

Reconciliation News

Stories about Australia's journey to equality and unity



RAP designs create opportunities for Cairns First Nations youth

Truth, Healing, Action
Yoorrook Justice Commission's Journey

A year after the referendum
Voice is as important as ever

**GETTING ON WITH THE JOB:
SUPPORTING SELF-DETERMINATION,
JUSTICE AND TRUTH-TELLING**

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RECONCILIATION
AUSTRALIA

Reconciliation News is published by Reconciliation Australia in May and October each year. Its aim is to inform and inspire readers with stories relevant to the ongoing reconciliation process between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

CONTACT US

 reconciliation.org.au

 enquiries@reconciliation.org.au

 02 6153 4400

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Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation promoting reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visit reconciliation.org.au to find out more.

Cover image:

Aspiring First Nations creatives at Indigenous Design Labs (L-R) Reseira Brown, Chenae Dempsey, Leonardo Robinson, Samara Francis, Suiai Donigi-Bedford, Sina Mahina and Norah Schlesak. Photo: Leigh Harris/Ingeous Studios. Read more about Indigenous Design Labs on page 14.

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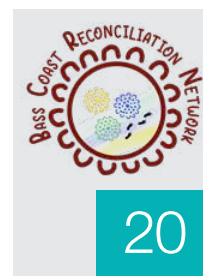
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FROM THE CEO

As I write we are close to a year since the Australian electorate rejected the Voice to Parliament referendum.

While it may be easy to remain caught up in disappointment at this result, as I have travelled this beautiful continent over the past year, I have been encouraged that First Nations people and the broader reconciliation movement have chosen to just get on with the job of building a fairer and more reconciled country.

If anything, Australians have become more determined than ever to achieve justice and create a country that is united in respect for First Nations people.

I am immensely proud of the role that Reconciliation Australia has played in this historical trend.

This edition of Reconciliation News is all about 'getting on with the job' of reconciliation; about showcasing and supporting First Nations self-determination for success.

Our National Reconciliation Week (NRW) 2024 theme – *Now More Than Ever* – reflected this post-referendum determination and was enthusiastically embraced by millions of Australians who rolled up their sleeves to do the work of reconciliation.

As Reconciliation Australia Director, Kirstie Parker writes in this edition 'add those Yes voters (including 60,000 organised, informed and enthusiastic campaign volunteers) to those No voters still genuinely supportive of First Nations advancement and that – right there – is some pretty mighty potential for reconciliation (12).'

This sentiment was reinforced with the release in May of the 2024 Australians' Perceptions of First Nations issues survey by international market researchers, Ipsos, which found that 78% of Australians believe Indigenous Australians should have a say in the laws and political decisions that affect them.

Which was precisely the idea that informed the Voice to Parliament concept because listening to the voices of First Nations people and providing opportunities for all Australians to learn from the vast knowledge and experiences which First Nations people possess, will ensure better outcomes for this nation.

New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Katie Kiss, tells us that she wants to move the debate from one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are thought of as a problem, to one that highlights our capacity to lead the development of success (18).

Partnership and listening are behind the inspiring story of NSW North Coast community organisation Naru Goori Groms being brought together with Elevate RAP partner the National Rugby League (NRL) by our Indigenous Governance Program, to further develop their culturally-connected ocean awareness and learn-to-surf program for youngsters on Gumbaynggirr Country (13).

The Bass Coast Reconciliation Network consists of ten organisations and groups – connected by their location on the Victorian South Coast – leveraging the power of RAPs to work together more effectively to increase their reconciliation impact for their communities (20).



CEO Karen Mundine. Photo: Joseph Mayers

Seizing an opportunity was exactly what drove the establishment of Indigenous Design Labs in Gimuy (Cairns) to provide practical experience and skills to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. Funded by RAP design contracts, this initiative has provided training to dozens of teenagers (14).

In Victoria, Yoorrook Justice Commission continues its comprehensive truth-telling process. Yoorrook is creating a public record of past and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria, a critical step towards healing, self-determination and reconciliation (16).

All these stories exemplify how First Nations people and our allies are creating opportunities to advance self-determination and build the movement for reconciliation and justice in Australia.

