



Reconciliation
A U S T R A L I A

THE STATE OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY

OUR HISTORY, OUR STORY, OUR FUTURE

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OUR HISTORY, OUR STORY, OUR FUTURE

Twenty-five years after the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR), this report examines the state of reconciliation in Australia today. The report uses a five dimensional framework of reconciliation to measure and analyse Australia's progress over this time and set out a roadmap for a reconciled Australia. The intention is to spark a renewed national conversation about how, over the next 25 years, we can move towards becoming a reconciled, just and equitable Australia.

THE STATE OF RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA

FOREWORD – PATRICK DODSON

Chairperson Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1991–1998
Co-Chairperson Referendum Council on constitutional recognition
of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

This State of Reconciliation in Australia report, celebrating a quarter of a century of formal reconciliation and the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, is timely. At a time when the Australian people are considering changes to incorporate Indigenous people in the nation's Constitution, this Report makes an important contribution to the national conversation about modern Australia's potential to reconcile fundamental and unresolved wounds that diminish Australia's collective sense of nationhood.

The report weaves 25 years of modern Australian history into a compelling narrative and injects sharp and insightful commentary and analysis about how far we have come as a nation, and the continued challenges that we face on the reconciliation journey. The Report brings the state of reconciliation into sharp focus—achievements, challenges, disappointments and work that must continue. Disturbingly, the Report reveals the schism between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia's understanding and perspectives of how our nation's history has shaped the contemporary circumstances of Indigenous communities, and their relationship with the Australian State. There is a discernible lack of appreciation by settler Australia about the grievances and sense of historical injustice that Indigenous people feel. This must be addressed for Australia to be reconciled.

Bridging that schism is the reconciliation movement's greatest challenge. Part of that challenge is defining the concept itself—reconciliation has come to mean different things to different people. This lack of clarity and lack of national unified purpose has been embedded in the reconciliation journey throughout Australia's history. If this journey was easy, reconciliation would not have promoted a political movement. There are powerful forces within Australia that do not agree that our nation needs to be reconciled. There are those who say that attention on past injustice encourages historic wounds to fester, creating a culture of victimhood; and that modern Australia has no responsibility for past government policies and practices.

These are formidable forces within the fabric of Australian society and they have led the work of reconciliation onto the battlefields of Australian politics. That famous handshake 25 years ago by the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs and his Opposition counterpart, symbolising a bipartisan commitment to the statutory Aboriginal reconciliation process, became tarnished by a political battle over the very matters that the process sought to address. The recognition of native title by the Australian High Court in 1992, and its accompanying extinguishment of the insidious terra nullius doctrine, and the Australian Human Rights Commission's 1997 report into the Stolen Generations, presented urgent legal and moral challenges to the Australian nation. The statutory reconciliation process provided a potential framework to accommodate these nationhood fractures into a broader national settlement, treaty or compact. These matters helped turn the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation into a people's movement, culminating in hundreds of thousands of Australians walking across famous, and not so famous, bridges in cities and towns throughout Australia in symbolic acts of commitment for a reconciled nation.

But, these matters also provoked a political backlash where reconciliation was redefined by those with political power to mean improved services and economic participation for Indigenous people—reconciliation on settler Australia's terms. Ideological battles ensued; where reconciliation provided a backdrop in a contrived culture war; where the collective rights of Indigenous people were pitted against the rights and responsibilities of individuals; and where Indigenous traditional rights were framed as symbolic aspirations, as opposed to the practical outcomes of public investment in education, employment and housing. Cries for a national apology to the Stolen Generations became a divisive political issue, and when it finally came, it was greeted with a sense of national acclamation, but also an edge of political partisan advantage.

Reconciliation must transcend Australian political theatre and promote a sense of national unity. All Australians should feel, as a nation, connected to the tens of thousands of years of human occupation of the Australian continent and surrounding Islands. Reconciliation Australia has produced a highly relevant report, exploring the state of reconciliation at a critical point in Australia's history. The Report is robust, and while it does not shirk from the challenges facing Australian reconciliation, it provides ample evidence of significant achievements and widespread community goodwill over the past 25 years—a necessary platform from which to imagine a reconciled nation in the future.

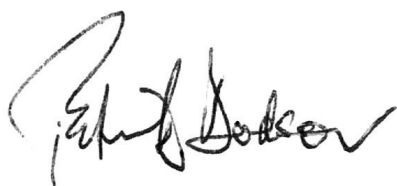
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Dodson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "D".

