



RECONCILIATION PLAN

REFLECT

COMMONWEALTH
OMBUDSMAN

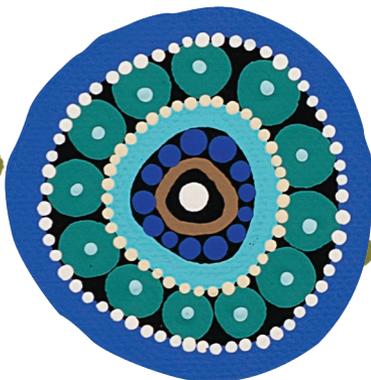


Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman
Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan 2019



Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.



Foreword



I am pleased to present our 2019 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This is my Office's fourth RAP and it strives to build on the foundations that have been established through previous plans. Reconciliation is an ongoing endeavour and this RAP demonstrates my Office's commitment to building, nurturing and promoting relationships based on respect and understanding for different cultures and perspectives.

The Ombudsman's Office deals with complaints about Commonwealth and ACT Government programs and services. We also work with Commonwealth and ACT agencies, non-government organisations and other oversight bodies to improve public administration. We support people who are

vulnerable or marginalised, ensuring they are treated fairly and are able to exercise their right to complain.

Since our 2018 RAP the Office has made progress towards improving our staff's awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, implementing recommendations from our Indigenous accessibility review and improving the Office's understanding of, and capacity to assist, Indigenous complainants. In 2019 the Office will particularly focus on improving our engagement and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

This RAP reflects my Office's commitment to promoting equality between all staff, to building an inclusive and respectful working environment, and to creating a service that is accessible and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the community as well as being sensitive to their needs.

I thank all our staff members who contributed to the development of this RAP and I look forward to working to implement the actions and deliverables in this year's RAP.

Michael Manthorpe PSM
Commonwealth Ombudsman



Our vision for reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation is to acknowledge, value, respect and affirm the history and cultural richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in all that we do, both in our daily interactions and in our work to influence enduring systemic improvement in public administration.

Our Office

The Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) was established by the *Ombudsman Act 1976* and commenced operations on 1 July 1977. The Office has a national presence, with staff in Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth.

Our Office considers and investigates complaints from people who believe they have been treated unfairly or unreasonably by an Australian Government department/agency or prescribed private sector organisation.

We also handle complaints relating to private health insurance, complaints about problems that overseas students may have with private schools, colleges or universities (education providers), the postal industry, VET Student Loans and the Australian Defence Force. We administer the Public Interest Disclosure scheme. The Commonwealth Ombudsman is also the Australian Capital Territory Ombudsman.

Our Office:

- works to resolve systemic issues arising from complaints and stakeholder engagement
- undertakes outreach to remote and regional areas to promote our services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- liaises with external stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities, to influence improvements in public administration affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- prepares reports and submissions to Parliament about schemes and programs which solely or predominantly affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including a submission on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Discussion Paper on Remote Employment and Participation in February 2018
- is implementing strategies to ensure our services are culturally safe, competent and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As at 31 December 2018 our Office employed approximately 234 staff (excluding contractors), including five self-identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees, comprising 2.1 per cent of the workforce.

Our Office has a dedicated Indigenous Strategy Team that provides advice and support to staff handling complaints relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The Office is committed to ensuring Indigenous Australians have equal, open and transparent access to our complaint-handling services.

The Indigenous Strategy Team is interested in capturing and monitoring complaints about Indigenous policy, programs and service delivery, and addressing systemic issues that arise from these complaints. The team is currently implementing the Indigenous accessibility review—ensuring our services are accessible to Indigenous Australians, and is also responsible for coordinating outreach to Indigenous communities in remote and regional areas.



Our RAP

Our RAP provides a public commitment to continuing reconciliation. It includes practical steps to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, and to increase our understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. The RAP is part of our work to make our services more accessible to Indigenous peoples.