I hope they inspire you, as they continue to inspire me, to recommit to the cause of building a stronger, more reconciled Australia.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Days of Note

10
December 2024

Human Rights
Day

26
January 2025

Survival
Day

13
February 2025

17th Anniversary
of the
National Apology

20
March 2025

Close the Gap
Day

21
March 2025

International Day for
the Elimination of
Racial Discrimination



RAP Conference & Indigenous Governance Awards Gala Dinner

6 – 7 November

The National Reconciliation Action Plan – RAP – Conference is a landmark event on the reconciliation calendar. This year, Reconciliation Australia will bring together representatives from thousands of RAP organisations large and small, academics, policy makers and community members to connect, collaborate and act on reconciliation.

Indigenous Governance will be in the spotlight on the first night of the National RAP Conference – Wednesday 6 November – when we celebrate the 2024 Indigenous Governance Awards finalists and announce this year's winners at an exclusive gala dinner event.

Together, both events will work to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, inspire and challenge organisations to increase the impact of their RAPs, and promote collaboration between RAP organisations.

rapconference.com.au



AIATSIS Indigenous Art Market

6 – 15 December

The AIATSIS Indigenous Art Market is a regular in-person and online event which focuses on showcasing authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. It's the largest market of its kind in the Canberra region and has also become popular online.

The market is a great opportunity to ethically buy art from a diverse group of artists with a wide range of paintings, textiles, sculptures and more on offer. Most importantly, 100% of all sales go directly to First Nations artists and their communities.

AIATSIS is once again working with the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation to deliver this free event.

If you're in Canberra, the in-person market will be open from Friday 6 to Sunday 8 December and the online market will be open all the way up to Sunday 15 December.

aiatsis.gov.au/whats-new/events/indigenous-art-market-2024



2024 IAHA National Conference

9 – 11 December

The 2024 Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) National Conference will bring together a diverse network of First Nations health professionals, students and community members on Kaurna Country in Tarntanya (Adelaide). The conference will offer personal and professional development opportunities, including workshops and discussions that are designed to challenge perspectives and inspire growth.

The event will aim to create a culturally safe space for delegates to connect, learn, and celebrate excellence in First Nations health care. Winners of the IAHA National Excellence in Allied Health Awards will be celebrated at a gala dinner.

A holistic, strengths-based approach to health is key to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Find out more and register here.

iaha.com.au

RECONCILIATION RECAP



Police Apologies
May & August 2024

On 24 May, Victorian Chief Commissioner of Police Shane Patton apologised to Victoria's First Peoples, 'unreservedly... for the role of Victoria Police ... in the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families, culture, and Country' and committed Victoria Police to a genuine truth-telling process.

The apology came after a series of recommendations to address injustice in the criminal justice system was presented to Victoria Police by Yoorrook Justice Commission in 2023. These were a result of Yoorrook's year-long inquiry into Victoria's child protection and criminal justice systems. The apology came as

part of the 79 reforms that Victoria Police has committed to with the goal of transforming policing in the state.

In August, at the Garma Festival on Gumatj Country, the Northern Territory Commissioner of Police, Michael Murphy apologised on behalf of NT Police to Aboriginal communities in the NT. He prefaced his speech by acknowledging that 'truth-telling is critical for the NT Police to own its own part in its challenging history,' before apologising 'unequivocally... I am deeply sorry to all Aboriginal Territorians for the past harms and injustices caused by members of the NT Police.'

Truth-telling is fundamental to achieving a just and reconciled Australia. Learn more at:

reconciliation.org.au/our-work/truth-telling/

NT Police Commissioner Michael Murphy delivers the apology at Garma 2024. Photo: Teagan Glenane/YF



Linda Burney and Malarndirri McCarthy
July 2024

On 25 July, the Honourable Linda Burney, Wiradjuri woman, MP for Barton in Sydney's west and Minister for Indigenous Australians, announced her retirement from federal parliament. Reconciliation Australia CEO Karen Mundine thanked the Minister for her 'decades of work and commitment to First Nations peoples, reconciliation, and Australia. Minister Burney finishes this stage of her career as the first Aboriginal woman to hold the Federal Ministry for Indigenous Australians, a position she held for the two years of this government.'

