



COMMUNIQUE

Issued by the

GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE OF TASMANIA

AND

THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION

The Premier of Tasmania, Jim Bacon MHA and the Board of Commissioners of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) met on the 14 November 2001 to further strengthen and give their commitment to jointly improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in Tasmania.

Key Principles

It is agreed on this day that the foundation for a new relationship between the Tasmanian Government and ATSIC, representing Aboriginal people in Tasmania, will be based on the following principles:

- their ongoing commitment to the purpose, objectives, principles and frameworks contained in the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (1992)*;
- the November 2000 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) framework on Aboriginal Reconciliation that builds upon the 1992 National Commitment and looks to addressing disadvantage in, and improving service delivery to, the Aboriginal community as a central part of the reconciliation process; and
- the need for joint leadership in progressing the process of reconciliation within the Tasmanian community through working to achieve the benchmarks contained in Goal 10 of *Tasmania Together*.

Other Guiding Principles

- recognition and respect for the fact that Aboriginal people in Tasmania represent a distinct cultural group;
- recognition and respect for the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples as recognised in common law;
- recognition that Aboriginal people represent one of the most disadvantaged groups in the community;
- recognition of the need to integrate the activities of the Commonwealth and State Governments within a partnership approach and to open discussions with Local Government aimed at ensuring all levels of government work together towards the reconciliation objectives;
- recognition that true reconciliation will only be achieved through government and the wider community supporting policies and strategies that clearly identify the linkage between the recognition of Aboriginal rights and the measures that address disadvantage;
- recognition that only a true partnership at a State and local community level can achieve a healthy and self-determining Aboriginal community; and
- a commitment to achieve improved outcomes in the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Tasmania.

Achieving Priority Outcomes

To improve outcomes in the priority areas outlined below, ATSIC and the Tasmanian Government will undertake specific initiatives for joint action in accordance with a Partnership Agreement to be developed and agreed to by both parties.

This Agreement will recognise the need for a partnership with Aboriginal people in Tasmania and the imperative for a multi-agency approach to achieving priority outcomes. Initiatives will be implemented cooperatively by relevant Commonwealth, State and Local Government agencies and ATSIC. Specific issues identified under these initiatives will be further developed by Partnership Agreement Issues Working Groups.

Priority Initiatives for Cooperation

Education

Education equips individuals with the capacity for full participation in community life. From literacy and numeracy skills essential to most employment, through to the development of interpersonal skills, cultural confidence and self-esteem, success in education is vital for each person to access opportunities available within the community.

In training and education, Aboriginal students on average achieve and participate at levels below that of the rest of the community. State wide literacy and numeracy testing indicates that Aboriginal students perform below other students in Grades 3, 5 and 7. In 2000 the retention rate for Aboriginal students to year 12 was 59 per cent compared to 84 per cent for other students. Similarly attendance rates are lower for Aboriginal students compared to non-Aboriginal students.

Beyond school, indigenous people are over represented in lower level or preparatory (access) vocational and training courses but are under represented in higher level training qualifications and at University.

The Tasmanian community, through *Tasmania Together*, has identified the need to ensure that young Aboriginal people are able to participate in an inclusive curriculum that respects their cultural heritage, recognises the perspectives of the Aboriginal community throughout school activities and allows teachers to provide a culturally sensitive education.

The State Government and ATSIC will work through the Partnership Agreement and with the Aboriginal community towards improved education outcomes for Aboriginal people. In doing so, the parties acknowledge the planning, program and reporting arrangements for Aboriginal education and training that exist in the State. To achieve better outcomes, joint effort under the Agreement will build upon these arrangements and look to new ways of assisting Aboriginal students. This will include vocational education and training (VET) Aboriginal programs.

The major emphasis for intervention with Aboriginal students in the immediate future will continue to be in the areas of literacy, numeracy, attendance, effective participation in education, higher retention rates to year 12, and increased participation in VET.

At the same time we will continue to work towards a more culturally sensitive school curriculum and a broader awareness of Aboriginal culture amongst teachers, students and the wider community.

Health and Well-Being

The health and well-being status of the Aboriginal community is below that of other Australians. For example, life expectancy is shorter, there is evidence of overcrowded housing, hospital admissions for interpersonal violence are significantly higher, and so is the perinatal mortality rate.

Indicative figures for Tasmania show that in 1998, 6.2 per cent of Aboriginal people rated their quality of life as lower than other Tasmanians, compared with 1.2 percent of all people. Only 55.4 per cent of Aboriginal people own their own homes, compared with 73 per cent of all Tasmanians.

The issue of improving health and well-being to a standard comparable to that of other Australians is a significant task which will take time to achieve. The Partnership Agreement will focus on two areas that have been given priority nationally as well as in Tasmania. These are Indigenous family violence and housing reform.

However, ATSIC and the State Government will also explore ways to address other health issues faced by the Aboriginal community – such as drug use and smoking.

Both parties recognise the importance of diet and nutrition in improving health and well-being for Aboriginal people and will explore the part that traditional Indigenous foods can play in better diet.

Economic Development and Employment

The major economic indicators still show that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is disadvantaged compared to other Australians.

In 1996, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in Tasmania was 28.5 per cent, compared with 10.7 per cent for the broader population. At the same time median weekly income for Aboriginal people was \$233 compare with \$265 for all Tasmanians.

Under the Partnership Agreement, ATSIC and the State Government will cooperate to promote economic development opportunities within the Aboriginal community that can have a real impact on increasing economic independence and employment.

There are five initial areas in which these efforts will focus:

- Housing - in particular the development of a business and training enterprise based around maintenance work on Aboriginal homes;
- Agriculture and aquaculture;
- Arts; and
- Tourism.

Tourism is an especially important sector. ATSIC and the State Government acknowledge the need for a tourism development plan that will assist the Aboriginal community to enter into all facets of the tourism industry.

The State Government will also continue to explore strategies to promote employment opportunities for Aboriginal people within the public sector.

Community Consultation

To ensure the aspirations of the Aboriginal community in Tasmania are being addressed, the Board of Commissioners and the Tasmanian Government agree to establish a broad consultation process within the State's Aboriginal community on the issues covered by the Partnership Agreement. The process will also allow other

issues - such as Aboriginal heritage and culture, land management and resource management - to be progressed.

In addition, ATSIC and the State Government will look at ways in which the Aboriginal community can be more closely involved in government decision making processes on issues that effect them.

Monitoring and Reporting

To ensure that the Partnership Agreement achieves agreed objectives, it is important that progress be monitored against key performance indicators that will be developed during the detailed negotiation of the Agreement. The Agreement will be completed by June 2002 and contain provision for periodic review.

CHAIRMAN GEOFF CLARK

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Commission**

JIM BACON MHA

Premier of Tasmania

14 November 2001