FIGURE 1: KEY EVENTS IN AUSTRALIA'S RECONCILIATION HISTORY

1932	William Cooper establishes the Australian Aborigines' League. During the 1930s, Mr Cooper and other leaders of the Aborigines Progressive Association gathered 1,814 signatures on a petition calling on Prime Minister Joseph Lyons and King George VI to intervene "for the preservation of our race from extinction and to grant representation to our race in the Federal Parliament".
1938	The Aborigines Progressive Association and the Australian Aborigines' League declare 26 January a day of mourning for Aboriginal people.
1963	Yolngu leaders present the Yirrkala bark petitions to the Australian Parliament, protesting against the seizure of more than 300 square kilometres of Aboriginal land in Arnhem Land for mining.
1965	University of Sydney students, including Charlie Perkins, launch the Freedom Rides, travelling around NSW by bus to draw attention to discrimination against Aboriginal people.
1966	Aboriginal stockmen and their families stage the Wave Hill station 'walk-off' to protest against poor working conditions. The Gurindji peoples' struggle later develops into Australia's first successful Aboriginal land claim.
1967	In a national referendum, 90.77 per cent of Australians vote 'yes' to give the Commonwealth Government the power to legislate for Aboriginal people and to include Aboriginal people in the Census.
1971	The Gove land rights case, while denying recognition of native title, sets the intellectual framework for recognising land rights. Neville Thomas Bonner becomes the first Aboriginal parliamentarian following his election as Senator for Queensland.
1972	The Aboriginal Tent Embassy is established. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is established.
1973	The Woodward Royal Commission into Aboriginal Land Rights is established, paving the way for the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the Northern Territory.
1975	Australian Parliament passes the <i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> (Cth).
1976	Australian Parliament passes the <i>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976</i> (Cth), leading to the establishment of land rights legislation in most Australian states in the 1970s and 1980s.
1988	The Barunga Statement calling for self-management and land rights is presented to Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who indicates his support for a treaty.
1990	The Australian Government establishes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC, CBE, DSG is the first chairperson.
1991	The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is tabled. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) is established. Professor Patrick Dodson is appointed inaugural chairperson
1992	The High Court recognises native title in the landmark case <i>Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)</i> (1992). Prime Minister Paul Keating delivers the 'Redfern Speech' recognising the history of dispossession, violence and forced removal of Aboriginal children. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner position is created. Professor Mick Dodson AM is appointed to the position.

1993	Australian Parliament passes the <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth). The first Week of Prayer for Reconciliation is held, which later becomes National Reconciliation Week
1995	The Australian Government officially recognises the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.
1996	The first National Reconciliation Week is celebrated. The full High Court hands down its decision in <i>Wik Peoples v Queensland</i> (the 'Wik decision'), in which it determines that pastoral leases do not extinguish native title.
1997	The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families releases the <i>Bringing them home</i> report. The Australian Reconciliation Convention is held in Melbourne.
1998	The <i>Native Title Act 1993</i> (Cth) is amended based on Prime Minister John Howard's 10-point plan.
2000	The CAR delivers its final report to Prime Minister John Howard and the Australian Parliament at Corroboree 2000. Bridge walks are held across Australia. Reconciliation Australia is established.
2004	ATSIC is abolished.
2006	The <i>Close the Gap</i> campaign for Indigenous health equality is developed following the release of the <i>Social Justice Report 2005</i> . Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan program begins.
2007	The Northern Territory Emergency Response begins. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commits to 'closing the gap' in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
2008	Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivers the Apology to the Stolen Generations. COAG commits \$4.6 billion towards <i>Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage</i> for projects in health, housing, early childhood development, economic participation and remote service delivery.
2009	Australia indicates its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
2010	The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples is established.
2011	The Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leads wide-ranging public consultations and delivers its findings in January 2012.
2012	The campaign to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution begins.
2013	The Australian Parliament passes the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013</i> to maintain momentum towards a referendum.

MEASURING RECONCILIATION IN AUSTRALIA

Australia has a long history of reconciliation and countless people—Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous—have dedicated their life’s work to the reconciliation movement. As a result, many significant steps have been taken.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australia’s colonial history is characterised by devastating land dispossession, violence, and overt and unapologetic racism. Over the last half-century, however, Australia has made some remarkable progress towards national reconciliation (Figure 1). This journey reminds us that reconciliation is a work in progress—generations of people have fought hard for meaningful change and future gains are likely to take just as long.

