



ACOSS Reconciliation Action Plan



2013 to 2016



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Artwork: Fern Martins
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Artwork

The artwork both on the front cover and throughout the ACOSS Reconciliation Action Plan has been painted by Fern Martins, who is a Ngarabul woman from NSW. ACOSS would like to thank Fern for this wonderful painting, which now hangs in our office.

We first met Fern when she visited our office just before Christmas 2012 to show us the book “Bubbay: A Christmas Adventure”, which she illustrated. When it came time to design our RAP, we naturally thought of Fern!

Thanks

ACOSS would like to thank the ACOSS RAP Working Group, consisting of Helen Connolly, Francis Lynch, Eddie Cubillo, Neil Marshall, Robynne Quiggin and Judith McKay Tempest for the significant contributions they have made in the creation of this document.

ACOSS would also like to thank Anna Jovanovic from Reconciliation Australia for guiding us along the way, and ACOSS RAP Champion Louise Stanley for making it all happen.

Our vision for reconciliation



The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has a national leadership role in developing and providing socially, economically and environmentally responsible public policy and action to achieve a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia. Critical to achieve this vision is the need to act in ways to advance reconciliation and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

ACOSS' commitment to reconciliation has been demonstrated over many years through mutually respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people, joint campaigns and problem solving on complex issues, and a deep respect within ACOSS for the unique contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Australia and recognition of past and current injustices and disadvantage.

ACOSS can advocate for and promote reconciliation within our membership, the health and community services sector, and the broader community by formally demonstrating reconciliation in our attitudes, structures, policies and peak body activities. We have the desire and capacity to turn good intentions into action.



Message from the President

As the peak body for community and welfare services in Australia, ACOSS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and their spiritual connection to land and sea. ACOSS also recognises the history of dispossession experienced by the First Australians and the impact this has and continues to have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

In committing to a Reconciliation Action Plan ACOSS understands the role it must play in advancing true and sustainable reconciliation that enables the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in an Australia which is tolerant and just.

Simon Schrapel, ACOSS President

Our Organisation



The Australian Council of Social Service is the peak body of the community services and welfare sector and the national voice for the needs of people affected by poverty and inequality.

ACOSS' vision is for a fair, inclusive and sustainable Australia where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from social and economic life.

Established in 1956, ACOSS aims to reduce poverty and inequality by:

- Developing and promoting socially, economically and environmentally responsible public policy and action by government, community and private sectors.
- Supporting the role of non - government organisations in providing assistance to vulnerable Australians and contributing to influencing the national public policy debate

ACOSS has a current staff of 16 employees who work out of one office in Sydney, NSW. ACOSS does not currently employ any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. ACOSS frequently hosts interns and volunteers to support its operations.

ACOSS has a membership of over 160 organisations and dozens of individuals with an active interest in promoting social welfare.

ACOSS is also part of the COSS (Councils of Social Service) network across Australia with one COSS operating in each state and territory, with a combined membership of over 3,000 community service organisations. A number of the COSS' have a RAP in place currently.



Our Reconciliation Action Plan

The development of the ACOSS RAP has involved establishing a RAP working group and consulting with organisations across and beyond our membership including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peaks, staff and stakeholders.

ACOSS' first step was to collaborate with staff members.

To create the working group ACOSS contacted two members of the ACOSS Board, Helen Connolly and Francis Lynch, and asked through our member networks for recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to participate.

The following are members of the RAP Working Group:

- Eddie Cubillo, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service;
- Neil Marshall, Hatch - WA;
- Robynne Quiggin, Australian Securities and Investment Commission; and
- Judith McKay Tempest, Indigenous Professional Support Unit NSW & ACT.

The ACOSS working group met for a one day face to face meeting in Sydney in October 2012. This was very productive in providing new ideas of what we could achieve in our RAP.

Relationships



As a national voice for people affected by poverty and inequality ACOSS recognises the existence of significant poverty and disadvantage which faces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In order for ACOSS to advocate accurately for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' concerns, the development of cooperative partnerships and relationships are essential. ACOSS will seek to build upon and source new membership and further enhance relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	MEASURABLE TARGET
1.1 A Working Group, comprising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, is established to support the development of the RAP.	RAP Champion	Meet twice in the first year and annually in subsequent years. Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet after six months and twelve months of RAP implementation. Maintain ongoing contact. Meet annually in the second and third year of RAP.
1.2 Identify and establish working partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations operating in areas related to ACOSS' policy development and advocacy priorities.	CEO and Board Memberships Officer	November, 2013 Ongoing Annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create database which identifies peaks in ACOSS policy areas. Maintain database and record new relationships as they are established. Annual reports to the board which evaluate effectiveness of relationships formed.
1.3 Write a policy document which clearly outlines ACOSS' consultation processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.	CEO	July, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaboration policy and procedure to be developed. Policy disseminated to staff and added to induction notes.
1.4 Acquire new Policy Advisers to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective for each of ACOSS' policy areas.	CEO and Policy Officers	December, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact Policy Advisers and update lists.
1.5 Celebrate National Reconciliation Week by providing opportunities for employees to participate in events.	All staff, coordinated by Events Officer	2013, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host an internal event. Support staff to attend other relevant NRW local events. Promote NRW events through membership via email communication, website and/or ACOSS@Work newsletter.



