



RECONCILIATION
AUSTRALIA

2021 STATE OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA REPORT

MOVING FROM SAFE TO BRAVE

SUMMARY REPORT





Reconciliation Australia
PO Box 4773
Kingston ACT 2604

Tel: 02 6153 4400
reconciliation.org.au

Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of Country and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Foreword

Thirteen years ago, we witnessed a pivotal moment in Australian history and a seismic shift towards reconciliation: the Apology. While long overdue, we can credit the timing of the 2008 Apology to an urgent act of bravery—to finally and formally acknowledge the suffering caused by decades of mistreatment of Indigenous Australians.

In preparing this foreword, I could not help but reflect on the day of the Apology. So many Australians had done the hard yards in the lead up to that day by learning about our shared history to better understand why an apology was necessary. Together, we stood in schools, workplaces, public places, lounge rooms and on bridges in solidarity and unity, sharing a moment of deep reflection, sorrow, and pride to be Australian. On that day, I remember saying that we looked in the mirror, and we liked what we saw.

Some of the nation's most important and difficult work is reflected in the work of Reconciliation Australia over the last 20 years. As Reconciliation Australia's inaugural Chairman, I have witnessed the key milestones, challenges and lofty aspirations that have shaped our thinking and hopes for a better tomorrow. The 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report presents that well-worn path and expertly examines the progress we have made, and the way forward.

The five pillars of reconciliation, as set out in detail in the report, give us a strong framework for attention. Action on these pillars can only be realised by being truthful; truthful to ourselves and truth-telling. That truth must begin by owning our personal biases, and confronting our nation's collective racism, both overt and covert.

Bravery in the face of racism will be our change agent. Now is the time to take a deeply personal journey and have the uncomfortable conversations. And we need to extend those conversations to those within our sphere of influence, both professionally and personally. We might feel a degree of safety when discussing our organisation's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), for instance, but are we prepared to step up our leadership roles, tackle racism head on and drive a reconciled nation at the risk of losing the support of constituents, or shareholders, or colleagues along the way?

Personal conversations are perhaps even harder to begin but are critically important. Are you willing to challenge those you love despite the fear of losing their respect? Are you willing to risk social isolation or your popularity at the next dinner party because you've challenged a racist comment? When we dig deep, we will stand together once more, in the knowledge that we are a mature and courageous nation. And the rewards of our actions will enrich all Australians and our national identity.

Brave is when we listen, challenge, and learn about ourselves and others. Brave is saying that you're ready to delve into the very things that hold you together; your bias, beliefs and values. Brave is when you refuse to accept inertia.

The global health pandemic has brought immeasurable hardship, loss and anxiety to many this year. Yet despite the enormous and ongoing challenges, the pandemic has in some respect provided many Australians with a gift. Through enforced isolation, job loss and instability, many of us have experienced a rare moment of insight into what it's like to experience the powerlessness, lack of financial security and food security, social exclusion and disengagement, and poor mental health that so many of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters face. We can choose now to harness this empathy and use it as a tool to discredit our personal bias and reject discrimination, with relentless determination.

Many of our young Indigenous people and emerging leaders are already leading this charge. In both mainstream media and social media, we have heard their voices banging on the door of racism, demanding to be heard and dismantling barriers to a truth-telling nation with a palpable sense of urgency. They will be our leaders in decades to come and we, as a reconciliation community, have a duty now to help them reclaim their narrative.

The measure of our success as individuals, will be the extent to which we have empowered ourselves and our sphere of influence—with the knowledge and confidence to face our biases and then, to create change. As a nation, the measure of our success must be the position that Indigenous peoples find themselves in. That is, a safe, equitable, equal and fair environment filled with prospect and hope.

Let's celebrate the progress outlined in the 2021 report and take action on the data and the crucial focus areas it illustrates. Let's take an unapologetic, brave stance on racism to propel us faster towards a reconciled nation. Only then can we once again look in the mirror and rejoice in what we have become.

Shelley Reys AO

Chief Executive Officer, Arrilla Indigenous Consulting

Preface

In 2016 Reconciliation Australia developed the first State of Reconciliation in Australia Report to mark 25 years of a formal reconciliation process in Australia through both the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and Reconciliation Australia.

The report identified for the first time the five dimensions of reconciliation that are necessary to achieve reconciliation in this country.

The dimensions—Historical Acceptance, Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity, and Unity—continue to form the basis upon which we understand the reconciliation effort, track progress and identify areas of greater need. These dimensions are interdependent, meaning sustained progress towards reconciliation can only occur when advancements are made in every dimension.

Four years on, this report reflects on where we have come from, where we are today, where we need to get to, and how we can get there.

It identifies significant areas of progress, including the now almost universal belief that the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians is important. The report uses real examples as shining lights for how we can progress each dimension, and reconciliation overall.

It also identifies the challenges and areas that require greater effort in order to move forward. In doing so, the report recognises that the reconciliation movement is at a tipping point, where we as a nation need to move from ‘safe’ to ‘brave’ in order to realise the promise of reconciliation.

Having built a substantial network of organisations and individuals who have joined the reconciliation movement through Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP); Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education; National Reconciliation Week activities; Indigenous Governance Awards and Corporate Partnerships; a series of national campaigns; State and Territory Reconciliation Councils; and the many local reconciliation groups and networks, we must now raise the bar of expectation.