Northern Territory Senator, the Honourable Malarndirri McCarthy was announced as the new Minister. Karen Mundine praised the unique and strong mix of political, media, cultural, and life experience Senator McCarthy brings to this key position. 'Her decades in public life show her strength and depth of understanding of issues when dealing both with communities and with the highest levels of government... we look forward to continuing a strong relationship with Senator McCarthy.'

To read Reconciliation Australia's full statements, visit: reconciliation.org.au/news-and-media/news

Left to right: The Hon. Linda Burney at the 2022 Indigenous Governance Awards. Photo: Joseph Mayers. Senator Malarndirri McCarthy in parliament in February 2024. Photo: Auspic/Department of Parliamentary Service, Commonwealth of Australia



NAIDOC Week
7 – 14 July 2024

NAIDOC Week, a celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements, kicked off up and down the country in July. This year's theme – *Keep the Fire Burning! Black, Loud and Proud* – encapsulated 'the unapologetic celebration of Indigenous identity,' said NAIDOC Committee co-chair Steven Satour. His fellow co-chair, Aunty Dr Lynette Riley, called it a 'clarion call to continuity, unity and solidarity.'

The NAIDOC Week awards were held on Kurna Yerta Country in Tarndanya (Adelaide). The awards recognise the outstanding contributions of First Nations people across Australia to their communities, to improving lives and promoting Indigenous issues.

There were 10 awards up for grabs, and winners were Naarah (Creative Talent), Alex Winwood (Sportsperson), Aunty Dulcie Flower (Lifetime Achievement), Aunty Millie Ingram (Female Elder), Kim Collard (Male Elder), Dante Rodrigues (Youth), Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (Education), Alick Tipoti (Caring for Country and Culture), Tui Nolan (Innovation) and Aunty Muriel Bamblett (Person of the Year).

NAIDOC Week is an opportunity for all Australians to learn about First Nations cultures and histories and participate in celebrations of the oldest, continuous living cultures on earth.

To learn more about NAIDOC Week visit: naidoc.org.au

Noongar man Alex Winwood took home this year's National NAIDOC Sportsperson Award at the ceremony held on Kurna Country. Photo: Brendan Blacklock



Garma Festival of Traditional Cultures 2 – 5 August 2024

Garma Festival, Australia's largest Indigenous gathering, returned to Arnhem Land from 2-5 August. This celebration of Yolŋu culture is hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation (YYF) and showcases traditional miny'tji (art), manikay (song), bunggul (dance) and storytelling, and is an important meeting point for the clans and families of the region.

The theme for Garma this year – *Gurtha-Wuma Worrk-gu (Fire, Strength and Renewal)* – captured the spirit of the Yolŋu in response to the rejection of the Voice to Parliament. 'Following fire, the land and all that is in it renews and comes back to life - and with it the people,' said Foundation chairman Djawa Yunupingu. 'This is the Yolŋu circle of life.'

As well as celebrating culture, Garma invites speakers and listeners from the political, business, academic and philanthropic sectors. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese attended for the third year running to speak to the federal government's direction following the referendum. The festival also hosted its first ever International Forum which brought together Yolŋu elders and leaders of Pacific Nations for a frank discussion on climate change and the need for strong partnerships.

Learn more about Garma: yyf.com.au/garma-festival

Dancers perform the traditional Yolngu Bunggul ceremony at Garma 2024. Photo: Nina Franova/YYF



National Indigenous Music Awards 10 August 2024

Held annually on Larrakia Country at the Darwin Amphitheatre, the National Indigenous Music Awards (NIMA) celebrated 20 years in 2024. Barkaa won Artist of the Year, and Film Clip of the Year for the *We Up* music video at the ceremony held on 10 August.

Other winners were Becca Hatch (New Talent of the Year), Dan Sultan (Album of the Year for *Dan Sultan*), 3% (Song of the Year for *Our People*) and Bulman School and Community (Community Clip of the Year for *Nidjarra*). Eurovision 2024 performers Electric Fields and Yolŋu artist Rrawun Maymuru shared the Indigenous Language Award for *Anpuru Maau Kutjpa* and *Yolngu* respectively. Warumpi Band founder Sammy Butcher was inducted into the NIMA Hall of Fame.

