

# Reconciliation Australia

## What We Are Asking of the Next Federal Parliament

MAY 2019



RECONCILIATION  
AUSTRALIA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When the next federal parliament takes the reins after the 2019 federal election, it will be faced with significant challenges. Reconciliation is one of those challenges and the time has come to make it a priority.

Our work shows the majority of Australians support reconciliation and expect the government to act.

We have created a roadmap that lays the groundwork for the path the government must take to achieve reconciliation.

We believe there are three key actions the federal parliament can take in the next term to set our course towards reconciliation.

These actions are:

1. Address the unresolved issues of national reconciliation
2. Support truth telling initiatives at a local, regional and national level
3. Support work across the breadth of reconciliation issues

The next federal parliament can **address the unresolved issues of national reconciliation** through:

- Legislation setting out support, a timeframe, and process, for advancing the issues proposed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart – an Indigenous voice to Parliament, truth telling, and agreement making
- Renewing and increasing investments to meet expanded Closing the Gap targets that are co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The next federal parliament can **support truth telling initiatives at a local, regional and national level** through:

- A community grants program to initiate and support truth telling projects, and the development of resources to support this
- The establishment of a national healing centre
- Reforming the school curriculum to better encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history

The next federal parliament can **support work across the breadth of reconciliation issues** through:

- Supporting the role of corporate, community, government and education organisations through Reconciliation Australia's RAP Program, and Narragunnawali Program
- Enhancing Reconciliation Australia's ongoing role leading the national reconciliation process to increase reach and impact, and support and drive local truth telling processes

These proposed actions set a solid foundation from which to build a truly just, equitable and reconciled Australia



## INTRODUCTION

Australia is at a critical juncture in the reconciliation journey. Now is time to act to meet our shared goal of becoming a reconciled nation.

Progress in the pursuit of equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the Closing the Gap Framework, remains stubbornly slow or non-existent.

Although the public supports key national reforms such as constitutional reform and agreement making, they have stalled in Parliament.

Experiences of racism still exist at alarming rates.

Widespread agreement on how we can recognise our shared history, celebrate the oldest continuing cultures on the planet, and move forward together has yet to emerge.

Government is yet to grasp the importance of self-determination, and community ownership of the solutions to the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Yet, while there is much to do and to work on as a nation, there are also great opportunities to be grasped that show us the way toward reconciliation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are working together, providing solutions to government to act on.

There are success stories in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across the country demonstrating that with community empowerment, we can make progress.

There is growing corporate engagement in the reconciliation process, with some of Australia's most successful companies adopting Reconciliation Action Plans.

Young Australians are now being taught a more accurate and inclusive history of our nation. This lays the groundwork for stronger relationships, better race relations, and greater understanding of the complex issues impacting on First Nation's Peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ex-servicemen and women are now honoured on ANZAC Day. Museums, galleries, cultural heritage centres, local councils, corporate organisations and other institutions are looking at their role in contributing to a fuller, more accurate account of our shared history.

Our work has shown us that the broader community is supportive of progress on important national reforms including constitutional reform and the *Statement from the Heart*, and governments around the country are considering how to advance unfinished business of reconciliation, such as Treaties.

The next Federal Government must work with the Parliament and the broader community to prioritise action towards a reconciled nation.

This roadmap seeks to provide guidance on the policies and actions that can take advantage of the opportunities presented, and address the long outstanding bedrocks of building a reconciled nation.

## OUR VISION

Reconciliation Australia's vision is for everyone to wake to a truly just, equitable and reconciled Australia.

Our aim is to inspire and enable all Australians to contribute to reconciliation and break down stereotypes and discrimination.

We will know we have achieved our vision when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a proud part of Australia's everyday life.

We have set out five dimensions of reconciliation, each of which require progress. These are Historical Acceptance, Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity and Unity.

## WHAT'S NEEDED AND WHY?

### Historical acceptance

Fundamentally, historical acceptance is about telling the truth about our shared history to achieve justice and healing.