Reconciliation cannot just be about raising awareness and knowledge. The skills and knowledge gained should motivate us to ‘braver’ action. For reconciliation to be effective, it must involve truth-telling, and actively address issues of inequality, systemic racism and instances where the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ignored, denied or reduced. That is, we need to move more of our effort from focussing on the preconditions for reconciliation, to focussing on more substantive change.

In moving towards such change, it is also clear that to continue to build the network of supporters, entry into the reconciliation space must still allow for a safe place to start on the journey—to learn, to grow, to make mistakes and to build skills and capability.

Importantly, we are seeing examples of this substantive work, with a number of RAP Partners coming out in support of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and increasingly speaking up on issues important to First Peoples, or for example, engaging in Indigenous-led initiatives such as justice reinvestment to reduce engagement with the criminal justice system. We are seeing it too in the level of community support for truth-telling as the foundation stone upon which we can build reconciliation, and progress in the education system to teach more on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. We are also seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations demonstrating exceptional Indigenous leadership and governance, leading the way on improvements in equality for First Peoples.

It is the examples set by these organisations, schools, communities and individuals articulated in this report that can move us towards a braver reconciliation. One that places truth-telling at the centre of how we move forward, that addresses racism, changes the systems to ensure First Nations voices guide us, and ensures the rights of First Australians are recognised.

Karen Mundine

Chief Executive Officer,
Reconciliation Australia

Introduction

The demand for reconciliation in Australia is as old as its European colonisation. Since the first Europeans arrived on Australia's shores and commenced an unequal, uneasy, and often violent relationship with the continent's hundreds of distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our shared history has seen calls for, and denials of, reconciliation and justice.

From the earliest days of the British colonies there were demands from a few lonely coloniser voices to treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural protocols with respect. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, despite the dispossession, violence and repressive racist policies they endured, have shown a generosity towards the new arrivals; and since 1788 have repeatedly called for reconciliation and a coming together.

“The continent was occupied by our people and the footprints of our ancestors traversed the entire landscape. Our songlines covered vast distances, uniting peoples in shared stories and religion. The entire land and seascape is named, and the cultural memory of our old people is written there.

“This rich diversity of our origins was eventually ruptured by colonisation. Violent dispossession and the struggle to survive a relentless inhumanity has marked our common history.”¹

Progress has been slow but in the past few decades Australia has made great advances towards the goal of a reconciled nation.

Progressing concurrently has been the restoration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights won through the vigorous resistance of First Nations peoples and their demands for self-determination, land rights, and recognition as Australia's First Peoples. It has often been this resistance that has fuelled the advances towards reconciliation. From acts of armed resistance in the early days of the colonies, to the formation of First Nations political organisations, the progress of reconciliation and Indigenous rights have been intertwined.

The establishment of the formal reconciliation process was recommended in the final 1991 report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which itself arose after many years of strong advocacy and activism by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In January 2001 the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) established Reconciliation Australia (RA), to lead the national journey towards reconciliation. Among the key responsibilities it outlined for the new organisation, few were more important than the task of reporting on Australia's progress towards a reconciled country.

This summary report captures key directions identified in the 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report to do just that. In doing so, the report draws on the views of key leaders of First Nations organisations and communities, and other key RA stakeholders;² a series of practical examples of reconciliation in action captured in the 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report;³ data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer⁴ and desktop research undertaken by Reconciliation Australia.

It describes the five dimensions of reconciliation, assesses where we are today, lays out some practical actions that need to be taken if we are to continue to progress the reconciliation process, and sets out some milestones in the nation's reconciliation journey. The full State of Reconciliation in Australia Report can be accessed at reconciliation.org.au

