



COMMONWEALTH  
**OMBUDSMAN**

Reconciliation  
Action Plan  
2013–2015

# Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman Reconciliation Action Plan 2013-2015



## Foreword

This Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a vital part of our commitment to improve communication and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities across Australia.

We aim to build respectful and mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous people and to ensure our services are accessible. We have developed a plan that includes meaningful actions and measurable targets with this objective in mind.

The actions outlined in this RAP commit the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office to developing a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within the Office, exploring cultural development and training for staff, developing strong external relationships, developing clear protocols for engaging with Indigenous communities and recognising and celebrating key events such as National Reconciliation Week and National Aboriginals and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week.

This RAP has been structured around Reconciliation Australia's guiding principles of relationships, respect and opportunities. For our Office this means that relationships are critical. Both inside and outside of the organisation, we work to ensure they are grounded in understanding and respect for Indigenous culture. The Ombudsman's office exists to safeguard all the community in its dealings with Australian Government agencies, and to ensure that administrative actions by those agencies are fair and accountable. This RAP is our commitment to ensure that is true and remains true for Indigenous Australians.

I commend this RAP to you, and ask that all staff consider what they can do to support it and contribute to a workplace culture that values diversity and equity, and promotes participation for all.

**Colin Neave**  
Commonwealth Ombudsman



## Our Vision

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's vision for reconciliation is to develop respectful and mutually beneficial relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. Through building these relationships and increasing our understanding of needs and issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we aim to increase the uptake of our services and improve the quality of outcomes for both clients and stakeholders.

## Our Business

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman was established by the *Ombudsman Act 1976* and commenced operations on 1 July 1977.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman safeguards the community in its dealings with Australian Government agencies. The Ombudsman's office handles complaints, conducts investigations, performs audits and inspections, encourages good administration, and carries out specialist oversight tasks. The Commonwealth Ombudsman is also the ACT, Defence Force, Immigration, Law Enforcement, Overseas Students, Postal Industry and Taxation Ombudsman.

As at 30 June 2013 the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman employed approximately 151 ongoing staff with one self-identified Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander employee. The Office has a national focus with staff in Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

## Our RAP

Key aims of the Commonwealth Ombudsman in developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) include:

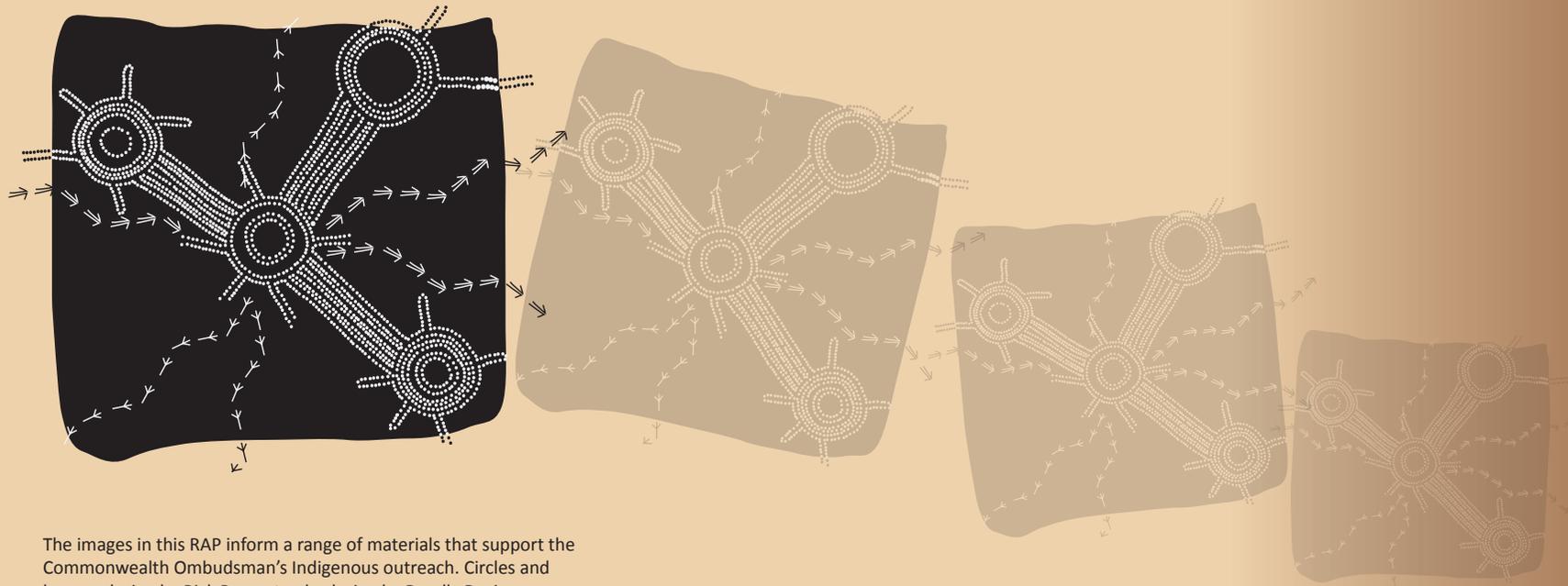
1. raising awareness of the services of the Commonwealth Ombudsman for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians
2. improving access to the services of the Commonwealth Ombudsman
3. ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in different locations (remote, rural, metropolitan) receive appropriately tailored services
4. educating and training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to provide culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander complainants.