Naturally, First Nations music's night of nights attracted some of the industry's biggest names: Jessica Mauboy, Miss Kannina, Birdz and Fred Leone, Eleanor Jawurlngali and Emily Wurramara all performed alongside award winners Dan Sultan and 3%, as well as Arrkula Yinbayarra and Dr Shellie Morris AO.

To find out more about the awards, finalists and winners visit: nima.musicnt.com.au

Barkaa holds her award for Film Clip of the Year at the 2024 National Indigenous Music Awards. Photo: Paz Tassone/NIMA



Country to Couture and National Indigenous Fashion Awards 6 & 7 August 2024

The annual Country to Couture fashion showcase returned to Larrakia Country on 6 August with 20 collections from emerging and established designers. Country to Couture celebrates First Nations fashion design and textile art as contemporary forms of cultural storytelling and knowledge-sharing.

It was followed on 7 August by the National Indigenous Fashion Awards. The seven award winners (from a field of 36) represented models, designers, brands and businesses who have positively contributed to the Indigenous fashion sector.

Both events are organised by Indigenous Fashion Projects (IFP) and held alongside the annual Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF). Over 70 art centres from the most remote regions of Australia showcased their work at DAAF, which promotes ethical purchases of Aboriginal art directly from artists.

Learn more about the project: ifp.org.au

Elaine George and Lucas Schober wear Coat of Arms from Dandaloo Su by Su Lousick. Photo: Marley Morgan/IFP

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2024

#NRW2024 highlighted the urgency of a continuing commitment to reconciliation, *Now More Than Ever*. The week offered the first opportunity for many people to re-engage with reconciliation in the post-referendum world.

National Reconciliation Week – 27 May to 3 June – is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia. The start and end dates of NRW are the same every year to commemorate two significant milestones in our history – the 1967 referendum and the High Court Mabo decision.

The theme *Now More Than Ever*, called on Australians to reconnect and recommit to bolder action off the back of the disappointing 2023 referendum result. In schools, communities and workplaces across the nation, supporters of the reconciliation movement took up the call and agreed that, now more than ever, the fight for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, recognition and justice must continue, and any advancement must be protected.

Hundreds of events took place across Australia, in so many different forms – performances, film screenings, meals for any time of day, seminars and in-conversations, ceremonies and sporting rounds. These photos represent a small snapshot.

Choirs up and down the country came together again this year to be part of *Voices for Reconciliation: Louder than Ever* to express their continuing support for reconciliation by belting out the Warumpi Band's iconic *Blackfella/Whitefella*. **Read the full story of *Voices for Reconciliation* on page 10.**

NOW MORE THAN EVER
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK 2024



THE LONG WALK

Reconciliation Australia and Reconciliation Victoria staff were among the thousands at Yarra Park marking 20 years since AFL legend Michael Long's historic Long Walk from Melbourne to Canberra. On their way to watch the Dreamtime at the G match, attendees dropped in to chat with the team, recorded their commitments to reconciliation and joined in the fun by building their dream team of First Nations footy stars.

Photo: Reconciliation Australia



NRW BREAKFAST – SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A staggering 2,800 supporters attended Reconciliation South Australia's annual National Reconciliation Week breakfast at the Adelaide Convention Centre. Actor Luke Carroll hosted the event and rapper Briggs was the keynote speaker.

Photo: Samuel Graves



RECONCILIATION DAY, ACT

Thousands turned up to Commonwealth Park to celebrate ACT Reconciliation Day – the only such public holiday in any state or territory. Visitors to the Reconciliation Australia stall marked their personal commitments to reconciliation.

Photo: Reconciliation Australia



QUEANBEYAN-PALERANG RECONCILIATION WALK

Reconciliation Australia staff joined thousands of community members and students from across the region on the annual walk down the Queanbeyan main street, organised by the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council.

Photo: Reconciliation Australia



GOODSTART RED HILL, QLD

Children from Goodstart's Red Hill (Brisbane) early learning centre and local school kids joined MPs and Councillors, and hundreds of residents to celebrate NRW 2024 by planting a Sea of Hearts in an adjacent park. The public event has been a catalyst for positive conversations with neighbours about reconciliation for the past few years.

