



RECONCILIATION  
ACTION PLAN

REFLECT

COMMONWEALTH  
OMBUDSMAN



Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman  
**Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan  
2018**



# 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 and present.



# Foreword



I am pleased to present our 2018 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a vital part of our continued commitment to develop a culturally respectful and inclusive workforce.

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 disadvantaged, ensuring they are treated fairly and have the right to complain.

Two significant milestones in Australian history were marked in 2017: 50 years since the 1967 Referendum and 25 years since the Mabo High Court decision. This was the background for our review into the accessibility of our services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This year we will implement recommendations from the review, supported by actions in our RAP.

Progress towards reconciliation can sometimes be slow and hard. We need to renew our commitment and take time to reflect on the practical steps we can all take towards reconciliation.

This RAP is my Office's public commitment to continuing our reconciliation journey. It includes practical steps to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and to increase our understanding of their diverse cultures and histories. It also supports improvements to our complaint management services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I thank all our staff who contributed to the development of the RAP, particularly the RAP Working Group and Office Inclusion Committee.

I look forward to working with you to implement the actions and deliverables in this year's RAP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Manthorpe', written in a cursive style.

**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.



**Description:** Dinghies at the Thursday Island jetty for local people who use them to travel to work and to take their children to school every day.



# 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.

The Ombudsman 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 also administer the Public Interest Disclosure scheme.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman is also the ACT Ombudsman.

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.

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 two own motion reports in 2016–17
- engaged Gilimbaa, an Indigenous consultancy, in 2016 to conduct an Indigenous accessibility review, and is currently implementing strategies to ensure our services are culturally safe, competent and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As at 30 September 2017 our Office employed approximately 228 staff, including three self-identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees, comprising 1.3 per cent of the workforce.



# Our RAP

Our RAP includes the following objectives for the Office:

- 1. Leadership and Office commitment**  
Demonstrating our Office's commitment to reconciliation and encouraging staff 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 development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our Office; supporting a more diverse workforce that reflects the population we serve.

This is our second RAP. Since 2015, our Office has:

- 1. Increased awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the Office.**

This has been achieved through ongoing communication championed by the executive team, regular Acknowledgement of Country at events organised by our Office and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events. We are currently renaming our conference rooms across Australia to reflect local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander names.

- 2. Continued to listen and learn.**

In July 2015, our Office hosted an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander complaint-handling forum at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. In October 2015, a similar forum was held in Darwin, in partnership with the NT Ombudsman. The purpose of these forums was to bring together people from a range of government, non-government and oversight organisations to share their experiences and ideas about improving the accessibility and efficiency of complaint-handling systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Following the forum, our Office established a Right to Complain Working Group, a network for forum attendees and others to connect and continue to work together to progress some of the ideas coming out of the forum. We also sought agreement from the Australia and New Zealand Ombudsman Association (ANZOA) to establish an Indigenous complaint-handling staff interest group to focus on complaint entry point procedures, share information and resources and improve complaint-handling practices and procedures for Indigenous peoples.

We also hosted a community of practice for Commonwealth government agencies on improving Indigenous complaint-handling in March 2016. On 4 April 2017, we hosted a second Community of Practice on ‘Engaging meaningfully with Indigenous Australians using digital media—opportunities and challenges for government’.

Our RAP is championed by our Senior Assistant Ombudsman (SAO) for the Social Services, Indigenous, Disability and Integrity Branch.

In 2017, a RAP Working Group was established to develop and implement our RAP. The Working Group consists of 10 staff across all levels of the organisation, including three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members. The RAP Working Group is overseen by the Inclusion Committee.



# 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
<b>1. Establish a RAP Working Group to develop and implement the RAP, and provide regular progress reports to the Office’s Inclusion Committee.</b>	Establish Working Group and agree to terms of reference.	January 2018	RAP Champion
	Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RAP Working Group and establish a mechanism to invite all new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to join the Working Group.	January 2018	RAP Champion Director Human Resources
	Report on RAP progress at each meeting of the Office’s Inclusion Committee.	February, May, August, November 2018	RAP Champion
	Meet at least four times over the life of the RAP to progress RAP initiatives.	March, June, September, December 2018	RAP Champion



<b>2.</b> <b>Build internal and external relationships.</b>	Develop an engagement strategy to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	March 2018	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager  ACT Ombudsman – Indigenous Strategy and Policy Officer
	Review Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services information on the Office’s internet page.	June 2018	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager  ACT Ombudsman – Indigenous Strategy and Policy Officer
	Invite a local ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elder or community person to participate in the RAP Working Group.	June 2018	RAP Champion  ACT Ombudsman – Indigenous Strategy and Policy Officer
	Review and update our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outreach procedures.	September 2018	Indigenous Coordination Team Manager
<b>3.</b> <b>Recognise, celebrate and participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW).</b>	Organise at least one internal event for NRW.	27 May – 3 June 2018	Inclusion Committee Chair
	Register our NRW event on Reconciliation Australia’s (RA) NRW website and circulate RA’s NRW resources and reconciliation materials to staff.		RAP Secretariat
	Encourage staff to participate and/or support an external NRW event and ensure RAP Working Group members participate in an external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.		Inclusion Committee Chair



<b>4.</b> <b>Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP.</b>	Develop and implement a strategy to raise awareness with all employees across the Office about our RAP commitment and any events.	March 2018	RAP Working Group Communication Officer  Communication Manager
	Develop and implement a plan to engage and inform key internal stakeholders of their responsibilities within our RAP, including engaging with senior leaders.	March 2018	RAP Working Group Communication Officer  Communication Manager
	Develop a proposal for an internal RAP intranet page to raise awareness of staff RAP commitments and provide a resource for RAP-related information.	March 2018	RAP Working Group Communication Officer  Communication Manager
	Develop and implement a strategy to raise external awareness of our RAP.	September 2018	RAP Working Group Communication Officer  Communication Manager