As stated in the State of Reconciliation Report, 'reconciliation can only truly evolve when the Australian community and our major institutions acknowledge and repair the wrongs of the past, understand their effects—and make sure that these wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are not occurring today, and are never repeated in the future'.

Reconciliation Australia believes that truth telling is a precondition for better relationships based on respect and a common understanding of our past. It is the foundation upon which better outcomes and successful approaches in Indigenous Affairs can be built.

We believe there is a growing desire within the broader community to develop an honest and full understanding of colonisation, the dispossession and trauma that First Nations' Peoples were subjected to in the following years, and the ongoing impact of this history.

Truth telling processes highlight the truth of our shared history in order to further reconciliation. Our research shows that perceptions of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians improve when Australians are more aware of our history, and its ongoing impacts.

Australians' acceptance and understanding of the wrongs of the past and the ongoing impacts of these wrongs through a process of truth, justice and healing, is integral to reconciliation.

#### **We call for the next federal parliament to support truth telling initiatives at a local, regional and national level through:**

- A community grants program to initiate and support truth telling projects, and the development of resources to support this
- The establishment of a national healing centre
- Reforming the school curriculum to better encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history
- Consideration of how a national truth and reconciliation commission could support truth telling

## Race Relations

At the heart of reconciliation is the relationship between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The latest Australian Reconciliation Barometer has found that there is still work to do to improve trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also continue to experience high levels of racial prejudice with more than 40% experiencing some form in the last six months.

Concerted effort needs to go into building greater levels of trust and addressing racism. Retaining a commitment to overcoming racism through both legal protections and community awareness and education programs is an important component of achieving a just, equitable and reconciled society.

Reconciliation Australia supports maintaining strong protections against racial hate speech in the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (the Act) and full compliance with the Act in the development of policies relating to First Nations peoples.

Race relations have a significant impact on cultural security and the socio-economic opportunities available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are twice as likely to experience racial verbal abuse, and even more likely to experience other forms of racial prejudice, than other Australians.

Almost all Australians (90%) believe that the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is important and that cultural diversity makes us stronger. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still experience frequent and damaging racism and feel less cultural security than other Australians.

Combatting racial discrimination and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expression, knowledge and aspirations are critical to creating a meaningful relationship.

### **Reconciliation Australia calls for next federal parliament to support initiatives to improve race relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians:**

- Support initiatives that address racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as the 'Racism it Stops with Me' campaign, and ensure protections against racial discrimination are maintained in the Racial Discrimination Act 1976.
- Support eliminating racism from our health and education systems including by ensuring that experiences of individual and systemic racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised, measured and addressed within the Closing the Gap Strategy.
- Enhance Reconciliation Australia's capacity to undertake greater community education and awareness raising on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history.



## Equality and Equity

Reconciliation is more likely to progress when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life.

To make this happen, we have to close the gaps in life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and achieve universal recognition and respect for the distinctive collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices have repeatedly called for a more comprehensive approach to bring about the change required to tackle disadvantage within a generation. Building on the commitments and Closing the Gap targets would recognise the inter-related nature of many indicators of disadvantage.

Embedding the principles and rights articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration)* within a refreshed Closing the Gap Strategy and all policy related to First Nation's Peoples would be a significant step towards re-setting the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, addressing disadvantage, and recognising rights.

A recommitment to the Closing the Gap framework is required that involves renewing investments and national, state/territory and regional agreements to meet expanded Closing the Gap targets, with supporting policies and national agreements that are co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Formal structures for engagement should be developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support the development, implementation and monitoring of this work.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and experts are increasingly calling for approaches to improving socio-economic outcomes that recognise the social and cultural determinants of disadvantage and empowerment.

**Reconciliation Australia calls for the next federal parliament to support initiatives to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to participate equally and equitably in all areas of life, with their rights recognised and upheld:**

- Support an ongoing process of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander co-design of policies and programs and commit to long term investment to meet newly developed and expanded closing the gap targets.
- Establish a process to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop a clear and actionable strategy to progress the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

## Institutional Integrity

Institutional integrity refers to the extent to which our political and business institutions, and community and social sectors actively support reconciliation.