Our RAP includes the following objectives for the Office:

1. Leadership and Office commitment

Demonstrating our Office's commitment to reconciliation, and encouraging staff members' understanding and awareness of the reconciliation process.

2. Engagement and service improvement

Raising awareness and improving access to our services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, regardless of location.

3. Capability and understanding

Improving our capacity to provide respectful and culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

4. Opportunities

Implementing strategies to improve employment and developing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our Office, supporting a more diverse workforce that reflects the population we serve.



Our current activities

This is our fourth RAP. Since January 2018 our Office has:

1. Increased accessibility

We reviewed our complaint-handling systems to identify barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in accessing our Office. We are implementing the findings of the Gilimbaa Indigenous accessibility review through strategies that aim to improve accessibility to the Office. Actions that we have taken include:

- developing and distributing 'Your Story Matters' communications targeted at Indigenous communities and organisations
- further developing our internal complaint-handling and data collection practices
- assessing Indigenous culture training needs for staff
- providing team-specific cultural awareness and capability training for our staff.

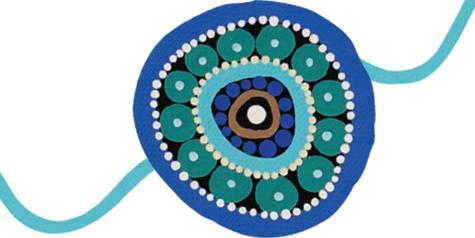
2. Celebrating our First Nations' cultures

The Office continued to welcome people to events and significant meetings with a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgment of Country. We continued to rename our meeting rooms in our offices across Australia to reflect the language of local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander groups.

On 29 May 2018, to acknowledge National Reconciliation Week, the co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, Dr Jackie Huggins AM FAFH, attended our Brisbane office to provide an all-staff address. Throughout her address Ms Huggins encouraged staff to learn more about our shared histories, and consider how we can individually and collectively contribute to achieving reconciliation.

The Office also celebrated the National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week in July with a Welcome to Country performed by Aunty Violet Sheridan as well as enjoying a traditional dance performance by the Wiradjuri Echoes.

The ACT Ombudsman held a local art competition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists living in the ACT. The competition received 11 entries and was won by Leah Brideson with her painting 'Community Together'.



3. Engaging and sharing

Our Office facilitates the Australian and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) Indigenous Engagement Interest Group, which provides opportunities to share information, resources and experiences with a view to improving complaint-handling practices and procedures for Indigenous peoples. The group meets quarterly and includes participants from parliamentary and industry ombudsmen offices from Australia and New Zealand.

As part of the Office's commitment to ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities, the Indigenous Strategy Team visits a range of key stakeholders and Indigenous communities. In 2017–18, the team visited Indigenous communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands of South Australia, Alice Springs in the Northern Territory, Bunbury in Western Australia, Parramatta in Western Sydney and border communities in South Western Queensland. In 2018–19 we are planning to visit Greater Western Sydney, Logan and other regional and remote locations.

4. Influencing change

In 2017, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet launched the Protocol for Indigenous Language Interpreting for Commonwealth Government Agencies (the Protocol). The Protocol was the result of a recommendation in the Ombudsman's 2016 report into the accessibility of Indigenous language interpreters and incorporates the 17 best practice principles from our report.

The Office has decided to adopt the Protocol to ensure that our services can be easily accessed by all members of the Australian community. Implementing the Protocol will progress key elements of the Indigenous accessibility review report and is an example of our Office modelling accessible practice for other agencies.

In February 2018, the Office lodged a submission to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Discussion Paper: Remote Employment and Participation as part of our oversight responsibility for the Community Development Program (CDP) reforms. In September 2018, Office representatives appeared before the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry reporting on the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Community Development Program) Bill 2018.





