



Roadmap for reconciliation: What we are asking of the next Federal Parliament

Reconciliation Australia

April 2022



Executive Summary

The incoming Federal Parliament in 2022 will be faced with unprecedented social and economic challenges. Reconciliation is one of the challenges that when achieved forms the foundation of a unified society.

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.

Australians want action on these issues. 89% of the Australian community support formal truth-telling processes, and the majority of Australians want more to be done by government to close the gap in health, justice and employment.¹ Over 40% of Australians believe Australia is a racist country, with more than one in two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having experienced racial prejudice in the last six months.²

We need to move more of our effort from focussing on the preconditions for reconciliation, to focussing on more substantive change.

As our substantial network of organisations and individuals who have joined the reconciliation movement grows 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.

We are now 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 learn more about 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 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.

¹ Reconciliation Australia, *2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer, 2020: [Australian Reconciliation Barometer -2020 Summary-Report web spread.pdf](#)*

² Ibid

Reconciliation Australia's work shows the majority of Australians support reconciliation and also expect governments to act. As support and commitment to braver action grows, the capacity of Reconciliation Australia to drive change must also be enhanced.

Progress on reconciliation is the glue that binds us and sets the foundation for a more just and equitable nation. A nation that comes to terms with the wrongs of the past, addresses racism, and embraces equality and unity.

The next Federal Government, working across the Parliament, must place reconciliation at the heart of its work. That's why we have created a roadmap to outline the path the government must take to achieve reconciliation.

We believe there are three foundational action areas the federal government must take in the next term to set our course towards a reconciled nation.

- 1. Support voice and work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**
- 2. Support truth telling initiatives at a local, regional and national level**
- 3. Support building the foundations of a respectful relationship**

It is these areas, supported by the detailed actions below, that will set a solid foundation from which to build a truly just, equitable and reconciled Australia and we call on government to support them.

Key actions

The next Federal Government working with parliament must **support voice, and work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** through:

- Supporting the aims in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including by introducing legislation setting out support, a timeframe, and process, for achieving a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.
- Working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to progress and co-design implementation of representative models identified as part of the Indigenous Voice Co-design process.
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, to appropriately fund and meet the targets and outcomes under the Priority Reforms of the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The next Federal Government must **support truth-telling initiatives at a local, regional and national level** through:

- Working with Reconciliation Australia to advance and support the truth telling agenda.
- Increased investment in research, including through ARC, research block grants or other funding mechanisms, to uncover the untold, and under-told, parts of our shared history as it relates to the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians.
- Building greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the public domain including through memorialisation, renaming electorates and other public places.
- Strengthening the national curriculum to ensure it better encompasses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

The next Federal Government must **support building the foundations for a respectful relationship** through:

- Funding a long term National Anti-Racism Framework to guide actions on anti-racism by government, the Australian Human Rights Commission, NGOs, business, educators, health professionals, police, other justice authorities, civil society, and the community.
- Establishing a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner to help drive progress towards closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care.
- Strengthening First Nations cultural heritage protection through funding and engaging in a co-design process with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance and other First Nations stakeholders, and acting on the outcomes of that process to make necessary policy and legislative changes.
- Enhancing Reconciliation Australia's funding to continue leading the national reconciliation process to support increasing and multiplying our reach and impact with corporate, community, government, education and Indigenous organisations, and support local truth-telling processes.

Our vision

In 2021 Reconciliation Australia marked 20 years as the lead body for reconciliation in Australia. Our work promotes and facilitates reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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 Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity, Unity and Historical Acceptance.

How are we tracking on reconciliation?

In the past few decades Australia has made great advances towards the goal of a reconciled nation.

Although the public supports key national reforms such as constitutional reform and agreement making, they continue to stall in Parliament.

Experiences of racism remain consistently and unacceptably high.

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

While positive and proactive partnerships have been forged through the National Partnership Agreement, Government is yet to fully grasp the importance of self-determination, and community ownership of the solutions to the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There is much work to do as a nation, yet there are also great opportunities to expedite our arrival at a just, equitable and reconciled Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are working together, providing solutions for governments 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 rapidly 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 in schools and early learning services. This lays the groundwork for stronger relationships, better race relations, and greater understanding of the complex issues impacting on First Nation's Peoples.

Museums, galleries, cultural heritage centres, local councils, corporate organisations and other institutions are examining their past roles in damaging colonial practices and how they can contribute 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 *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, and governments around the country are considering how to advance unfinished business of reconciliation, such as treaties and truth-telling.

The slow response to progressing the Uluru Statement calls and closing the gap are an indicator that Parliament is not keeping up with the broader community in progressing reconciliation.

Our Australian Reconciliation Barometer shows that the majority of Australians believe more must be done by government departments to close the gap in health, justice, education, and employment.

Key data points, Australian Reconciliation Barometer:³

Truth telling

- 89% of Australians believe it is important to undertake formal truth-telling processes in relation to Australia's shared history.

Uluru statement

- 95% of Australians believe it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a say in matters that affect them.
- 81% of Australians believe it is important to protect an Indigenous Body within the Constitution, so any government can't remove it.