Photo: Charmaine Greenwood



PENTRIDGE PRISON TOURS

At 16, Gunditjmarra/Keerraaywoorong man Chris Austin entered Pentridge Prison. After nearly 30 years, and with support from The Torch Project, art liberated him. This NRW, Chris (pictured in front of his painting 'Looking After the River') led tours through the prison to share his experience with incarceration.

Photo: The Torch Project



NSW FIRST NATIONS VETERANS CEREMONY

Despite the cold weather, 500 school children, veterans, servicepeople, and community members gathered on Gadigal Land at the Anzac Memorial to commemorate First Nations veterans. Held every NRW for the last 18 years, the commemoration service is supported by RSL NSW.

Photo: Salty Dingo



VOICES FOR RECONCILIATION: LOUDER THAN EVER

For the second year in a row, choirs and singing groups from around the country raised their voices in support of National Reconciliation Week.

In classrooms, halls, churches, and workplaces across Australia, nearly 500 choirs came together in May 2024 to raise their collective voices for this year's *Voices for Reconciliation: Louder Than Ever* project as part of National Reconciliation Week. Taking on the anthemic rock classic *Blackfella/Whitefella* by Warumpi Band, thousands sang in support of both observing the week and the ongoing need for reconciliation in Australia.

It has been almost 40 years since the Warumpi Band first fired up Australia with their single *Blackfella/Whitefella*. The song is written by band members George Rurrumbu and Neil Murray and calls for people of all backgrounds and races to come together and stand up for change. The power of the song written in 1985 endures in 2024, providing inspiration for action off the back of the Voice to Parliament referendum result.

We, at Reconciliation Australia, did cautiously wonder if thousands of Australians would – once again – come together in song as they did for 2023's anthem, *From Little Things Big Things Grow*. However, once 2024's chosen song was announced, choirs from all corners of the country quickly registered to take part. It soon became obvious just how many people were still ready to fight the good fight for reconciliation.

Queensland musical duo Mundy-Turner and their local Sing for YES campaign group were one of the first groups to answer the call. What happened next was a performance both memorable and impassioned in its quest to keep the conversation about reconciliation and First Nations justice going.

More than 50 people from the local community came together on the Dugulumba Balun (Logan River) to sing loudly and proudly.

Projects like this create a vital opportunity for understanding and healing to take place.



Mundy-Turner and Sing For Yes choir singing Blackfella/Whitefella on the Dugulumba Balun (Logan River). Photo: Pascal Burger

'Singing on Yugambah Country on the banks of that beautiful Balun felt very potent. We were given an inspiring and informative welcome by Uncle Ted Williams, Yugambah Elder and Traditional Custodian. The energy was electric!' says one half of the duo, Cath Mundy.

'It had enormous significance for our community to come together at this time, to sharpen our commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and to resolve to continue to stand up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'

In its second year, *Voices for Reconciliation* continued to see dozens of schools taking part. From seasoned school choirs to halls full of all year groups, young Australians were given the chance to learn about reconciliation through song.

Melanie Penny from Geraldton Primary School said the students in the Western Australian school shared the same enthusiasm for the cross-learning moment. 'National Reconciliation Week is an important part of our learning program at Geraldton Primary School. During choir rehearsals, we watched the Warumpi Band perform *Blackfella/Whitefella* and discussed the meaning behind the words,' she said.

Like many of the choirs who took part this year, this was also Geraldton Primary's second year of being involved.

'Last year our students were so excited to be included in the *Voices for Generations* video of *From Little Things Big Things Grow*. It was an easy and enthusiastic "yes" from our Specialist Choir to learn *Blackfella/Whitefella* this year,' said Melanie Penny.

'We participated with pride, and the achievement was celebrated by parents, teachers, students and our whole wider community when we saw the choir sing in the choral compilation on YouTube and Facebook.'

Joseph Bromley, a teacher at Woodend Primary School in the Macedon Ranges region of Victoria spoke of the power of song in teaching the next generation about Australia's true history and the need for reconciliation.

'Communicating, in an age-appropriate manner, the meaning and themes of the song and discussing the message of unity and shared humanity the song expresses was very important. Kids get this stuff. They inherently understand the importance of fairness, justice, and equality something denied the Aboriginal community for far too long.'

Ultimo TAFE also came aboard for a consecutive year, and recorded students and staff performing with their aptly named choir, *Ultimate Voices*. Educator Cat Coleman said the students enjoyed the process of taking part.

