

NATIONAL STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE RECONCILIATION

COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

This Roadmap for Reconciliation contains four national strategies. These strategies set out the most important actions for individuals, communities, organisations and governments. They recommend ways to transform our commitment to reconciliation into actions, so helping the nation put right the legacy of the past.

Understanding our history

Before British settlement at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788, Australia was owned and occupied for many thousands of years by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Since 1788, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been dispossessed and dispersed from their traditional lands.

Loss of land has had economic, social, cultural and spiritual consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples spanning many generations. In addition, for more than one hundred years many Indigenous people worked for rations rather than wages. Also, many were forcibly removed from their families as children, affecting whole communities.

What happened in the past continues to have consequences today. Compared with other Australians, Indigenous people experience poorer health, limited employment opportunities, educational disadvantage and greater imprisonment. Economic disadvantage restricts life choices and is a major obstacle to self-determination.

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders often face prejudice when trying to rent a home, find a job, hire a taxi, get service in shops and banks, and when doing the simple everyday things that most Australians take for granted.

Building on achievements

Since the 1960s, there has been considerable improvement in Australia's treatment of the first peoples. More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are achieving recognition for their contribution to the life of the nation and success in their chosen fields. The civil rights of Indigenous peoples have been recognised through the extension of voting rights, the 1967 Referendum, and the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

Increasingly, our courts are also recognising the cultures, histories and rights of the first peoples of Australia.

In 1991, the Commonwealth Parliament established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to promote a process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community for the

benefit of the nation.

Our responsibility for the future

The Council has proposed two reconciliation documents. The first is Corroboree 2000 – Towards Reconciliation, which includes the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation.

The second is this Roadmap for Reconciliation. The Roadmap recognises that all of us have a role to play in making reconciliation a reality. Making a commitment to the Declaration can be the start of our Reconciliation journey, but fine words are not enough.

The actions proposed in this Roadmap respond to the call to do things differently. They will work best when developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. They should allow for flexible local options, where possible, recognising that what works in one community might not work in another.

The Roadmap draws on the extensive consultations of the Council. It represents the Council's considered view on the key actions for going forward. The Council's final report to Parliament in December 2000 will include more detailed action proposals, based on the comments that have been received and further discussions.

I. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY TO SUSTAIN THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS

The National Strategy to Sustain the Reconciliation Process sets out ways to build on progress towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community after the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation completes its term.

These measures address practical, cultural and spiritual dimensions of reconciliation.

Essential actions include:

- **Leadership for the reconciliation process:**
 - All levels of government, the private sector, community and voluntary organisations publicly support the ongoing reconciliation process, provide resources and increasingly involve Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in their work.
 - A foundation, Reconciliation Australia, is established to maintain a national leadership focus for reconciliation, report on progress, provide information and raise funds to promote and support reconciliation activities.
 - State, Territory and local reconciliation groups, involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from

the wider community, lead and support action that promotes reconciliation.

- Australian parliaments and political parties address the low level of Indigenous representation in the political system.
- **Education for reconciliation:**
 - Schools, tertiary education institutions and employers require and support the culturally appropriate teaching of the truth of Australia's history that includes Indigenous perspectives and addresses racism.
 - The media feature stories that promote reconciliation and challenge racist stereotyping.
- **People's movement for reconciliation:**
 - Communities celebrate significant dates and events and take joint action to achieve agreed reconciliation goals.
- **Protocol and ceremony:**
 - All parliaments, governments and organisations observe protocols and negotiate with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders or representative bodies to include appropriate Indigenous ceremony into official events.
- **Symbols of reconciliation:**
 - Governments, organisations and communities negotiate to establish and promote symbols of reconciliation. This would include changing the date of Australia Day to a date that includes all Australians.
- **Formal recognition of the documents of reconciliation:**
 - All parliaments and local governments pass formal motions of support for the documents of reconciliation.

II. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY TO PROMOTE RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER RIGHTS

This strategy proposes a number of actions, including some constitutional and legislative processes, to assist the progressive resolution of outstanding issues for the recognition and enjoyment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights. It aims to ensure:

- That all Australians enjoy, in daily life, a fundamental equality of rights, opportunities and acceptance of responsibilities; and
- The status and unique identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia, achieve recognition, respect and

understanding in the wider community.

Essential actions include:

Education

- Governments and their agencies, legal, cultural and educational institutions, Indigenous organisations, and the media work together to improve community awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples with distinct cultures, rights and status.

Legislation

- All governments take steps to ensure the recognition and protection of Indigenous intellectual property as already occurs in some Commonwealth legislation.
- All governments ensure their policies and practices observe Australia's international Indigenous and human rights obligations.
- State and Territory governments consider giving magistrates and judges the discretion to take account of traditional laws in sentencing, as already occurs in some circumstances in the Northern Territory.
- Governments establish legislative processes to deal with the 'unfinished business' of reconciliation, allowing for negotiated outcomes on matters such as Indigenous rights, self-determination within the life of the nation, and constitutional reform.

Australian Constitution

- Government agencies, legal institutions and educational organisations develop and promote community awareness about the Constitution and its application in protecting the rights of all Australians.
- Within the broader context of future constitutional reform, the Commonwealth Parliament enacts legislation for a referendum which seeks to:
 - Prepare a new preamble to the Constitution which recognises the status of the first Australians; and
 - Remove section 25 of the Constitution and introduce a new section making it unlawful to adversely discriminate against any people on the grounds of race.

III. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY TO OVERCOME DISADVANTAGE

The National Strategy to Overcome Disadvantage aims for a society where Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders enjoy a similar standard of living to that of other Australians, without losing their cultural identity.

This strategy focuses on education, employment, health, housing, law and justice. Priority must be given to achieving comparable outcomes in health and education. Improvement in these areas is critical to advancing reconciliation. It is important that no person is disadvantaged by the inability of governments and service providers to communicate and cooperate in the delivery of services.

Essential actions include:

Performance measurement and reporting

- The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) evaluates and updates its National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, agreeing on a framework for all governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to:
 - Set program performance benchmarks that are measurable, include timelines and are agreed in partnership with Indigenous peoples and communities;
 - Ensure they have the information systems necessary to monitor performance; and
 - Annually report their performance to parliaments, councils and their constituents against these benchmarks.
- Every five years, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission works with ATSIC to prepare an independent report on the nation's progress in addressing disadvantage.

Partnerships and working arrangements

- Peak business and community groups make commitments to overcome disadvantage, and encourage their members to make similar commitments.
- Services are designed and delivered in a way that is driven by local Indigenous people, strengthens local communities, and forges social coalitions and equal partnerships, drawing on and building the skills and resources of the community.
- Service providers, ATSIC and governments identify and eliminate systemic discrimination and racism, beginning with a review of their own practices.
- Governments adopt funding arrangements that are flexible and sufficient to meet local needs, and enable the pooling of funds across agencies and between the different levels of government.
- Employers link performance-based salaries in all sectors to improvements in Indigenous outcomes, where appropriate.

Community and personal responsibility

- Indigenous communities, families and individuals take more

responsibility for addressing the causes and consequences of disadvantage within their control.

- All Australians accept the responsibility to learn more about the causes and extent of disadvantage and reject racism and related behaviour.

IV. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

The National Strategy for Economic Independence aims for a society where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities can share the same levels of economic independence as the wider community.

For most Australians, pathways to economic independence include getting a job and/or running a business. In both of these cases, an education substantially improves the likelihood of success.

This strategy is not for everyone. For some, economic independence will be defined in terms of their traditional economy and lifestyle.

Essential actions include:

- **Access to jobs and resources**
 - All employers establish strategies for employing and training more Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.
 - Banks and other financial institutions actively adopt culturally responsive banking and financing regimes and facilitate better access to capital.
 - Governments increase the value of Indigenous assets by legislating for Indigenous intellectual property and cultural rights and by working in partnership with Indigenous communities to protect biodiversity and rehabilitate and sustain lands and waters under the control of those communities.
- **Effective business practices**
 - Indigenous people and communities develop their existing competitive advantages in respect of their cultural assets and special knowledge of the land and the environment.
 - Governments, ATSIC, and the private sector all research and develop successful business models that can be applied in regional and remote communities. Priority should be given to developing commercial activities on Indigenous-owned land.
 - Private-sector organisations seek opportunities for joint ventures with Indigenous businesses. Governments promote such joint ventures.
 - Governments and industry work in partnership with Indigenous communities to ensure their projects strengthen Indigenous communities by supporting the local economy and

enhancing regional employment opportunities.

- **Skills development**
 - Schools, TAFEs, universities and other education providers, working with families, develop and implement flexible programs to improve student attendance, retention rates, academic results and career pathways.
 - TAFEs and other vocational education providers target their programs to the employment opportunities in the local labour market, aiming for available jobs or business opportunities on the completion of training programs and schemes.
 - With local community involvement, education providers, banks and other financial institutions develop money-management programs that increase the capacity of people to plan, save and invest in their future.
 - Indigenous leaders actively encourage their people to equip themselves with the skills, knowledge and experiences that are valued in the local employment market.

V. THE COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION... AND BEYOND

When the Commonwealth Parliament voted unanimously in 1991 to establish the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation to promote a process of reconciliation, it provided Australians with an historic opportunity to build a nation that lives out the values it proclaims.

The Parliament established the Council and a formal nine-year reconciliation process because it recognised that:

- Australia was occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who had settled for thousands of years before British settlement at Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788;
- Many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders suffered dispossession and dispersal from their traditional lands by the British Crown;
- There has been no formal reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians;
- By the year 2001, the centenary of Federation, it is most desirable that there be such a reconciliation; and
- As a part of the reconciliation process, the Commonwealth will seek an ongoing national commitment from governments at all levels to cooperate and to coordinate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission as appropriate to address progressively Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education,

employment, health, infrastructure, economic development and any other relevant matters in the decade leading to the centenary of Federation, 2001.

From the preamble to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991

The Parliament directed the Council to undertake a range of functions, including consultation with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community on whether reconciliation would be advanced by a formal document or documents of reconciliation. After extensive consultations, the Council decided that such documents would help the process, but that any such documents would have to:

- Express the Australian people's hopes and aspirations for reconciliation;
- Share responsibility with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for making progress to overcome disadvantage through negotiated actions;
- Recognise that much remained to be done; and
- Outline an ongoing process that enables Australians to work together towards a reconciled nation.

The Council also believed that these would have to be 'people's documents' which parliaments, local authorities, organisations, institutions and people in communities could accept and commit to.

The Council has always stressed that reconciliation can only be achieved through the commitment and efforts of Australians in their everyday lives. In the lead-up to the centenary of Federation, when its term ends, the Council has been heartened to see reconciliation take on a life of its own in communities, workplaces, peak bodies and voluntary organisations.

True reconciliation will require concerted efforts in all spheres of our nation's life. This 'Roadmap' provides a framework for all Australians to contribute through actions as we walk together along the reconciliation road.