Enhancing Reconciliation

- 61% of Australians want to do something to help improve reconciliation
- 90% of Australians believe the relationship between First Peoples and the broader community is important

Anti-racism Framework

- 43% of the broader community and 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe that Australia remains a racist country.

CTG

The majority of Australians believe that more must be done by government departments to close the gap in outcomes for health, justice, and employment:

- Health: 60% general community
- Justice: 57% general community
- Employment: 62% general community

³ Reconciliation Australia, *2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*, 2020:
[Australian Reconciliation Barometer -2020 Summary-Report web spread.pdf](#)

National curriculum

- 83% of the general community believes it is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to be taught in schools.

First nations cultural heritage- valuing culture

- 79% of Australians believe First Nations' cultures are important to our national identity.
- 87% believe it is important to learn about First Nations' histories
- 85% believe it important to learn about First Nations' cultures

Rationale and actions across the reconciliation dimensions

Race Relations

Our 2020 Australian Reconciliation Barometer found that one in two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced racism in the previous six months.

To close the gaps in health, education, employment and justice, overcoming racism must be a national priority backed by effective institutional and legislative settings, and supported by public education.

Maintaining the current protections against racial discrimination in both state and federal jurisdictions is a critical shield against racism.

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

Cross party support for a National Anti-Racism Framework will provide much needed national leadership and guidance on addressing racism.

So too will government support for anti-racism campaigns and programs including the *Racism. It Stops with Me* campaign, and education campaigns in schools and other institutions.

We call on the next Federal Government to:

- Maintain legal protections against racism
- Support anti-racism campaigns and programs
- Fund a long term National Anti-Racism Framework to guide actions on anti-racism by government, the Australian Human Rights Commission, NGOs, business, educators, health professionals, police, other justice authorities, civil society, and the community.

Equality and Equity

The ongoing failure to close the gap in equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people, underscores 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 to make progress.

The National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap between the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the First Nations' Coalition of Peaks is a welcome initiative.

It is imperative that Governments resource it adequately, and act in good faith on the advice of those who know best how to address the issues that affect them – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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 particular, there is no agreed process and timeline to progress the call for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.

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.

We call on the next Federal Government to:

- Support the aims in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including by introducing legislation setting out support, a timeframe, and process, for achieving a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.
- Work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to progress and co-design implementation of representative models identified as part of the Indigenous Voice Co-design process.
- Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and COAG, to appropriately fund and meet the targets and outcomes under the Priority Reforms of the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- Address justice issues, including incarceration, children in out-of-home care, and family violence, that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people disproportionately, by:
- Raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 to bring it into line with international human rights standards.
- Establishing a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner.
- Establishing an independent justice reinvestment body as per the Australian Law Reform Commission 'Pathways to Justice' report

Institutional Integrity

There are over 85 Australian Government departments with an endorsed RAP and actively engaged in the program, signifying an appetite for reconciliation within government.

The Coalition of Peaks (Coalition) forged a National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in 2020 and continues to partner with government on its implementation.

These positive signs suggest an interest in progressing reconciliation by governments at a state, territory and federal level.

These positive actions can be undermined however, when the relationships between governments and corporations are put under the spotlight.

The Rio Tinto destruction of 46,000-year-old cultural heritage sites of the Puutu Kunti 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 Reconciliation Australia's 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, and garnered reflection on the expectations of governments in these situations.

We call on the next federal parliament to

- Honour the commitments enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to incorporate its aims into policy and legislation, that impact First Peoples. This should include the right to self-determination, the right to participate in decision making in matters that affect their rights, and free, prior and informed consent.
- Enhance Reconciliation Australia's funding to continue leading the national reconciliation process to support increasing and multiplying our reach and impact with corporate, community, government, education and Indigenous organisations, and support local truth-telling processes.

Unity

Undertaking and supporting initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements is central to supporting unity in Australia.

It should become part of everyday business as a way of enhancing our national identity and celebrating the oldest living culture on the planet.

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.

The Australian Government commitment to establish a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural precinct in the heart of the national capital, Canberra – Ngurra: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Precinct is a positive step.

There still remains considerable work to be done to realise the promise of national unity.

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."

This hope must remain central to our nations' parliament.

We call on the next Federal Government to:

- Strengthen First Nations cultural heritage protection through:
 - Funding and engaging in a co-design process with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance and other First Nations stakeholders.
 - Acting on the outcomes of that process to make necessary policy and legislative changes.
- Increase funding for initiatives that celebrate, promote and enhance public education about First Peoples' history, culture, and achievements, as one of three central elements of our national identity - in line with recommendations of the Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy Senate Inquiry.

Historical Acceptance

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.

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.

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 are critical to informing the next steps in truth-telling.

We call on the next Federal Government to:

- Increased investment in research, including through ARC, research block grants or other funding mechanisms, to uncover the untold, and under-told, parts of our shared history as it relates to the relationship between First Peoples and other Australians.
- Building greater public recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the public domain including through memorialisation, renaming electorates and other public places.
- Strengthening the national curriculum to ensure it better encompasses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.