Respect

ACOSS remains mindful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sensitivity about the past involvement of welfare groups in unjust practices and aims to ensure that the principles of respect and self - determination underpin all social policy advocacy. ACOSS will promote understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural lands and history amongst staff and members to support the production of a culturally competent organisation.

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	MEASURABLE TARGET
2.1 Develop an ACOSS policy statement on self determination.	CEO & Policy Staff	July, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy statement and practice notes developed and disseminated amongst members.
2.2 Celebrate the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures by participating in NAIDOC Week.	All staff; coordinated by Events Officer		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local events hosted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation.
2.3 ACOSS examination of social policy will always look through a lens of Aboriginal self – determination and impact and include an Aboriginal component in our budget submission.	CEO & Policy Staff	January, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget submissions include section on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
2.4 Comprehensive cultural engagement training available for all staff.	CEO & RAP Champion	December, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a cultural engagement strategy for ACOSS where all employees will participate in accredited cultural awareness training.
2.5 Engage Board members in opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the challenges they face in today's society.	CEO & President	December, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite a key Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander spokesperson to annually address Board on contemporary issues.
2.6 Actively support the promotion and public endorsement of the campaign to amend the Australian Constitution to ensure that all citizens are treated equally under the Australian Constitution.	Board CEO Media/ Publications/ Policy Staff	December, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACOSS public endorsement of constitutional campaign and promotes this support to members.



ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	MEASURABLE TARGET
2.7 Launch of the ACOSS RAP	RAP Working Group Events Officer	August, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch completed and RAP documents distributed
2.8 Modify staff induction training and review human resource policies and materials to include cultural awareness components and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies (EEO)	CEO/Deputy CEO	March, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update human resource policies and induction documents to include RAP information
2.9 Engage employees in understanding the protocols around 'Acknowledgement of Country' and 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies to ensure there is shared meaning behind the ceremonies	RAP Champion	March, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, implement and communicate document outlining current protocols



Opportunities

Creating opportunities for economic development and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment is central for ACOSS in order to strengthen our commitment to equal opportunity, workplace diversity and Closing the Gap.

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	MEASURABLE TARGET
3.1 Investigate opportunities within ACOSS to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment opportunities.	RAP Champion	March, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy.
3.2 Indirectly support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment through supply diversity.	CEO Publications Officer/Events officer/ EA/ Office Manager	March, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create database of Aaboriginal suppliers for key business needs.
3.3 Promote the work of Supply Nation (formerly the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council) to the COSS network and identify opportunities to leverage purchasing power of the network.	COSS Project Coordinator	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply Nation discussed at COSS Directors meeting. ACOSS to investigate in becoming a member of Supply Nation.
3.4 Increase public speaking and media opportunities for Aboriginal representatives to join ACOSS representatives on relevant issues.	CEO Media Officer	March, 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide public speaking opportunities on issues conducted in partnership with Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people.
3.5 Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisational members.	Board Membership Officer	March 2014, 2015, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and report on membership of Aboriginal controlled organisations annually to Board.
3.6 Utilise relationships with Government at all levels to influence policy decisions which progress the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	CEO & Policy Staff	March, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All submissions relating to poverty and disadvantage should include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspective.

Tracking progress & reporting



ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	MEASURABLE TARGET
4.1 Report achievements, challenges and learning to Reconciliation Australia for inclusion in the Annual Impact Measurement Report.	RAP Champion	Before September 30th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAP progress is reported each year in the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire • ACOSS Board report.
4.2 ACOSS' Reconciliation Action Plan is made available publicly.	RAP Champion	August, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish the RAP on ACOSS and Reconciliation Australia websites by May 2013.
4.3 Review, refresh and revise ACOSS RAP.	RAP working group in collaboration with ACOSS staff	March, 2014 March, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACOSS RAP revised after first year, and then after three years.

For more information about ACOSS and our Reconciliation Action Plan, contact our RAP Champion:

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