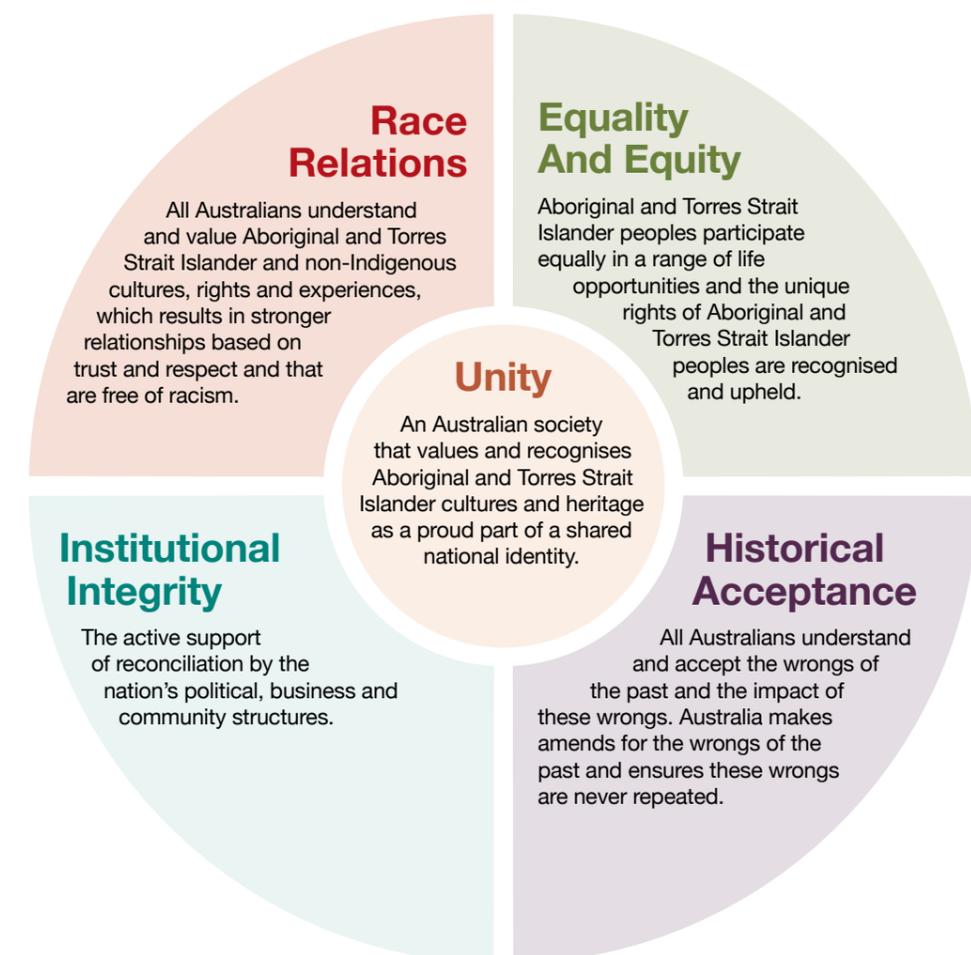
The Five Dimensions of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people, for the benefit of all Australians. But how do we define what Australian reconciliation is, and how we will know when it has been achieved?

In 2016, a quarter of a century after the formation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the start of the formal reconciliation process, Reconciliation Australia (RA) sought to do this through an extensive consultation with stakeholders in Australia and by investigating similar processes in other countries, such as New Zealand/Aotearoa, Canada and South Africa.

While reconciliation can mean different things to different people, Reconciliation Australia has identified five integral and interrelated dimensions to measure reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance. These are the five dimensions of reconciliation.

These five dimensions do not exist in isolation; they are interrelated and Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we progress in all five.



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.

Goal: Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.

Key Action: Overcome racism.

Equality and Equity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participate equally in a range of life opportunities and the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.

Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life—i.e. we have closed the gaps in life outcomes—and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are self-determining.

Key Action: Strengthen the focus on Closing the Gap; and support processes, programs and approaches that give effect to self-determination, including through a voice to parliament.

Institutional Integrity

The active support of reconciliation by the nation's political, business and community structures.

Goal: Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.

Key Action: Improve the protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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.

Goal: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a valued and recognised part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.

Key Action: Celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements.

Historical Acceptance

All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past that occurred, and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia makes amends for past policies and practices and ensures these wrongs are never repeated.

Goal: There is widespread acceptance of our nation's history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated—there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance.

Key Action: Acknowledge our past through truth-telling, education and understanding.

Where we are today

Support for reconciliation has grown significantly over the past three decades. There is a far greater awareness of the complexity and magnitude of First Nations' cultures and knowledges; and many more Australians now understand and acknowledge the brutal impact that British colonialism and the modern Australian state have had on First Nations families and communities.

As one respondent to the Reconciliation Australia (RA) stakeholder interviews observed,

"The past 20 years and reconciliation? Growing awareness that we had not seen before. Before this time people were not interested and did not want to know."

The 2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) evidence supports this view with 95% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 91% of the general community feeling our relationship is important.⁵

95%  Ninety-five per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and **91% of Australians in the general community feel our relationship is important.**

79% of Australians in the broader community now agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity.⁶

The proportion of Australians in the general community who believe in the possibility of national unity remains high at 72%. Similarly, 73% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the concept of unity.⁷

While there have been some improvements in how First Nations peoples perceive the relationship between non-Indigenous Australians and themselves, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience of racism remains consistently and unacceptably high. There is an increasing proportion of Australians who acknowledge Australian racism and want to do something about it.⁸

Forty-three percent of the broader community and 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people agree with the view of many of the stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia that Australia remains a racist country.⁹

While a broad consensus remained among stakeholders that Australia has made progress against the five dimensions, there is also a level of frustration at the slowness of progress and a clear view that politicians are lagging behind public opinion and dragging the chain.

"In a broader sense the issue of reconciliation has been a positive story. In a political sense though we are seeing a bare minimum of support. Just need the politics to catch up."

The ARB findings support this, revealing that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Australians in the general community, believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap in health, justice, education, and employment.

 Health	 Justice	 Education	 Employment
60% in the general community	62% in the general community	60% in the general community	57% in the general community
73% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap.	71% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap.	72% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap.	64% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap. ¹⁰

The anger and exasperation at the Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement from the Heart was a constant theme in the interview of stakeholders with one respondent describing the Uluru Statement from the Heart as *"a guiding light"*.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed look to the lack of progress in relation to the Uluru Statement from the Heart as an indicator that Parliament is not keeping up with the broader community in progressing reconciliation.

"There are signs of increasing impatience as to why this is not all fixed."