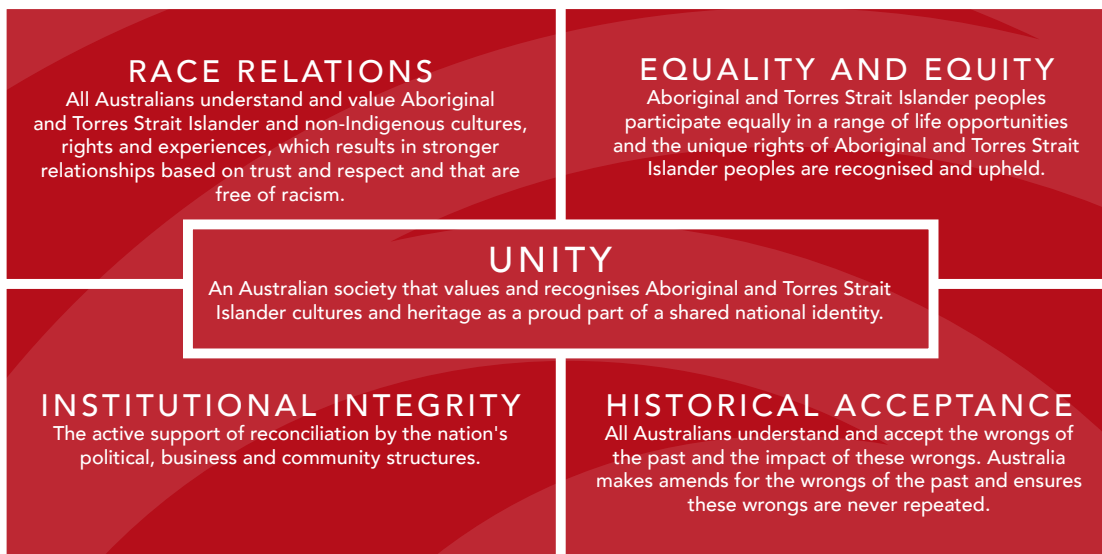
In the 25 years since the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established, the concept of reconciliation has taken a holistic approach that encompasses rights, as well as so-called symbolic and practical actions. Over this time, reconciliation has introduced a greater focus on the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and opened up national debate on prejudice, discrimination and racism. It has raised broader questions about our national identity and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights in our nation’s story. Reconciliation can no longer be seen as a single issue or agenda and the contemporary definition of reconciliation must weave all of these threads together.

To develop a framework to measure Australia’s progress towards reconciliation across these many dimensions, Reconciliation Australia undertook a review of reconciliation in Australia and internationally. As a result of this work, five critical dimensions that together represent a holistic and comprehensive picture of reconciliation were identified.

The five dimensions (Figure 2) identified to measure reconciliation in Australia are:

- race relations
- equality and equity
- institutional integrity
- unity
- historical acceptance.

Figure 2: The five interrelated dimensions of reconciliation



Using these five dimensions, we can get a clear picture of what is required to achieve reconciliation in Australia. Specifically, we will know Australia is reconciled when, and only when:

1. Positive two-way relationships built on trust and respect exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians throughout society.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life—i.e. we have closed the gaps in life outcomes—and the distinctive individual and collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are universally recognised and respected, i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are self-determining.
3. Our political, business and community institutions actively support all dimensions of reconciliation.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and rights are a valued and recognised part of a shared national identity and, as a result, there is national unity.
5. There is widespread acceptance of our nation's history and agreement that the wrongs of the past will never be repeated—i.e. there is truth, justice, healing and historical acceptance.

These five dimensions do not exist in isolation. They are interrelated and Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we make progress in all five areas. For example, greater historical acceptance of the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can lead to improved race relations, which in turn leads to greater equality and equity. The nation's progress towards reconciliation is only as strong as the least advanced dimension.

THE STATE OF RECONCILIATION TODAY

RACE RELATIONS

At the heart of reconciliation is the relationship between the broader Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To achieve reconciliation, we need to develop strong relationships built on trust and respect, and that are free of racism.

The latest Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) results show that while we still don't trust each other and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high levels of racism, there are positive signs of progress.

Almost all Australians believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is important and that cultural diversity makes us stronger. However, because personal interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians are limited, there is scope to increase our exposure to each other and improve understanding and acceptance. While it may not be possible to create direct person-to-person interaction for all Australians, there are many ways to learn more about each other. The media, schools and workplaces all play a critical role in this.

The latest ARB results show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still experience frequent and damaging racism, and the fight to end racism across society must clearly continue.

KEY FINDINGS—RACE RELATIONS

1. Almost all Australians (86 per cent) believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is important.
2. Many Australians (64 per cent) agree that cultural diversity makes us stronger, but some of us (35 per cent) still believe Australia is a racist country.
3. The level of contact and interaction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is low. Only 30 per cent of the general community socialise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians is low. Only 26 per cent of the general population believe trust towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is high.
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still experience high levels of racial prejudice and discrimination. Thirty-three per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced verbal racial abuse in the six months before the survey.

Source: Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014

EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Reconciliation is more likely to progress when Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians participate equally and equitably in all areas of life. To make this happen, we have to close the gaps in life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and achieve universal recognition and respect for the distinctive collective rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For this report, equality is defined as:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being in control of their life choices—enabling them to participate fully in the social, cultural and economic opportunities enjoyed by the wider Australian community.