'Singing in a group is a really wonderful experience for everyone, of all abilities and interests. The students love being a part of an event and having a real purpose to the activity. It is a really positive experience all round.'

Voices for Reconciliation is sure to stay on the events calendar for many years to come, with choirs showing ongoing enthusiasm to keep the beat going.

As Cath Mundy said, 'When we sing together, we are connected in a joyous way – even about sad and difficult things. We share a common beat, we create unison and harmony, literally and metaphorically. Projects like this create a vital opportunity for understanding and healing to take place.'

Reconciliation Australia thanks the family of the late George Rurrumbu, Neil James Murray, the Butcher families, and Universal Music Publishing Group for their support of Voices for Reconciliation: Louder than Ever.

You can watch all *Voices for Reconciliation: Louder Than Ever* compilations and performances via youtube.com/ReconciliationAus

A YEAR AFTER THE REFERENDUM, VOICE IS AS IMPORTANT AS EVER



Kirstie Parker. Photo: De Greer-Yindimincalie

I'm going to go out on a limb and say I'm not the only one feeling unsettled as Australia approaches the first anniversary of the unsuccessful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice Referendum.

Like a lot of other First Nations people and our allies, since 14 October 2023 I've tried not to overthink the overwhelming No vote, instead focussing on ways to deal with the fresh, deep, profound grief ossifying my bones and marrow.

I feel it was important for the whole nation to sit for a while with what happened, and for mob especially not to drift automatically to 'We're fine; nothing can hurt us.' It did hurt...a lot.

Maybe we'll never get a firm handle on the exact recipe for the dish served to the nation near 12 months ago. But its base was undoubtedly the early withdrawal of once prized political bipartisanship. This was blended with low civics awareness, poor awareness of Australia's history and understandable cost of living anxiety, and then oversalted with various kinds of mischief, lies, fearmongering, and racism.

And all of this was in the context of an often one-step-forward-two-steps-back relationship between First Nations people and non-Indigenous Australians, a mere three decades into focussed efforts to 'reconcile'.

Well before the referendum, critics of reconciliation had held that the process lets the Australian state off the hook for its own violent and racist policies, and in the wake of last year's ballot, some immediately declared reconciliation 'dead'.

That the reconciliation process begun in 1991 has been imperfect is not a toss I would even begin to argue.

But to me, that's not something to be in denial about or a reason to abandon the journey we've begun. Rather, the Referendum and all it entailed demands gutsy, pragmatic and continual review of the reconciliation movement and greater effort to improve and bolster it.

And I'm dead certain that the YES vote count would have been a mere fraction of the 6,286,894 officially recorded, had it not been for decades of dedicated efforts by the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and now Reconciliation Australia, the various state and territory bodies, and the 2500+ schools and early learning services with a Narragunnawali RAP and the 3200+ other RAP organisations which together impact five million Australians.

Add those Yes voters (including 60,000 organised, informed and enthusiastic campaign volunteers) to those No voters still genuinely supportive of First Nations advancement and that – right there – is some pretty mighty potential for reconciliation.

To me at least, it's enough to crack on with. And that's what I'll do, together with fellow travellers – all the while trying not to sweat the small stuff and to recognise any nefarious efforts to distract from the main game for what they are.

To invoke the theme of National Reconciliation Week 2024, *Now More Than Ever* reconciliation should be a non-partisan 'people's movement' taking its cues from First Nations peoples and aspirations.

We should understand that any First Nations policy not informed by mob and any solution not led by mob is just a failed experiment in waiting.

And as we advocate for First Nations self-determination, we should get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable and put the pedal to the metal on justice, anti-racism and truth-telling.

Have a thoughtful anniversary, Australia.

Yuwaalaraay woman Kirstie Parker is a non-executive Director of Reconciliation Australia. She attended the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in May 2017, signing the historic Uluru Statement from the Heart. In the lead-up to the Voice Referendum, Kirstie advised the Uluru Dialogue, the group tasked by the Uluru Convention with taking the Uluru Statement forward.

SURFING TO SUCCESS: NARU GOORI GROMS AND THE NRL



Yeshe Smith (Partnership Brokers Association), Amber Hamer (Naru Goori Groms) Alanah Scholes (NRL) on the beach at Coffs Harbour. Photo: Lee Davison

For millennia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had governance systems in place. Unique ways of self-governing, driven by culture and community priorities.

The Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Program (IGP) is expanding the impact and reach of these tried and tested ways of working by bringing together Indigenous Governance Awards finalists and deeply engaged RAP organisations through its partnership program.

The pilot stage has matched Indigenous Governance Awards 2022 finalist Naru Goori Groms, a wellbeing focused ocean awareness and learn-to-surf program that builds community resilience and cultural connection developed by Naru Aboriginal Corporation, with Elevate RAP partner National Rugby League (NRL) to positive results.

Out of the boardroom and on to Country

The partnership, facilitated by Reconciliation Australia with support from the Partnership Brokers Association, officially kicked off with Naru Goori Groms, hosting the NRL in Coffs Harbour for two days of cultural activities and planning.

The Welcome to Country by the Giingana Gumbaynggirr Freedom School set the tone for the two days, with their use of language deepening the impact on NRL attendees.

Over the two days, the organisations delved into their motivations, shared individual objectives, and potential partnership challenges. With this intentional approach and formalised process Naru Goori Groms and the NRL were able to openly discuss their differences, contributions, reservations and importantly, their non-negotiables.

At the end of this gathering, the relationship between the two organisations had strengthened. They understood one another's goals and expectations and how they can work together to deepen the impact of Naru's work

while extending NRL's understanding of the effectiveness of First Nations initiatives when they are truly self-determining.

Relationships for reconciliation

Valuing and implementing Indigenous governance practices recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as decision makers for their own futures.

Partnerships that set out to do this take dedication and mutual respect to build and maintain, but when they succeed, they can generate significant positive learning and behavioural shifts.

From Naru Goori Groms' perspective, their partnership with the NRL is an opportunity for them to share and actively model the value of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in all decision-making processes.

For the NRL, it's about seeing small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations grow and offering increased capacity for them to do so while deepening their own understanding of Indigenous Governance practices.

A partnership like this can ultimately, tackle indifference and racism at individual and organisational levels and contribute to the broader appreciation and application of Indigenous governance practices, and as a result, reconciliation.

The IGP team continues to work with Stretch and Elevate RAP partners and past IGA finalists to grow this initial stage of the Partnership program. Broader offerings are planned for the future.

For now, learn more about Naru Goori Groms via [youtube.com/ReconciliationAus](https://www.youtube.com/ReconciliationAus) and read up on the work the NRL are doing as an Elevate RAP Partner at [nrl.com/community/indigenous/reconciliation-action-plan](https://www.nrl.com/community/indigenous/reconciliation-action-plan)

To follow the work of the Indigenous Governance Program, visit: reconciliation.org.au/our-work/indigenous-governance



Samara Francis and Chenae Dempsey working on the Mortgage Choice NAIDOC Week design. Photo: Lee Harris/Ingeous Studios

RAP DESIGNS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAIRNS FIRST NATIONS YOUTH

The substantial impact of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) has been well documented including providing employment and economic opportunities for First Nations peoples. This story explores the creative development opportunities for young people that flow on from the RAP program.

Cairns-based First Nations designer and artist, Leigh Harris, has always dreamed of using his talents to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth with a pathway into the creative design and digital industries, and his work designing RAP reports was the key to his achieving this dream.

With nearly 40 years of experience in design and communications, much of it while running his own businesses in Far North Queensland (FNQ), Leigh has built a large client base and a reputation for integrity. A good proportion of his work has been designing Reconciliation Action Plans for corporate clients, and it was this work which formed the economic base for a new social enterprise, Indigenous Design Labs (IDL).

Leigh argues that design skills and tech literacy are fundamental to professional and economic success in contemporary Australia, and that First Nations youth are too often excluded from these economic and employment opportunities. He has watched his young nieces and nephews, and their friends, denied the chances so many other Australians take for granted.

‘An entry into this industry was next to impossible for these kids in Cairns,’ said Leigh. ‘And it would still be that way if nothing was done.’

These young people see their work at IDL as 'having fun', and seeing their joy in what they are doing reminds us to try and make our own work as joyful as possible.