The Voice to Parliament, a proposal that originated from the Uluru Statement from the Heart, was supported by 66%,¹¹ which is in line with the broad community support in a 2019 Essential Poll finding that 70% of 1,097 respondents support constitutional recognition.

The desire to progress reconciliation was further demonstrated in the ARB with 61% in the general community (54% in 2018), and 78% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (73% in 2018) wanting to do something to improve reconciliation.¹²

There was also a positive response to progressing truth-telling about our shared history. Three years after the Uluru Statement this need to truthfully tell and accept Australia's history was overwhelmingly endorsed in the 2020 ARB with 93% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 89% of Australians in the general community supporting formal truth-telling processes in relation to Australia's shared history.¹³

93%  93% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and **89% of Australians in the general community supporting formal truth-telling processes in relation to Australia's shared history.**

Fifteen percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to feel they cannot be true to their cultures at work; 14% in interactions with educational institutions; and 12% in interactions with government departments

Most of us also believe that education about our shared past is critical, with 83% of the general community and 91% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people agreeing that it's important for Indigenous histories and cultures to be taught in schools.

Stakeholders interviewed noted the positive impact of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) while emphasising the need to do more.

*"RAPs have become an important part of institutional integrity; helped change the narrative on accountability and engagement with Aboriginal people, but still yet to truly change the culture and processes in organisations."*¹⁴

More broadly, the ARB highlighted that more must be done to continue the improvement in institutional integrity both within and outside of Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) organisations. Fifteen per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to feel they cannot be true to their cultures at work (19% in 2018); 14% in interactions with educational institutions (17% in 2018); and 12% in interactions with government departments (19% in 2018).

The Rio Tinto destruction of 46,000-year-old cultural heritage sites of the Puutu Kuntj Kurama and Pinikura (PKKP) Peoples, at Juukan Gorge, WA, was a significant rupture of a relationship between a large corporate organisation and Traditional Owners of the land they mine.

It was met with widespread community shock and outrage; the suspension of the organisation from the Reconciliation Action Plan program; a Senate Inquiry; shareholder action; and the CEO and two senior executives of Rio resigning. It highlighted the distance still to go in some areas, and the increasing expectation of the Australian community to improve the relationship with First Peoples and take bolder action towards reconciliation.

It also showed that there are real consequences when expectations are not met and organisations fail to enact their commitments to reconciliation.

Alongside the disappointments, there is strong evidence of progress in Australia's journey towards reconciliation, expanded upon in the full 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report. This progress is borne out of data in the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, the RAP Impact Measurement Report, the many case studies of success and progress, and is the consensus from the stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia.

We are moving closer to becoming a reconciled nation,

*"[There is a] growing awareness that we had not seen before. Before this time people were not interested and did not want to know."*¹⁵

There is, however, much more to do. It is possible that as we move closer to achieving some of the key prerequisites, such as truth-telling, negotiations around treaties, and greater control by First Nations peoples over their own affairs, the reconciliation journey will become more difficult.

But it is the more difficult, substantive change that will propel us towards a more reconciled country.

Where we need to be in the future

Much has been achieved since the birth of the formal process of Australian reconciliation in 1991 but we have a long way to go and there are things we must do better to expedite our arrival at a just, equitable and reconciled Australia.

The data provided by the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB), feedback from stakeholder interviews, and case studies of successful reconciliation initiatives, all of which are reported on in more detail in the full 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report, provides us with some good directions.

It's not all just black and white

In 2016, nearly half (49%) of all Australians were either born overseas or had at least one parent who was born overseas.¹⁶ There is a strong need to better engage with Australia's extensive culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. As one respondent pointed out in the stakeholder interviews,

"If we are talking reconciliation it cannot just be black and white. Look at the demographic of our country."

Another remarked simply,

"Race relations [is] also a major issue for new migrants."

This shared experience of Australian racism and a reduced exposure, and commitment to the mythology of Australia's creation, make CALD communities natural allies in the movement for reconciliation. As Reconciliation Australia IT Officer and first generation Sri Lankan migrant, Suminda Gunaratne, wrote in Reconciliation News,

*"Within Australia's migrant communities there is an overwhelming desire for greater knowledge about Australia's history and friendships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We need to engage better with these communities and tap into their goodwill."*¹⁷

This desire is being acted on within Australia's CALD communities as they increasingly engage with First Nations peoples, with the peak national CALD communities body, FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia), launching its "Encouraging Engagement" guide during National Reconciliation Week 2020.¹⁸

Strength in the local street

Local communities are where reconciliation is lived and felt and effort is required to energise and engage at a local level.

One of the stakeholders interviewed by Reconciliation Australia noted that,

“It was an enormous grassroots movement in the early days and with the local reconciliation action groups. Mums and dads of Australia came together to learn and to start to build relationships with Aboriginal people in their area. The local movement is however not as strong as it was.”

Many respondents pointed to the effectiveness of reconciliation in local communities and stressed the important role of local government in such a process. In addition, case studies provide countless examples of local governments initiating local change across the five dimensions.

It is also at this local level where the stakeholder interviews highlighted the critical importance of truth-telling and the opportunities this presents local communities to progress reconciliation based on historical acceptance.