Importantly, in this report, equity refers to:

The unique rights—both collective and individual—that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians hold by virtue of being Indigenous, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples' ability to freely exercise these rights.

In regard to equality, it is clear that large and unacceptable gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians exist on all social, health, education and economic indicators. Reflecting the reality of the statistics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to consider their living conditions worse than other peoples and are more likely to see barriers to employment and education.

Due largely to targeted government investment programs through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage framework*; health, education and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have begun improving over recent years.

However, as equality stands today, it is clear Australia is falling far short of providing equal life opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many of these indicators will only improve with significant, long-term and targeted efforts in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

When it comes to equity, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) is the most comprehensive international tool to advance the rights of Indigenous Peoples. While the majority of the world's states voted for the Declaration in the UN Assembly in 2007, Australia was one of four countries to vote against it. It was not until 2009 that Australia eventually endorsed the Declaration.

Since this time, the implementation of the Declaration has, at best, been mixed, indicating the value that Australia places on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This may also suggest that Australia still views the document as aspirational, rather than being one of a legally binding nature. Whilst existing legislation, such as the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)* (the RDA), provides some human rights protections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it does not afford protections to the same standards as those detailed in the Declaration.

In particular, there are a number of examples that suggest Australia does not recognise the Declaration as a document that sets the standards by which existing human rights obligations apply to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such standards include the right to participate in decision making; the right to be consulted prior to providing free and informed consent about laws and policies; and the right to keep and strengthen relationships with lands, waters and other resources. There are numerous instances where these rights have not been upheld—the proposed closure of up to 150 remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia in November 2014; the introduction of paperless arrest powers in the Northern Territory in December 2014; and the defunding of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples in 2014.

Furthermore, protections that do exist face ongoing threats. In 2007, the RDA was suspended to pave the way for the implementation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the 'intervention'). Further, in 2014, the Australian Government proposed amending section 18 of the RDA, which would, in turn, erode racial vilification laws and place greater value on the right to free speech at the expense of protections against racial discrimination. Therefore, Australia's efforts to implement the Declaration, across government, corporate and community sectors, undoubtedly must improve. A National Implementation Strategy on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples would be a way of achieving this.

Against this background, it is little surprise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face an uphill battle to uphold their cultural and personal beliefs. Research shows a decline in language use and cultural event participation.

KEY FINDINGS—EQUALITY AND EQUITY

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy less participation in, and access to, a range of life opportunities—significant disparities continue to exist in the key areas of employment, education and health.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to consider their living conditions worse than other peoples and are more likely to see barriers to employment and education.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have less enjoyment of their unique individual and collective rights as Indigenous peoples.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel less cultural security than other Australians.

Sources: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2014, Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014, Social Justice and Native Title Report 2015, Social Justice and Native Title Report 2014, AIATSIS 2005.

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

Institutional integrity refers to the extent to which our political and business institutions, and community and social sectors actively support reconciliation.

On the national political scale, reconciliation has broad multi-partisan support, and superficially, political support appears to be at an all-time high. Closer examination however, especially of successive governments' support for CAR's recommendations, shows a more complex picture.

In its final report to the Australian Parliament, CAR made six recommendations that supported its *Roadmap for Reconciliation* and the *Declaration Towards Reconciliation*. These recommendations covered creating a framework to overcome Indigenous disadvantage; reforming the Constitution to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and removing section 25 of the Constitution, which allows states to stop people from voting based on race; continuing to pursue reconciliation; and negotiating an agreement or treaty.

Of CAR's recommendations, the greatest progress has been made on overcoming disadvantage, mainly through work on COAG's *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage* framework. Important steps towards a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been made and we are closer than ever to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution and removing racial discrimination from our founding document.

Progress on CAR's other recommendations is mixed. To continue working towards reconciliation, Reconciliation Australia was established in late 2000 and has been funded ever since. However, funding for state and territory reconciliation councils has fallen far short of what was envisaged.

CAR also called on all governments to formally support and enshrine in legislation its reconciliation documents, and to negotiate an agreement or treaty between the Australian Parliament and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To date, these two important recommendations have not been implemented.

Outside CAR's recommendations, at a federal level, the efforts of the Australian Public Service (APS) towards reconciliation in the areas of employment and procurement have been mixed. Overall, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working in the APS has remained between 2.3–2.5 per cent. In addition, the federal government has acknowledged that its agencies have performed poorly in the field of procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. Recent Australian Government targets on employment and procurement provide optimism that these efforts may improve.

Since 2010, the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) has released biennial reports on state, territory and federal governments' expenditure on all government services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Indigenous Expenditure reports show a complex story behind government spending. While all governments have increased their total Indigenous spending in real terms year on year since 2008–09, the latest report shows that spending on Indigenous-specific services has fallen.