Our Reconciliation Action Committee (RAC) is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and comprises employees from across the Office. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspective is also incorporated with the assistance of Reconciliation Australia. The RAC meets quarterly to monitor the RAP progress.

This RAP will be reviewed in 12 months and will be available on the Office's intranet, website and Reconciliation Australia's website.

Currently the office conducts an outreach program through its Indigenous Team. The Indigenous Team:

- works to resolve systemic issues arising from complaints and stakeholder engagement
- provides specialist advice and support to staff handling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples related complaints
- coordinates outreach to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- liaises with Government agencies
- provides feedback or reports on addressing systemic problems, and implementing an engagement strategy aimed at ensuring our services are accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.



The images in this RAP inform a range of materials that support the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Indigenous outreach. Circles and banner design by Rick Roser; tracks design by Deadly Design.

**Relationships – Positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians are important to the Office because they enhance the way we do our business, assist us to build trust and respect and, subsequently, enable us to increase the uptake of our services and improve the quality of outcomes for both clients and stakeholders.**

| Action                                      | Responsibility                | Timeline                                 | Measurable Target   |
|---|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Establish a Reconciliation Action Committee | Executive Indigenous Champion | By December 2013                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Reconciliation Action Committee (RAC) is established and supports the implementation of our RAP.</li> <li>The RAC will meet at least once every quarter to discuss progress on the RAP</li> </ul>                  |
|   | COO/CSaC (to coordinate)      | 12 months from date of effect of the RAP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress reported annually to Reconciliation Australia</li> </ul>  |
| Raise internal awareness of the RAP         | RAC/SLG                       | By February 2014                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Launch RAP to all staff via morning tea, email and intranet news item</li> </ul>   |
|   | RAC                           | By April 2014                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a plan to raise awareness with all employees across the Office about the RAP commitment</li> </ul>   |
|   | Ombudsman                     | By December 2013                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint an Executive Indigenous Champion to demonstrate commitment at the highest level within the Office, lead significant reconciliation activities within the Office and oversight progress of the RAP</li> </ul> |

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| Action   | Responsibility   | Timeline                                      | Measurable Target   |
|--|--|---|---|
| Develop external relationships   | SAO Social Services, Indigenous and Legal/ Indigenous Team     | By June 2014                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and stakeholders within our sphere of influence to approach to assist in our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues and in developing potential RAP actions for the future. This list will include details for Land Councils, Indigenous Education Units and others</li> </ul> |
|  | SAO Social Services, Indigenous and Legal/ Indigenous Team     | By September 2014                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish clear protocols for engaging with Indigenous communities</li> </ul>  |
|  | SAO Social Services, Indigenous and Legal/ Indigenous Team/ICT | By December 2014                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and maintain relevant Indigenous services information on our internet</li> </ul>   |
|  | SAO Justice, Finance and Territories /ACT Ombudsman Section    | By June 2014                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop external relationships with ACT Indigenous communities, organisations and stakeholders in cooperation with ACT government agencies</li> </ul>  |
| Celebrate National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week and other significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples events | RAC/SLG  | <p>May – June 2014</p> <p>May – June 2015</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise and celebrate National Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June 2014) across the Office including hosting an internal morning tea to provide staff with an update on the RAP (during NRW)</li> <li>Recognise and celebrate NAIDOC Week across the Office including hosting an event with a guest speaker</li> </ul>   |