‘Braver’ RAPs

While there was strong recognition of the positive role played by the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program, some respondents in the stakeholder interviews questioned some components of the program.

One view was that RAPs are sometimes a box-ticking exercise, and that the partnerships with First Nations peoples were often unequal. Respondents called for more First Nations control of agenda, and greater emphasis on supporting First Nations self-determination.

Respondents also argued that RAP organisations should be more prepared to advocate on some of the harder issues confronting First Nations communities; such as child removal, incarceration and over-policing, rather than concentrating on less controversial issues such as culture and caring for Country. So too, should they be prepared to consider their role in these issues, how they might support, or how they might be contributing to, issues that impact First Peoples negatively.

National recognition

The Uluru Statement from the Heart and a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament remains the strongest proposal to achieve self-determination, with stakeholder interviews, the 2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, and other recent national polling all expressing strong support for it.

The recommendations of the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) as well as the unimplemented recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, remain vital.

Areas for action: 2021 onwards

Moving towards a braver reconciliation requires a vision for what a reconciled Australia looks like. To do this, clear future directions guided by the five dimensions of reconciliation are needed.

RACE RELATIONS

Actions

- Maintain legal protections against racism
- Support public campaigns against racism
- Support public education on First Nations cultures and histories
- Reform mainstream service delivery, and workplaces, to address systemic racism and promote cultural safety and improve accountability
- Address justice issues that impact the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and institutions including addressing over-incarceration, rates of family violence, and children in out-of-home care.

This evidence gathered in the full 2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report demonstrates that addressing Australian racism and building positive race relationships will progress reconciliation across many of the five dimensions including closing the gaps in health and other indicators, which is so necessary for achieving equality and equity.

Addressing the many justice issues that have been the subject of significant government inquiries and acting on findings and recommendations, should be a priority in order to improve the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, government and government institutions.¹⁹

More broadly, overcoming racism must be a national priority. There must be a zero-tolerance approach to racism, backed by effective institutional and legislative settings, and supported by public education. Australian institutions must be more active in calling out and condemning all racism both at the individual and systemic levels, including any racism in our parliaments.

Maintaining the current protections against racial discrimination in both state and federal jurisdictions is a critical shield against racism suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many other Australians, particularly people of colour and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Legislative protection against racism must remain strong, and attempts to wind back protections under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* (RDA) and other protective legislation must be resisted.

But more must be done to free Australia from the distorting and divisive effects of racism.

Racism is a consequence of ignorance; so community education and awareness-raising on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories is essential for reducing and eliminating racism.

Anti-racism campaigns such as the Racism. It Stops with Me campaign should be supported by government so that they can continue their work and outreach. The campaign provides the community with important tools to help make change and learn more about racism, respond effectively when racism occurs, be a good ally, and act for positive change.²⁰

Strong condemnation of racism such as the “Eagles Condemn Racism” video released by AFL club, the West Coast Eagles, and the “RISEUP” campaign launched by Basketball Australia and the Australian women’s national team, the Opals, are guiding lights for other organisations and institutions to look to and emulate in reducing racism.²¹

Workplaces, schools and individuals should consider how they can support a greater understanding of how unconscious bias can function, and how we can actively intervene, disrupt and challenge racism.

Schools and the early childhood sector are critical to achieving this change as well. Maintaining Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Education in Reconciliation program and other initiatives such as The Healing Foundation’s Stolen Generations Resource Kit for Teachers and Students, will remain critical in helping our education sector to increase understanding of our history and promote unity.²²

They are also important for revealing and working against unconscious bias and systemic racism within the education system.

EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Actions

- All future policy development, implementation and monitoring of Indigenous Affairs is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies
- The calls in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament, should be supported by parliaments, corporate and civil society, and the broader community
- Governments must appropriately resource national, regional, local and traditional owner, independent, representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Governments, working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, must address each of the social and economic gaps experienced by First Peoples
- Governments must raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 to bring it into line with international human rights standards.

The ongoing failure to close the gap in equality between First Peoples and non-Indigenous people, and ensure the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is realised, respected and enjoyed by First Australians suggest a clear need to lift our national effort on achieving equality and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Leadership must come from governments working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

The announcement by Prime Minister Scott Morrison in 2019, of a partnership between the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the First Nations’ Coalition of Peaks, was a welcome initiative. In the 2016 State of Reconciliation in Australia Report, Reconciliation Australia had joined with many First Nations peak organisations and called for COAG to extend and expand the Closing the Gap targets in a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is positive that this has been acted on.

This partnership means that not only do the deliberations around the Closing the Gap strategy and targets finally have some meaningful First Nations participation, but we have, for the first time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sitting at the national table as partners.

This partnership is a good first step towards one of the key pillars of reconciliation—that all future policy development, implementation and monitoring is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative bodies. It is imperative that Governments engage in the partnership discussions and negotiations in good faith and act on the advice of those who know best how to address the issues that affect them.

However, the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must have a decisive voice in matters that affect them—a cornerstone of the equality and equity dimension of reconciliation—is far from being implemented across the board.

In the eloquent words of the Uluru Statement from the Heart,

*“When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.”*²³

Reconciliation Australia urges the Australian Government to support the calls in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament. It should maintain national, regional, local, and traditional owner, independent, representative bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and create respectful partnerships and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations.