Many recent reviews have suggested that unsatisfactory progress on *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage* is not due to the quantum of expenditure, but rather the way it has been allocated and delivered. This criticism was the catalyst for reforms under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) in 2014. However, rather than the ambitious IAS reforms resolving many of the issues they were meant to address, early indications are that they were too much, too soon, and have left a trail of anxiety and uncertainty for many service providers.

While the various governments' efforts on the policy front are mixed, broader support for reconciliation in the business and community sectors has grown significantly over the last 10 years. This is best shown through the growth of Reconciliation Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program. The RAP program started with eight organisations in 2006 and today more than 650 organisations have developed a RAP, with another 500 developing a plan. The corporate sector has been a strong supporter of the RAP program and corporate engagement is further demonstrated by the many corporate heavyweights who actively participate in the Business Council of Australia's (BCA) Indigenous Network. More than 200 organisations from the not-for-profit and community sectors have a RAP and national sporting bodies and clubs also show strong support for reconciliation.

In addition to driving engagement with reconciliation, evidence shows the RAP program is creating opportunities in employment, education and business for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and creating positive attitudes and behaviours among the three million people working in organisations with a RAP.

Despite this progress by our national institutions, the ARB results show that the majority of respondents feel all sectors should do more to improve education, employment and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This analysis of institutional integrity does not include how our institutional systems, such as for health, justice and education, are actively supporting reconciliation. Progress in this area will need to be explored in the future.

KEY FINDINGS—INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

1. Broad multi-partisan political support for reconciliation exists but successive governments' implementation of CAR's recommendations has been mixed.
2. All Australian Governments' total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expenditure has increased but funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services has decreased.
3. Business and community support for reconciliation is increasing.
4. RAPs are driving social change and improving economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
5. Most Australians believe that political, business and community institutions should do more to advance reconciliation.

Sources: Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014, Indigenous Expenditure Report 2014, Reconciliation Action Plan 2014 data, Workplace RAP Barometer 2014

UNITY

In a reconciled Australia, national unity means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, histories and cultures are valued and recognised as part of a shared national identity. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world. Reconciliation involves all Australians valuing and recognising the rich and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that have existed in our nation since time immemorial and continue to this day.

Measures of national unity show there is much goodwill for reconciliation. Most Australians believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity. Importantly, most Australians believe we can become united and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique place as the First Australians. Our pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is slowly increasing and we believe it is important to learn more.

Where we hit a stumbling block is turning this goodwill into action and positive change. For example, while we think it is important to know more, most Australians rate their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories as low. Many Australians want to contribute to reconciliation, but only a small number know how they can contribute. Organisations like Reconciliation Australia and other reconciliation groups have a role in educating all Australians about reconciliation and how they can contribute. Clearly, we have more work to do.

Many Australians see the Apology delivered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 as an important milestone to improving our relationship—indeed, it was the high point on Australia's reconciliation journey over the last 15 years. Australians are now better placed than ever before for another long-sought reconciliation milestone—constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All Australians can contribute to reconciliation by supporting a referendum to meaningfully and substantially recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution and ensure it is unlawful to adversely discriminate on the grounds of race. While we still have some steps to go before a referendum, all Australians have a role to play by learning more and talking to people from all walks of life. To get this right, we must listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, develop a proposal that has their support, and make a positive contribution to a national conversation.

KEY FINDINGS—UNITY

1. Many Australians (65 per cent) believe it is possible for Australia to be united.
2. Most Australians (72 per cent) believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity and agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique place as the First Australians (71 per cent).
3. Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is increasing.
4. Australians' knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is limited (only 30 per cent are knowledgeable) but most Australians (83 per cent) believe it is important to know more and strongly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories being a compulsory part of the school curriculum.
5. Some Australians (44 per cent) want to support reconciliation but most don't know how (76 per cent). When people participate in reconciliation activities, their knowledge improves and their views on the relationship change significantly.
6. Some Australians (49 per cent) believe the Apology has improved our relationship but many Australians strongly support new actions to unify Australia, including recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

We can't change the past but we can learn from it. We can make amends and we can ensure mistakes are never repeated. Our nation's past is reflected in the present and unless we can heal historical wounds, they will continue to play out in our country's future. Reconciliation can only truly evolve when the Australian community and our major institutions acknowledge and repair the wrongs of the past, understand their effects—and make sure that these wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are not occurring today, and are never repeated in the future.

The actions classified in this report as 'historical acceptance' refer to all Australians understanding and accepting past laws, practices and policies that have deeply affected the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Historical acceptance is about understanding the immediate and devastating impact of these actions and the intergenerational trauma they caused, including their effect on the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians today. Fundamentally, historical acceptance is about telling the truth to achieve justice and healing.