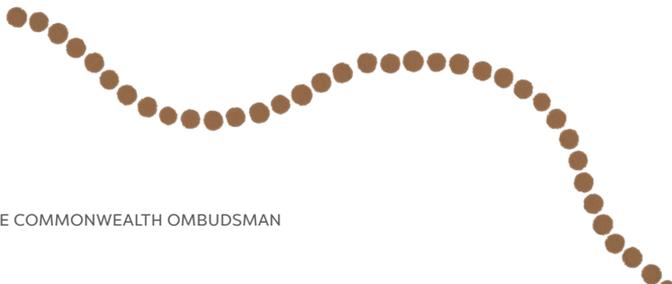
Relationships

Positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians are important to our 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.

Good relationships are based on trust, understanding, communication and mutual respect.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations	Review and update our engagement strategies to identify and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	April 2019	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations, and produce a document containing practical steps to partner-up with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.	August 2019	RAP Champion
	Invite a local ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elder or community person to participate in the RAP Working Group.	April 2019	RAP Champion
	Review and update the Office's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach procedures.	September 2019	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager

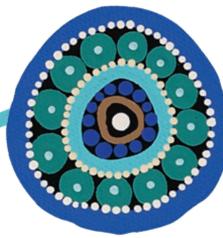
	Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services information on both the Commonwealth Ombudsman and ACT Ombudsman internet and intranet pages.	September 2019	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW)	Organise at least one internal event for NRW.	27 May – 3 June 2019	RAP Working Group Communication Officer
	RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.		Communication Manager
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.		RAP Champion
	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation material to our staff.		
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff, and raise awareness of RAP commitments and upcoming events.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Communication Officer Communication Manager
	Engage with senior leaders and other internal stakeholders to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities under the RAP.	February 2019	RAP Champion





	Continue to update the RAP intranet page to provide a resource for staff to learn about reconciliation and send regular intranet announcements to promote RAP activities.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Communication Officer Communication Manager
	Continue to raise external awareness of our RAP through the Office's social media channels.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Communication Officer
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	June 2019	RAP Champion
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	May 2019	RAP Champion
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination, and produce a document outlining findings and recommendations.	July 2019	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager Director of Human Resources
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions and future needs.	September 2019	Director of Human Resources

Respect



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

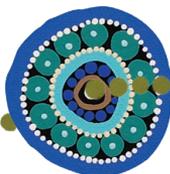
Pride in the cultures that have existed in this country for tens of thousands of years and the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Australia's development.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation.	December 2019	RAP Champion Director of Human Resources
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	June 2019	RAP Champion
	Subscribe to suitable Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander media/publications and make these available to all staff to encourage awareness and education.	March 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat
	Ensure that all staff complete mandatory e-learning module on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness.	December 2019	Director of Human Resources

6.

Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols

Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.	July 2018	RAP Champion
Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	July 2018	RAP Champion
Consult with Traditional Owners regarding our protocol document for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country and promote appropriate use at significant meetings, events and education sessions.	April 2019	RAP Champion
Invite a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country for our internal NAIDOC Week event for 2019.	June 2019	RAP Champion
Raise the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and histories within the Office by displaying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and renaming key meeting rooms in state offices.	June 2019	RAP Champion





<p>7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week</p>	<p>Hold at least one internal NAIDOC Week event.</p>	<p>First week in July 2019</p>	<p>RAP Champion</p>
	<p>Raise awareness and share information amongst staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week which includes information about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to our offices.</p>	<p>First week in July 2019</p>	<p>Deputy Ombudsman</p>
	<p>Support our staff to participate in NAIDOC Week events and promote community events in local areas.</p>	<p>First week in July 2019</p>	<p>RAP Champion</p>
	<p>RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.</p>	<p>First week in July 2019</p>	<p>RAP Champion</p>
<p>8. Recognise, celebrate and/or participate in other days and events of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples</p>	<p>Ensure staff members are aware of, and have access to, a calendar with significant days of celebrations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p>	<p>March 2019</p>	<p>RAP Working Group Secretariat</p>