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

Actions

- Governments, corporate organisations, and civil society must recognise the importance of, and honour commitments enshrined in, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work proactively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to incorporate its aims into domestic policy, legislation, and business practices that impact First Peoples
- RAP organisations should speak up on, and engage with a range of issues, including those that may attract controversy, such as constitutional reform, treaties, truth-telling, over-incarceration, children in out-of-home care, justice reinvestment, and closing the gaps in equality.

The results from the stakeholder interviews show recognition that institutional integrity is improving. The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program is seen as a major contributing factor to this trend.

The public support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart by some of Australia’s biggest companies is evidence of this, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants in our interviews suggest ways to improve the RAP program and the integrity of RAP organisations.

While expanding the RAP program and the influence of reconciliation in Australia’s leading corporate, sporting, cultural and educational organisations is crucial, it is also important to ensure greater accountability and an increased commitment to First Nations leadership in partnerships and their primary role in setting priorities.

RAP partners are facilitating change, increasing employment opportunities for First Nations peoples, educating their own workforces and directly assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with funding and/or skills and expertise.

However, there is an opportunity to build on this and move into a braver space by speaking up on a range of issues including those that may attract controversy—such as deaths in custody, over-policing, over-incarceration, and child removal.

There is also an opportunity for RAP partners to interrogate their own businesses to ensure they are supporting the principles established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Increasing the appetite to speak up, and critically test their organisations’ practices and approaches on critical rights-based issues for First Peoples, can help build stronger long-term relationships so critical to true reconciliation.

There is a role for the business sector, the civil (for purpose) sector, and more broadly, the RAP community, in supporting the equal participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a range of life opportunities. Likewise, the active support of Australia’s largest and wealthiest companies can add significant weight to advocacy for the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be recognised and upheld. And they can interrogate their own role in relation to the realisation and enjoyment of those rights. This should involve considering how their business operates and helps or hinders equality and equity for First Peoples. Public statements should be matched by actions within the everyday operations of the organisation.

UNITY

Actions

- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should value First Peoples cultures and ways of doing in governing, education curricula, business practices, and media representation
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should support initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements
- Governments, corporate, education and media institutions should promote discussion about enhancing our national identity by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history into our national story.

Governments, corporate organisations, education and media institutions must contribute to, and support unity. Central to this is undertaking and supporting initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements. This should become part of everyday business as a way of enhancing our national identity and celebrating the oldest living culture on the planet.

There are many examples of initiatives to draw from. The Mossman State School in Far North Queensland is currently teaching its students the local Aboriginal language, Yalanji, with great success. Fifty years ago, speaking Yalanji in the playground of this same school was a punishable misdemeanour, but today the Elders who experienced this repression of their mother tongue are working with teachers and education officials to bring their language to the broader community.

In the small historic town of Braidwood in NSW, local non-Indigenous residents advocated for, funded and erected a large tribute to the local Dhurga Yuin, acknowledging their ancient connection to local Country. Local Catholic school, St Bedes, is also running language classes in the local Dhurga language.

These are good examples of how communities, and their local schools, are developing educational programs that other schools can draw on. Supporting similar projects on a national scale, and ensuring our institutions are progressing the broader community's understanding and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, achievements and ways of doing is important to progressing unity. It is also an opportunity for the whole nation to forge a national identity that is uniquely Australian, of this continent, and inclusive.

There still remains considerable work to be done in this regard. In May 2020, this was starkly evident as a result of the destruction of 46,000-year-old caves at the Juukan Gorge in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The loss to the Puutu Kunti Kurama and Pinikura (PKKP) Peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the broader community, and indeed the world is hard to comprehend.

Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage forms one of the critical building blocks of forging a more unified nation. Emerging from the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in the 1990s, the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation stated that,

“Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equity for all.”²⁴

HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

Actions

- Governments at a federal, state and local level should support truth-telling in local communities to build national understanding of our shared past, and build a culture and movement of truth-telling
- Governments and institutions should build greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the public domain including through memorialisation, plaques, renaming places, and sharing and re-storying
- Governments and universities should support increased scholarship to investigate Australia's frontier wars and massacres
- Governments, working with our educational institutions, should work with First Peoples to improve the teaching of First Nations history and culture in our schools.

Just as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are missing from the Australian Constitution, so too is much of Australia's telling of its history silent on the occupation of Australia by its First Nations peoples. Too often, our history covers up the brutal nature of colonisation, and leaves out the resilience and contribution by First Peoples.

The effective advocacy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the three decades of the reconciliation process, have all been part of a relearning of Australian history in which the myth of peaceful settlement by courageous European pioneers is making way for a more truthful representation.

To develop a deeper reconciliation process, Australia must also develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of pre-colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order to appreciate what was disrupted or lost.

All Australians need to understand a fuller account of our shared history and its impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society post-colonisation, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' contribution to the nation.

This should involve initiatives to build greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures such as memorialisation, plaques, renaming places, and sharing and re-storying—including through the arts, establishment of museums, local community memorials and monuments. A national effort across these areas should involve collaborating to re-story, reconcile and heal, including through local reconciliation committees, advocacy, and partnerships across the Australian community.