Australia's colonial history is characterised by the dispossession and intentional marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This dispossession and marginalisation has occurred broadly through a history of conflict and massacres, as well as active policies to segregate and assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. Many actions of the past were aimed at taking away the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A detailed examination of Australian history and its past and current impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is beyond the scope of this report. As such, the report focuses on four key areas that have a well-established evidence base (often gathered through national inquiries) and reliable data to measure progress. The specific wrongs examined are:

- land dispossession
- forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families
- failure to pay Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers' wages
- incarceration and Aboriginal deaths in custody.

Findings show that Australia's lack of historical acceptance is a potential barrier to reconciliation. Until we accept our past, make amends for injustices and pledge to ensure that these wrongs are never repeated, Australia will not achieve true reconciliation.

Our most urgent task is to ensure that wrongs are not repeated. Evidence shows that rates of imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are at an all-time high, and the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has tripled since the *Bringing them home* report was delivered. These complex social problems are symptomatic of intergenerational trauma and deeply entrenched systemic issues. To achieve lasting change, we must treat both the symptoms and the causes. This involves working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to invest in holistic early intervention and prevention strategies.

Understanding of the past varies in the broader Australian community, but there is a prevailing sense that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are responsible for their own disadvantage. This presents an opportunity to raise awareness and better educate people about the negative effects of colonisation, systemic racism and exclusion.

There is a continued perception by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that past wrongs have not been righted. This is a major barrier to reconciliation. The data supports this perception and shows that efforts to repair past wrongs have been slow, piecemeal, largely ignored, or are getting worse. For example, native title has been slow to take effect, although we are starting to see results through agreement-making; various state governments' efforts to address stolen wages have been piecemeal; the recommendations of the *Bringing them home* report were largely ignored; and incarceration rates are higher than at the time of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Despite these sporadic efforts, there are positive signs that Australia is examining the injustices of the past. In 2015, the Queensland Government announced a stolen wages reparations scheme; the New South Wales Government launched an inquiry into reparations for the Stolen Generations; the South Australian Government announced an \$11 million Stolen Generations reparation fund; and the Western Australian Government signed a landmark native title agreement with the Noongar people of south-west Australia. These are positive signs of reparation that need to be replicated across the nation.

KEY FINDINGS—HISTORICAL ACCEPTANCE

1. Most Australians (94 per cent) agree that wrongs towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples occurred as a result of European settlement.
2. Many Australians accept facts about past injustices but are unsure of the details. However, it is widely agreed (85 per cent) that it is important for all Australians to learn more about past issues.
3. Australians are divided on the nature and extent of the effect of past wrongs on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. Between 50 per cent and 60 per cent of the general community agree that past race-based policies have created today's disadvantage.
4. Australians have widely varying views on forgiveness and moving on, and progress on repairing the wrongs of the past has been mixed.
5. Australia is repeating some of the wrongs of the past and urgent, well-considered action is needed to reduce the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison.

Sources: *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014*, *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015*, *Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015*, *Australian Institute of Criminology 2011*.

TOWARDS A RECONCILED AUSTRALIA

The key findings of this report show that Australia has developed a strong foundation for reconciliation and significant steps have been made over the last 25 years. However, to achieve Reconciliation Australia's vision of a reconciled, just and equitable Australia much unfinished business remains.

In 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) concluded that:

"... all Australians can take heart from the positive outcomes so far. Nevertheless, a decade was a short time to address the legacies of 200 years of history, and much remains to be done..."

Reconciliation is hard work—it's a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality."

Australia's experience over the 15 years since CAR delivered its final report rings true to these words. We are taking positive steps and all Australians should take heart from the progress we have made. We have sustained the reconciliation process and taken steps towards acknowledging the past and overcoming the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

After campaigning by civil society organisations for Indigenous health equality, decades of under-investment and neglect were overturned through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage* framework and targets.

In 2008, COAG committed \$4.6 billion to address health, housing, early childhood development, economic participation, and remote service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This was the most comprehensive strategy and the largest investment yet to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inequality. Importantly, it was a concerted and coordinated effort by all Australian governments.

During the 2000s, the corporate sector, inspired by the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program, became a major contributor to the national reconciliation effort through employment, procurement and education in their workplaces. Community sector support, through the RAP program and other grassroots groups and events, is high, as is the general goodwill of the Australian people towards reconciliation.

The results of the Australian Reconciliation Barometer (ARB) consistently show that most Australians believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians is important. Most Australians want to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and most believe that all sectors of society should do more to reduce inequalities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A significant milestone on Australia's reconciliation journey over the last 15 years was the Apology to the Stolen Generations. In 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised on behalf of the Australian Government to the Stolen Generations for the "the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians."