# 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. Engage employees in cultural learning opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements	Capture data and measure our staff’s current level of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.	March 2018	RAP Champion Indigenous Coordination Team Manager
	Subscribe to suitable Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander media/ publications and make these available to all staff to encourage awareness and education.	March 2018	RAP Secretariat
	Develop and implement a cultural awareness training strategy for our staff, including implementing the recommendations from the Indigenous accessibility review. The strategy will consider innovative ways of partnering with other organisations, to access training and consider various ways cultural learning can be provided (online, face-to-face workshops or cultural immersion).	June 2018	Director Human Resources Indigenous Coordination Team Manager
	Ensure the RAP Working Group, RAP Champion, and managers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff participate in cultural awareness training.	December 2018	RAP Champion Director Human Resources

<b>6. Recognise, celebrate and participate in NAIDOC Week.</b>	Review HR policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	March 2018	Director Human Resources
	Provide opportunities for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate with their cultures and communities during NAIDOC Week.	July 2018	Deputy Ombudsman
	Provide opportunities for all staff to participate in NAIDOC Week activities and share information about the meaning of NAIDOC Week with staff and promote community events in local areas.	July 2018	Inclusion Committee Chair
	Hold at least one internal NAIDOC Week event and ensure the RAP Working Group participates in an external event.	July 2018	Inclusion Committee Chair
<b>7. Recognise, celebrate and/or participate in other days and events of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</b>	Ensure staff are aware of and have access to a calendar with significant days of celebrations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	March 2018	RAP Working Group Secretariat

<b>8. Raise internal understanding of the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols, such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.</b>	Develop a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country and maintaining respectful partnerships.	March 2018	ACT Ombudsman – Indigenous Strategy and Policy Officer
	Review our protocol document for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, and ensure protocols are used appropriately at significant meetings, events and education sessions.	June 2018	RAP Champion Inclusion Committee Chair
	Invite a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country for our internal NAIDOC Week event in 2018.	June 2018	ACT Ombudsman – Indigenous Strategy and Policy Officer
	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.	December 2018	RAP Champion Chief Operating Officer (COO)

# Opportunities



The 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
<b>9. Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our Office.</b>	Engage with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff regarding career progression and development opportunities.	June 2018	COO  Director Human Resources
	Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Retention Strategy to support the achievement of the Office's 2.5 per cent employment target set in the Australian Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy.	September 2018	COO  Director Human Resources
<b>10. Improve service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.</b>	Implement recommendations from the Indigenous accessibility review conducted by Gilimbaa, an Aboriginal consulting firm.	December 2018	SAO Social Services, Indigenous and Disability Branch  Indigenous Coordination Team Manager

<b>11.</b> <b>Investigate opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity within our organisation.</b>	Review procurement policies and procedures to identify barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to supply our organisation with goods and services.	June 2018	COO  Chief Financial Officer
	Promote the mutual benefits of procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses and develop guidelines for staff about how to procure goods and services from these businesses, including information about Supply Nation.	September 2018	COO  Chief Financial Officer
	Develop one commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business.	December 2018	COO  Chief Financial Officer
<b>12.</b> <b>Provide staff and external Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with opportunities to undertake work-based exchanges.</b>	Support at least one staff member to participate in the 2018 Jawun Program.	December 2018	COO  Director Human Resources



# Governance and tracking progress

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>13.</b> <b>Build support for the RAP, and report on achievements, challenges and learnings.</b>	Identify and agree on resource needs for RAP implementation.	February 2018	RAP Champion
	Identify and develop systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities.	February 2018	RAP Secretariat
	Report progress towards RAP actions at each Inclusion Committee meeting and every subsequent Senior Leadership Group (SLG) meeting, as part of Inclusion Committee Report. Report on progress of initiatives in the Office's Annual Report.	Quarterly reports to Inclusion Committee and SLG.  2017–18 Annual Report	RAP Champion
	Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia annually and publish on the Office's intranet.	September 2018	RAP Secretariat
<b>14.</b> <b>Review, refresh and update RAP.</b>	Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	July 2018	RAP Secretariat
	Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal feedback and endorsement.	September 2018	RAP Secretariat



# Collaborative Hands Painting Workshop

During National Reconciliation Week 2017, the Office engaged with Burreniju Aboriginal Corporation through their Collaborative Hands Workshop, as a reconciliation activity. Staff members were able to come together from across each state office and collaborate with two local Aboriginal artists.

The Office produced three canvases, and each canvas is interconnected by a circle symbol. The circle symbol represents our workplace community. Staff members were then able to place their handprints on the canvas as a symbol of collaboration. The completed panels have been proudly displayed in the Canberra office as a reminder of the participants' active involvement in an Aboriginal art workshop and in the spirit of reconciliation.

The artwork for the cover of our RAP is one of the canvases that the Office produced. The title of the canvas is 'Helping Hands.'



'This painting looks forward to a vibrant spring, filled with sunshine and colour. The flowers reflect the femininity of the women who created it, socialising around the canvas. Joined handprints signify the Commonwealth Ombudsman working together with the Australian community for the betterment of government services and initiatives to improve wellbeing outcomes.'

**Artists:** Linda Huddleston and Lynette Talbot with Laura Burr, Christine Sullivan, Lili Smith, Sandra Court and Lisa Tran.

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