**Respect** – Mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians is important to the Office because it assists us to build positive relationships, enables us show consideration and appreciation and, subsequently, provides us with a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cultural beliefs and needs.

| Action   | Responsibility | Timeline          | Measurable Target  |
|--|----------------|-------------------|--|
| Investigate cultural development training for staff  | COO/HR         | By June 2014      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine cultural awareness training options and including cultural protocols into induction for new employees</li> </ul>  |
|  |                | By September 2014 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an implementation plan for the Office to enable roll-out of the preferred option/s</li> </ul>   |
| Facilitate a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cultural beliefs and needs | COO            | By June 2014      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Office's new Enterprise Agreement recognises and accommodates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cultural beliefs and needs</li> </ul>   |
| Raise internal understanding of protocols  | RAC            | By June 2014      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raise the cultural visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples culture and history within the organisation by displaying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags</li> </ul> |
|  |                | By September 2014 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rename the key meeting rooms to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land and display information at the meeting rooms about the background to the name of the room</li> </ul>                 |
|  |                | By February 2014  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure 'Acknowledgment of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' protocols are used at significant meetings, events and education sessions</li> </ul>  |

**Opportunities** – Creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is important to the Office as it enables them to have the same opportunities as other Australians, make informed choices about their lives and realise their full potential and share in opportunities that benefit all Australians.

| Action   | Responsibility | Timeline                  | Measurable Target   |
|--|----------------|---------------------------|---|
| Consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities that are suitable for the Office | HR             | Commence by December 2014 | Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait employment within the Office including, but not limited to, consideration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• opportunities for Jawun Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Corporate Partnerships</li> <li>• liaising with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) regarding a PM&amp;C Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Secondment Program with other Commonwealth agencies</li> <li>• identifying contacts within appropriate government agencies to explore opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment/secondment to the Ombudsman's office</li> <li>• contacting DHS to determine if there is scope for secondments/ placements for Office staff to their remote servicing teams</li> <li>• work experience opportunities</li> <li>• encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to apply</li> </ul> |
|  | HR             | By June 2014              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the Office as an employer of choice when advertising vacancies externally</li> </ul>   |

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| Action              | Responsibility | Timeline          | Measurable Target   |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|---|
| Other opportunities | HR             | By June 2014      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage existing employees to update equity and diversity information</li> </ul>   |
|                     | SAO Operations | By September 2014 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine Service needs/gaps in service delivery (if applicable) and consider steps for improvement</li> </ul>   |
|                     | Finance        | By December 2014  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scope a business case (with assistance from Supply Nation) to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses into the Office supply chain</li> </ul> |

## Tracking Progress

| Action                            | Responsibility | Timeline         | Measurable Target  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|------------------|--|
| Build ongoing support for the RAP | RAC/COO/SLG    | By June 2014     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define resourcing for the RAP</li> <li>Collect data to measure progress and successes</li> <li>Progress of RAP reported to staff via Intranet</li> <li>Submit our annual report of achievement to Reconciliation Australia</li> </ul> |
| Reporting progress                | RAC/COO/SLG    | By December 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Report progress on RAP bi-annually to Senior Management</li> <li>RAP progress to be included in the Ombudsman's Annual Report</li> </ul>  |

|      |   |
|------|---|
| COO  | Chief Operating Officer                       |
| CSaC | Corporate Strategy and Communications Team    |
| HR   | Human Resources Team                          |
| ICT  | Information and Communication Technology Team |
| NRW  | National Reconciliation Week                  |
| RAC  | Reconciliation Action Committee               |
| RAP  | Reconciliation Action Plan                    |
| SLG  | Senior Leadership Group                       |
| SAO  | Senior Assistant Ombudsman                    |