On the national political scale, reconciliation has broad multi-partisan support.

While support for reconciliation in the business and community sectors has grown significantly, most Australians believe that political, business and community institutions should do more to advance reconciliation.

Critical to the success of government policy is ensuring that government accountability and processes are strengthened in line with advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. Our State of Reconciliation Report set out several principles for Government policy and program development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, including:

- good governance within government
- respectful and sustained engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their representative bodies and community organisations
- local and holistic approaches
- long-term approaches supported by sustained and adequate funding
- evidence based policies.

Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people properly represented at the national level is necessary to meaningful engagement with government, industry and the non-government sectors on the review and implementation of the Closing the Gap Strategy. It is a fundamental requirement of upholding principles of self-determination and free, prior and informed consent.

### **Reconciliation Australia calls for the next federal parliament to support work across the breadth of reconciliation issues, including:**

- Supporting the role of corporate, community, government and education organisations through Reconciliation Australia's RAP Program, and Narragunnawali Program
- Enhancing Reconciliation Australia's ongoing role leading the national reconciliation process to increase reach and impact, and support and drive local truth telling processes
- Support appropriately funded and engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, including National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, and invest in local governance and decision making.



## Unity

In a reconciled Australia, national unity means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, histories and cultures are valued and recognised as part of a shared national identity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world. Reconciliation involves all Australians valuing and recognising the rich and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that have existed in our nation since time immemorial and continue to this day.

Achieving a process to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledging our past through truth, justice and healing are important milestones in establishing a shared national identity.

Recent processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the wider public, have culminated in a number of proposals to government. The most recent of which, the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Final Report of the Referendum Council, called for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament as a form of recognition.

The failure of successive Australian governments to bring about social and economic inclusion for First Peoples illustrates the clear need for a permanent mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to advise the Government on policies and decisions affecting them.

Progress towards reconciliation and a more unified nation must be underpinned by clear, structured, and mandated engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People that ensures First Peoples' voices are heard in the development, application and evaluation of legislative and policy processes.

### **Reconciliation Australia calls for the next federal parliament to take steps to address the unfinished business of reconciliation through constitutional and related national reforms:**

- Support legislation setting out support, a timeframe, and process, for advancing the issues proposed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart – an Indigenous voice to Parliament, truth telling, and agreement making
- Support amending the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011 to include referencing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to allow for the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights to examine all bills and legislative instruments for compatibility with the Declaration.

## RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA'S WORK

Reconciliation Australia has a unique and important contribution to make in influencing political leaders, decision makers and influencers.

Our strong reputation for working productively with government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector places us well to affect positive change through political, community and corporate engagement.

Our people have longstanding experience in developing and implementing strategies to influence government and public opinion, consistent with the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our vision for a truly reconciled, just and equitable Australia, based on five inter-related dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity and historical acceptance, articulates clearly the areas that need attention and progress.

This is why Reconciliation Australia is engaged across a breadth of issues.

- we have led engagement on national reform processes, including constitutional recognition
- we are an active member of the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality
- we are a member of Change the Record Campaign Steering Committee focused on incarceration and family violence
- we are an active member of the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy, supporter of the Family Matters Campaign

We engage across a range of other policy and research issues, releasing for example the Australian Reconciliation Barometer every two years, and the State of Reconciliation Report every four years.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan program has seen nearly 1000 active corporate, government and non-government organisations commit to actions to progress reconciliation. These organisations employ 2,700,000 Australians. 41,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed with RAP organisations, and \$634 million in goods and services were procured from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.

Our Narragunnawali program supports the development of environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The program provides professional learning and curriculum resources to Australian teachers and learning services across the country. The program currently supports over 32,000 teachers, educators and community members, and around 4000 schools and early learning services representing more than 10% of all schools and early learning services.

Our Indigenous Governance Program, aims to progress reconciliation through recognising, supporting and celebrating strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and self-determination. Every two years we hold the Indigenous Governance Awards in partnership with the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute. In 2018, 51 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations applied for the Awards.

We have success stories to tell through our Indigenous Governance, RAP and Narragunnawali programs.