Such community truth-telling can underpin and support a widespread movement of truth-telling and build understanding of our shared history. It can help pave the way to a more formalised truth-telling process.

Developing greater understanding of the role of truth-telling in reconciliation, through initiatives such as the Truth-Telling Symposium held jointly by Reconciliation Australia and The Healing Foundation are critical to informing the next steps in truth-telling.²⁵

Community truth-telling can underpin and support a widespread movement of truth-telling and build understanding of our shared history. It can help pave the way to a more formalised truth-telling process

An evaluation of the RAP partnership between EY (formerly Ernst & Young) and the Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle showed increasing positive connections among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and their non-Indigenous colleagues within organisations.²⁶

Such improvements in relationship increase the awareness of non-Indigenous employees, about history and First Nations cultures, through cultural awareness trainings, online learning and cultural learning programs.

Reconciliation 'Australia's Narragunnawali program and The Healing Foundation's education program are also having an impact.

In the education sector, the 2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer showed that 61% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and 43% of the general public agreed it is very important for Indigenous history to be a compulsory part of the school curriculum.²⁷

There is scope to strengthen commitment to historical truth-telling within our education sector.

Some key milestones in Australian Reconciliation

*Note: this is not an exhaustive list.

Approximately 80,000 BCE	First evidence of Aboriginal occupation in Australia.
1788	British establish a colony at Port Jackson Sydney on Gadigal Country.
1797	The settlement of Parramatta is attacked by a large group of Bidjigal warriors led by Pemulwuy.
1834	Western Australian Governor, James Stirling, leads an attack on the Binjareb Noonga in the Pinjarra Massacre leaving an estimated 70 men, women and children dead.
1901	The Commonwealth of Australia is formed without any consultation with Australia's First Nations.
1914 -1918	1,300 Indigenous soldiers, out of an estimated Indigenous population of 80,000, served in the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War. Around 250 to 300 soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice.
1931	Doris Pilkington Garimara and two other girls begin their epic escape back to Jigalong as documented in the book, <i>Rabbit Proof Fence</i> .
1938	Day of Mourning protests by Aboriginal men and women gathered at Australia Hall in Sydney. The participants at the first Day of Mourning came from across Australia to continue a struggle that had begun 150 years previously.
1948	The <i>Commonwealth Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948</i> (Cth) creates "Australian citizenship" for the first time. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are technically included as citizens but are still unable to vote—one of the key privileges of citizenship.
1959	Malera/Bundjalung woman, Margaret Williams-Weir, becomes the first Aboriginal person to graduate from university when she is awarded a Diploma of Physical Education from the University of Melbourne. She went on to complete a PhD at the University of New England.
1962	The <i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i> is amended to enable all Indigenous Australians to enrol to vote in federal elections, with Queensland becoming the last State to grant Indigenous Queenslanders the right to vote in State elections in 1965.
1966	In the Wave Hill walk-off, two hundred Gurindji stockmen, house servants and their families—employed by Lord Vestey's Pastoral Company at Wave Hill, NT—went on strike to get their tribal lands returned.
1967	More than 90% of Australians vote "Yes" in a referendum to allow the Australian Government to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
1971	Jagera man, Neville Bonner, becomes the first Aboriginal person to sit in the Australian Parliament as a Queensland Senator for the Liberal Party.
1972	The Aboriginal Embassy is erected in front of Australia's Parliament House in Canberra to demand land and other rights.
1976	Kuku Yalanji woman, Pat O'Shane, becomes Australia's first Aboriginal barrister.

1984	Arrernte and Kalkadoon man, Charles Perkins, appointed head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs becoming the first Indigenous person to head up an Australian Government department.
1985	Uluru is handed back to its Anangu owners with the Anangu leasing the land back to the Australian Parks and Wildlife Service for 99 years with joint management arrangements.
1988	The <i>Barunga Statement</i> , demanding rights and recognition for Aboriginal peoples, is presented to Prime Minister Bob Hawke and tens of thousands of Australians protest lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights during Australia's Bicentenary.
1990	The Hawke Government establishes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in an attempt to provide greater First Nations control of affairs.
1991	The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody presents its final report and recommendations to the Australian Parliament, including calling for a process of national reconciliation. The Australian Parliament unanimously passes the <i>Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991 (Cth)</i> , formally launching a process of national reconciliation.
1992	The High Court recognises the Meriam people's ownership of Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait and overturns the fallacious legal concept of <i>terra nullius</i> after a long legal battle by Koiki Mabo and other plaintiffs.
1993	In response to the High Court's Mabo decision the Keating Government passes the <i>Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)</i> providing a mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to claim back some of their ancestral lands.
1996	The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation expands the Week of Prayer for Reconciliation to launch Australia's first National Reconciliation Week.
1997	The <i>Bringing Them Home</i> report on Australia's Stolen Generations is launched at the inaugural Australian Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne attended by nearly 2,000 people.
1998	National Sorry Day is commemorated for the first time.
2000	Hundreds of thousands of Australians walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge, and other bridges around Australia, to show support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations. Noongar writer, Kim Scott, becomes the first Aboriginal writer to win the Miles Franklin Award—Australia's most prestigious fiction prize—for his novel, <i>Benang</i> .
2001	Reconciliation Australia is established.
2004	The Australian Government creates a memorial to the Stolen Generations at Reconciliation Place in Canberra.
2007	The Australian Parliament suspends the <i>Racial Discrimination Act (Cth)</i> in order to implement the so-called Emergency Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. National Indigenous Television (NITV) is launched.