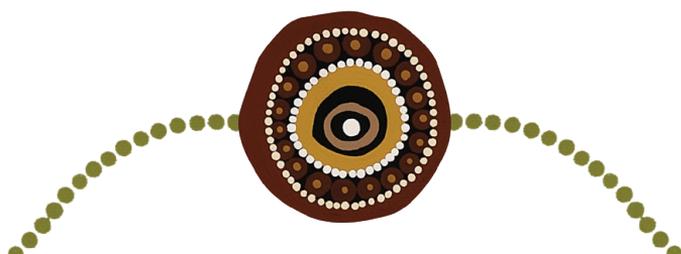


Opportunities

Our Office is committed to creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.

Creating opportunities that will support equality in life expectancy, education, employment and economic development.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
9. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development	Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	December 2019	Chief Operating Officer Director of Human Resources
	Actively seek the views of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff regarding career progression and professional development opportunities.	August 2019	Director of Human Resources
	Advertise positions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.	December 2019	Director of Human Resources
	Monitor the application of recruitment procedures and policies to encourage the employment and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and future applicants in our workplace.	December 2019	Director of Human Resources



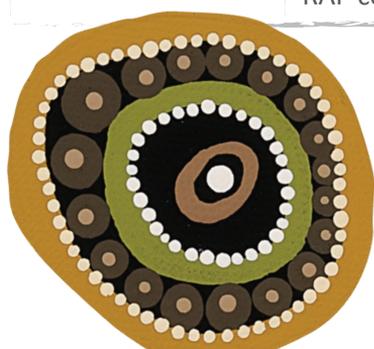


<p>10. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes</p>	<p>Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	<p>Chief Operating Officer Chief Financial Officer</p>
	<p>Promote procurement of goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.</p>	<p>June 2019</p>	<p>Chief Financial Officer</p>
	<p>Promote Supply Nation procurement opportunities.</p>	<p>September 2019</p>	<p>Chief Operating Officer Chief Financial Officer</p>
<p>11. Improve service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities</p>	<p>Continue to implement recommendations from the Gilimbaa Indigenous accessibility review.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	<p>Indigenous Coordination Team Manager</p>
<p>12. Provide staff and external Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples with opportunities to undertake work-based exchanges</p>	<p>Support at least one staff member to participate in the Jawun Program.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	<p>Chief Operating Officer Director of Human Resources</p>
	<p>Identify and implement strategies to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through internships, graduate programs and cross-agency staff exchange initiatives.</p>	<p>December 2019</p>	<p>Director of Human Resources Chief Operating Officer Chief Financial Officer</p>

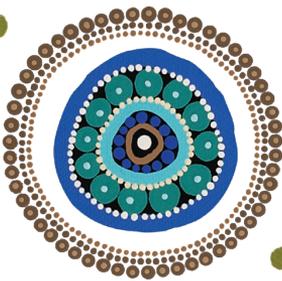


Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
13. Maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP	Maintain the Terms of Reference for the RWG.	February 2019	RAP Champion
	Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG, ensuring all new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are invited to join the RWG and invite an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elder and members of the local community to participate.	December 2019	RAP Champion Director of Human Resources
	Meet at least six times per year over the life of the RAP to monitor and report on RAP implementation.	December 2019	RAP Working Group
14. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments	Ensure resources are available for RAP development and implementation.	December 2019	RAP Champion
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	February 2019	RAP Champion
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	February 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat



<p>15.</p> <p>Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally</p>	Report on RAP progress at quarterly meetings of the Senior Leadership Group.	Quarterly, 2019	RAP Champion
	Report on the progress of RAP initiatives in the Office's annual report.	September 2019	RAP Champion
	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia and publish the results on the Office's intranet.	30 September 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat
<p>16.</p> <p>Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP</p>	Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat
	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat
	Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for review and endorsement.	December 2019	RAP Working Group Secretariat



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Artist



Leah Brideson

Title: Community Together

