically to gauge attitudes towards constitutional recognition, we have a clear understanding of the key messages and strategies that will be effective in building popular ownership of constitutional change.

If the Government recommends a referendum, Reconciliation Australia will work with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples to lead a constitutional recognition reference group made up of key organisations with a broad and influential network. As part of stages two and three, Reconciliation Australia's public education and engagement strategy would involve:

- Production and distribution of education material:
 - Schools resource kits targeted at emerging voters (16-18 years old)
 - Fact sheets
 - Presentation kits
 - Promotional material (handouts, flyers, posters, merchandise)
- Online education and engagement:
 - Website content for the YouMeUnity site
 - Online marketing
 - Online discussions and ideas sessions
- Events targeted at key groups and locations:
 - Engaging key influencers and ambassadors to distribute the message
 - Hosting events around constitutional recognition and supporting organisations to host their own events
 - Promoting constitutional recognition through established events
- Media and advertising:
 - Media interviews and opinion pieces
 - Television Commercials and online advertising
 - Social media
 - Media monitoring
- Research
 - Further research into successful communication messages to build support for constitutional recognition

A specific strategy will need to be developed and agreed with the relevant government departments and Ministers, however, Reconciliation Australia estimates that a funding envelope of the order of \$4 to \$6 million over two years (2012-13 and 2013-14) is required

for the successful execution of phases two and three of our public education strategy and should be provisioned for in the 2012-13 federal Budget.

Reconciliation Australia is well aware that the 2012-13 Budget is being developed within tight fiscal constraints. The proposed spending envelope takes this into account and seeks to strike the right balance between minimising costs and maximising the likelihood of a successful campaign. As detailed plans are developed, Reconciliation Australia will continue to focus closely on cost effectiveness and the efficacy of strategies and programs. Particular attention will also be paid to leveraging the involvement of RAP organisations and supporters and co-ordinating with other organisations to maximise impact. Reconciliation Australia also suggests that the Government consider the creation of a new community education and community awareness grants program to support smaller community organisations undertake activities in the lead up to the referendum.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government provide funding of between \$4-\$6 million over two years (2012-13 and 2013-14) for a public education and engagement strategy for the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

4. Australian Indigenous Governance Institute

Reconciliation Australia believes that strong, well run Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are a critical linchpin to improving the lives of the First Australians. For more than a decade Reconciliation Australia has run an Indigenous Governance program that focuses on recognising and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' central role in strengthening their communities. This program has included convening the first national Indigenous Governance Conference and creating the Indigenous Governance Awards, in partnership with BHP Billiton, to identify, celebrate and promote effective governance.

Over the life of this program there has been clear evidence of increased understanding and recognition of the importance of good governance and greater application of sound governance practices. Stronger governance and leadership now form one of the building blocks in the Closing the Gap strategy, agreed by the Council of Australian Governments. Building good governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is also one of the key objectives of the Government's *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-18*.

Despite the progress demonstrated through Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Governance program, more can and should be done by governments in this important area. This view was supported during the evaluation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response. 86 per cent of service providers surveyed as part of the evaluation felt that local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance capacity had not been developed or only developed some of the time.

As part of the Reconciliation Australia program, a landmark research project was conducted—the Indigenous Community Governance Project—in partnership with the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. One of the main recommendations in the final report of this project calls for the establishment of a National Institute for Indigenous Governance:

“There is an urgent need for a nationally coordinated approach to the provision of governance capacity development and training that is targeted, high quality and place-based. Governance capacity development is needed for leaders, managers and staff of organisations and community groups. Given the pivotal role of governance for Indigenous social, economic and cultural outcomes on the ground, serious consideration should be given to the early establishment of an Australian Indigenous Governance Institute to:

- a) foster, encourage, communicate and disseminate best practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and design;
- b) encourage, facilitate and, where practicable, collaborate with relevant bodies at the national, state, territory and local levels to develop practical, culturally-informed

educational and training materials, tools and resources to support the delivery of governance and organisational development at the local level;

- c) facilitate and implement the development of 'train the governance trainer' and mentoring courses, particularly targeted at developing a sustainable pool of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the requisite professional skills, and;
- d) Commission and undertake applied research to support those functions.

The Institute should be funded on a joint basis by the Australian, state and territory governments, and also be able to seek support from the philanthropic and private sectors.¹

In response to this recommendation, the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) was established in 2010. The fledgling AIGI has been provided a small amount of seed funding, but is yet to receive ongoing funding to underpin its operations over the next three to four years. We recommend that this issue be addressed in the 2012-13 Budget.

In our view, an active and sustainable AIGI is critical to developing the governance capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across Australia. Such an organisation would ideally:

- be recognised as the peak body on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance matters;
- develop culturally appropriate tools and resources for developing governance capability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities;
- provide relevant professional learning programs; and
- undertake and commission research that would lead to improved governance across Australia.

The resources required to support the AIGI would depend on the exact function of the organisation and should be jointly developed by the AIGI and officials from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

We estimate that total funding of up to \$800 000 a year would be sufficient for an active and sustainable organisation.

¹ Smith, D and Hunt J, 2007, 'Indigenous Community Governance Project: Year Two Research Findings' *CAEPR Working Paper No 36*. ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences, Canberra.

Recommendation 2: That:

- a. The Commonwealth Government provide funding of up to \$3.2 million over four years, commencing in 2012-13, for the ongoing operation of the AIGI;
- b. Officials from the Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs work with AIGI to develop more detailed costing.