2008	Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologises to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Parliament and people.
2010	Noongar man, Ken Wyatt, becomes the first Aboriginal member of the House of Representatives after winning the Perth seat of Hasluck for the Liberal Party.
2013	The Australian Parliament passes with bi-partisan support the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Bill 2012</i> , recognising the unique and special place of First Nations peoples as the original owners of the Australian continent and islands.
2016	South Australia, Victoria and the Northern Territory announce their intention to commence Treaty discussions with First Nations peoples.
2017	The National Constitutional Convention at Uluru releases the Uluru Statement from the <i>Heart</i> , a unified statement to the Australian people calling for an Indigenous voice to parliament, the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to develop agreements or treaties, and a process of truth-telling. The Turnbull Government rejects the Uluru Statement from the Heart.
2018	Victoria becomes the first Australian state to pass Treaty legislation when it passes the <i>Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 (VIC)</i> .
2019	Queensland and the Northern Territory establish their own processes towards a treaty with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. The Budj Bim Cultural Landscape of the Gunditjmara Nation, a 6,600-year-old Aboriginal aquaculture site in south-west Victoria, is added to the UNESCO World Heritage List.
2020	Tens of thousands of Australians attend Black Lives Matter marches in cities across the country to protest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody and high rates of incarceration of First Nations peoples. Mining company Rio Tinto destroys two 46,000-year-old sites in the Juukan Gorge, Pilbara, and is suspended from the Reconciliation Action Plan community; Senate Inquiry held; CEO and two senior executives resign. Vincent Namatjira wins the 2020 Archibald prize for his portrait of Adam Goodes, becoming the first Indigenous artist to win in its 99-year history. Meyne Wyatt awarded 2020 Archibald Packing Room Prize for self-portrait, becoming the first Indigenous artist to be awarded the prize in its 99-year history. Hubert Pareroutja wins the Wynne Prize for his painting of Tjoritja (West MacDonnell Ranges, NT), becoming the fifth Indigenous artist in a row to win the prize.

End notes

1. Ulurustatement.org, from *Our Story*, available at: www.ulurustatement.org/our-story
2. From May to March of 2020, Reconciliation Australia undertook a series of interviews with stakeholders on the state of reconciliation. Those interviewed included leaders of national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, leaders of relevant non-Indigenous organisations, corporate leaders and RAP partners.
3. Reconciliation Australia has collected a range of case studies identifying examples of effective reconciliation across the framework of the five dimensions. These case studies provide evidence of what reconciliation looks like in practice, through the individuals and groups who are making a difference. These are the stories we want readers to remember when they think about reconciliation in Australia.
4. Since 2008, Reconciliation Australia has biennially surveyed the views of the Australian public about reconciliation and related issues. Known as the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB or “the Barometer”), the survey is a key tool for helping understand how the nation is performing on its journey towards reconciliation.
5. Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020, available at: www.reconciliation.org.au
6. *ibid.*
7. *ibid.*
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020, available at: www.reconciliation.org.au
11. Essential Poll 2019, available at: www.essentialvision.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Essential-Report-280619.pdf
12. *ibid.*
13. Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer, 2020.
14. Reconciliation Australia, Stakeholder Interviews, Reconciliation Australia 2020.
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16. ABS, 2017, *Cultural Diversity in Australia – 2016 Census Data Summary*, available at: www.abs.gov.au
17. Gunaratne, S. 2013, *A migrant on the Journey to Recognition*, Reconciliation News, available at: www.reconciliation.org.au
18. Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Council of Australia, 2019. *Encouraging Engagement: A guide for multicultural organisations to engage in reconciliation*. (Consultation draft), available at: http://fecca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/FECCA-Encouraging-Engagement_v3-Consultation-Draft-SINGLES-1.pdf
19. See for example: The Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths In Custody; The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (Bringing them home); Parliamentary (Cth) Inquiry into Stolen Wages.
20. Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020, Racism. It Stops with Me campaign, available at: <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/>
21. Stocks, G., 2019, *Eagles’ plea to stop racism*, available at www.westcoasteagles.com.au; *Opals Ask Australia to “Rise Up” in support of Black Lives Matter*, 2020, available at www.australia.basketball
22. Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education, available at: www.reconciliation.org.au/narragunnawali; Healing Foundation - Stolen Generations Resource Kit: healingfoundation.org.au/resources/stolen-generations-resource-kit-teachers-students
23. Uluru Statement from the Heart, Referendum Council 26 May 2017, available at: www.ulurustatement.org
24. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Reconciliation: Australia’s challenge, final report to the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth Parliament, December 2000. Appendix 1. Available at: https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RA_RAP-Impact-Report-2019_web.pdf
25. Reconciliation Australia/The Healing Foundation, 2018 Truth Telling Symposium.
26. https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/RA_RAP-Impact-Report-2019_web.pdf
27. Reconciliation Australia, Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020, available at: www.reconciliation.org.au





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