The long-overdue Apology lifted the nation and helped heal some of the wounds of the past. Responding to the Apology in the Australian Parliament, then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Professor Tom Calma AO said:

“Today is an historic day.

It’s the day our leaders—across the political spectrum—have chosen dignity, hope and respect as the guiding principles for the relationship with our first nations’ peoples.

Through one direct act, Parliament has acknowledged the existence and the impacts of the past policies and practices of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families.

And by doing so, has paid respect to the Stolen Generations. For their suffering and their loss. For their resilience. And ultimately, for their dignity.”¹

The Apology is a landmark on our reconciliation journey that all Australians can be proud of. Since then, the Australian Government has supported the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration), and over the last eight years there have been positive developments towards holding a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

Despite these significant steps, there have also been some blemishes on our reconciliation journey and we clearly have a long way to go. For some, the uplifting effect on the nation of the Apology was paired with an ongoing sense of injustice that it was not accompanied with compensation. As former Reconciliation Australia chair and member of CAR, Jackie Huggins said:

“I’d ask any Australian if they had their children taken away from them forcibly by the mere fact that they were Aboriginal in this country, would not they seek some compensation? I think every decent Australian would say, ‘Yes I would want compensation’.”²

These mixed acknowledgements of Australia’s past are playing out in our present. The rates of incarceration and detention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially youth, are at crisis levels. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented in the child protection system and the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has tripled since the *Bringing them home* report was released in 1997.

We now risk repeating the wrongs of the past and failing another generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To break these cycles, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be involved in decision making to develop comprehensive, preventative, long-term approaches to address these issues. Greater support for Aboriginal community-controlled services in these areas is the critical first step. A major contributor to policy failure is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are left out of the decision-making process. Until we truly value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ right to self-determination—to participate in and make decisions about their social, cultural and economic development—we are doomed to fail.

¹ Calma, Professor Tom, Social Justice Commissioner, Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008, *Let the healing begin, Response to government to the national apology to the Stolen Generations*, 13 February 2008, available at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/response-government-national-apology-stolen-generations>

² ANTA, *Are we there yet? Ten years on from the Decade of Reconciliation: A reconciliation progress report*, 2010. Available at https://antar.org.au/sites/default/files/reconciliation_progress_report_final_0.pdf.

Approaches such as the 2007 Northern Territory National Emergency Response that sought to address serious social issues but that ultimately discriminated against and marginalised Aboriginal (and some Torres Strait Islander) peoples are reminders that we must remain vigilant of our 'good intentions'. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the guide towards truly recognising and valuing the rights and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and overcoming the inequalities that exist today.

Recognising and valuing the cultures, histories and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is essential to creating national unity. Agreement-making, within native title and other frameworks, is an example of recognising and valuing the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, however, these agreement-making practices need to be much more widespread and common. We also have many conversations and debates to come on how Australia can meaningfully and substantially recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.

NEXT STEPS

To achieve Reconciliation Australia’s vision of a reconciled, just and equitable Australia, much unfinished business remains. Drawing on the key findings, this section highlights the critical areas Reconciliation Australia believes require the greatest attention in future.

DIMENSION	AREA FOR ACTION
Race relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overcome racism
Equality and equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renew focus on closing the gap• Recognise and respect the cultures and collective rights of First Australians
Institutional integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capitalise on the RAP program• Improve the ‘governance of government’
Unity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieve a process to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and unite all Australians
Historical acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledge our past through truth, justice and healing

These key points for action are posed as a conversation starter to map out the next 25 years of Australia’s reconciliation journey. Many conversations remain ahead of us but, until we achieve reconciliation, Australia will fall short of reaching our full potential as a nation and of truly “recognising the gift of one another’s presence”.³

1. OVERCOME RACISM

Key actions

- Federal, state and territory governments maintain strong and effective legal protections against racial discrimination through the current *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) and state-based legislations.
- All sectors of the Australian community—governments and business, and the education, health, sports, recreation and arts sectors—show a zero tolerance approach to racism, prejudice and discrimination.
- All sectors of the Australian community increase their support for public anti-racism campaigns and resources, such as *Racism. It stops with me*.

2. RENEW FOCUS ON CLOSING THE GAP BY ALL AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS

Key actions

- All Australian governments recommit to the *Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage* framework, including renewing investments and agreements to meet the *Closing the Gap* targets in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- All Australian governments agree to include justice targets in the *Closing the Gap* framework as called for by the National Justice Coalition.
- All Australian governments commit to appropriate resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.
- All future policy and strategic planning is done in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies.

³ Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *Draft Declaration Towards Reconciliation*, 1999

3. RECOGNISE AND RESPECT THE CULTURES AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS OF FIRST AUSTRALIANS

Key actions

- The Australian Government works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop a national strategy to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration). Such a plan must outline actions to embed the Declaration in activities by all sectors of society—governments, civil society, the private sector, and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The Australian Government supports and maintains a national, independent and representative voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and national sector peak bodies that represent Aboriginal professionals and community services.
- All sections of the community take action to increase understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

4. CAPITALISE ON THE POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE GENERATED THROUGH THE RAP PROGRAM

Key actions

- Reconciliation Australia expands the impact and reach of the RAP program.
- The corporate sector and all Australian governments increase their support and engagement with the RAP program.
- All RAP partners increase their RAP commitments and actions to provide positive and sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations.

5. IMPROVE THE GOVERNANCE OF GOVERNMENT

Key actions

- Government approaches to policy and program development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs are based on the following principles:
 - good governance within government
 - respectful and sustained engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their representative bodies and community organisations
 - local and holistic approaches
 - long-term approaches supported by sustained and adequate funding
 - evidence-based policies.

6. ACHIEVE A PROCESS TO RECOGNISE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES AND UNITE ALL AUSTRALIANS

Key actions

- The Australian Government continues consulting with the Australian people and, in particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to develop a model to meaningfully and substantially recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution and remove racial discrimination from our founding document. Reconciliation Australia believes the model must:
 - contain a statement of recognition
 - remove outdated references to race, in particular section 25
 - include racial non-discrimination
 - be based on the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
 - be supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- The Australian Government continues to support broader public education for a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution.
- All Australian governments and the corporate sector increase and expand agreement-making practices with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country in ways that empower pathways to self-determination for Indigenous Australians.
- Dialogue needs to continue with all sectors of the Australian community to discuss the unresolved issues of sovereignty, treaty and agreement-making in order to progress these important matters.

7. ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAST THROUGH TRUTH, JUSTICE AND HEALING

Key actions

- All sections of the community take action to increase their knowledge and understanding of the wrongs of the past and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- The education system must maintain and strengthen its focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- Research and develop a truth and justice process for Australia.
- All governments take a new and more comprehensive response to the *Bringing them home* and Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reports.
- All Australian governments take urgent and well-considered action to avoid repeating the wrongs of the past, including tackling the growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in prison and the number of children in out-of-home care.

SUSTAINING AND BUILDING THE RECONCILIATION PROCESS

This report has highlighted the bright spots in our nation's reconciliation journey. The goodwill and sense that we do want to be united, coupled with the practical measures being taken in workplaces, are a strong foundation for accelerating our efforts.

However, if we are to be a reconciled nation, we must make significant progress against all dimensions of reconciliation. As long as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not enjoy the same opportunities as non-Indigenous Australians, we cannot say we are reconciled. As long as prejudice and racism exist, we cannot say we are reconciled. As long as past wrongs are repeated, we cannot say we are reconciled.

The findings throughout this report show that Australia has developed a foundation for reconciliation. But that foundation is uneven across the five key dimensions of reconciliation. It needs to be strengthened and built upon if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians are to truly achieve reconciliation.

In its final report to Parliament, CAR outlined a raft of actions to sustain the formal reconciliation process. Most of these actions are highly relevant 15 years later. CAR acknowledged that the formal reconciliation process had helped bring all Australians together, and asked all levels of government, non-government organisations, businesses, peak bodies, communities and individuals to commit to sustaining the reconciliation process.

All Australians have a role in creating a reconciled, just and equitable Australia—political leaders and governments of all levels and leanings; the corporate and not-for-profit sectors; schools and tertiary institutions; faith groups; philanthropists; the media; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and members of the public.

There is also a clear and critical role for specialist organisations to guide these various parties through their journey towards reconciliation and ensure that our combined efforts are not only well intentioned, but effective. This is the role of Reconciliation Australia, state reconciliation councils, local reconciliation groups and organisations, such as ANTaR.

A strong and cohesive network of reconciliation groups is vital to achieving a reconciled Australia. This group of organisations must be adequately resourced and supported by federal, state and territory, and local governments, and where possible, non-government partners. On the whole, it must receive significantly more support than it currently does.

Despite the challenges, there is an underlying desire for a more unified nation. This presents a pivotal opportunity to work together for reconciliation. As a nation, we must focus on the things that unite us so that we can redress the things that still divide us. We must continue to harness the goodwill and aspirations of the Australian people and continue the national conversation for the next 25 years to achieve a reconciled, just and equitable Australia.

The full *State of Reconciliation in Australia* report, including the detailed findings and sources is available at: www.reconciliation.org.au





Reconciliation Australia
PO Box 4773
Kingston ACT 2604
Tel: 02 6273 9200
www.reconciliation.org.au

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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this publication may contain names of people who have since passed away.