So, Leigh's company, Ingeous Studios teamed up with Red Ochre Republic, another Indigenous creative agency headed up by Sharee Jacobs and Tarquin Singleton to establish Indigenous Design Labs (IDL), a real-time creative agency where young people could pick up tech and design skills and gain real life experience.

However, Leigh argues that technical skills are only part of the proficiencies that young First Nations designers need.

'Ensuring that our designs are culturally sound is the most important thing that we teach young people. So much work is being done that is not inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. We ensure that our creatives are a true representation of both, and the diversity of our cultures.'

Having spent more than a decade designing close to 50 RAP documents, Leigh was happy to pass on this part of his business to IDL. These contracts would give the students real-world practical experience of working in a creative agency. Client liaison, tendering, marketing, and other essentials for a successful small enterprise are all part of the real-life experience for IDL participants.

Red Ochre Republic's Sharee Jacobs has now been a mentor with IDL for three years.

'We understand that it's difficult to access these sorts of opportunities and build a portfolio, so we aim to support people in their creative journey,' said Sharee. 'As young people they have tremendous ideas and their access to social media means they can create really imaginative and vibrant designs for the projects that they work on.'

The young people range from 13 to 18 years old, and Sharee reports that even the youngest participants provide new design perspectives.

'They have great creative zest and think outside the box, sometimes in ways that surprise us adults,' she said. 'Their perspectives are particularly useful for projects that target youth; we use young people to design for young people and as a result our work is unique.'

IDL has a growing client base including Queensland Health and Australian Defence Apparel, as well as its RAP clients which include Mecca Cosmetics, the Cairns City Council and FNQ not-for-profit, Vocational Training Group.

'We do "journey RAPs", in that we do designs that will evolve over time with their own RAP journey,' Sharee said. 'In this way the kids initially learn how to do a RAP design but also how an organisation's RAP develops over time and what they are trying to achieve.'

Sharee argues that First Nations ownership and management of IDL is a key reason for its success. 'Young people can see other people who are like them, from their own community, succeeding in their work. We say, "to be it, you gotta see it".'

These young people see their work at IDL as "having fun", and seeing their joy in what they are doing reminds us to try and make our own work as joyful as possible.'

Sharee pays tribute to Leigh Harris for his role in assisting young First Nations people. 'I think he's given opportunities to other young designers, and helped people across the creative spectrum, whether in art practice, photography, design or coding.'

One of those young designers whose participation in IDL opened opportunities in the creative industries is Lalawa Donigi-Bedford, an 18-year-old Torres Strait Islander woman now studying filmmaking at the South Australia Institute of Business and Technology.

'It's really challenging finding something like the IDL in Far North Queensland,' said Lalawa. 'Young people don't often know how to pick up skills and experience in design and technology.'

'IDL works so well; it is really community-based and like a family. It is enjoyable to learn from someone that you are culturally comfortable with; someone who has both the technical knowledge but also the cultural knowledge to make us feel at home.'

She has a passion for creative arts and film and told Reconciliation News that her work with IDL made it possible to do the film production course.

'I always dreamt about working in film and the access to cameras and editing software programs I had during my time at IDL has been so important to my success.'

'My time there also taught me how to push myself, to say what I need to say, in a respectful way. IDL built my confidence.'

Lalawa is impatient to get into the industry and 'start telling our stories, particularly stories from the Torres Straits.'

She wants to move away from the deficit views of First Nations peoples, so often the default position of non-Indigenous journalists and filmmakers.

'I might make a romcom,' she said. 'But with First Nations peoples and lives because at the moment the stereotyping of our people is just so bad.'

'I need to get to work as soon as I can,' she declared with the impatience of a young woman on a mission!

Learn more about Indigenous Design Labs: indigedesignlabs.com.au/

Read up on the impact of RAPs across all walks of Australian life: reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation-action-plans/rap-impact/



In an historic moment, Victorian Premier Jacinta Allan gave evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission on 29 April 2024 as part of Yoorrook's hearings into the systemic injustices faced by First Peoples in relation to land, sky and waters. (L to R) Premier Jacinta Allan, The Hon Anthony North KC, Travis Lovett, Professor Eleanor Bourke AM, Adjunct Professor Sueanne Hunter and Professor Maggie Walter. Photo: Yoorrook Justice Commission

TRUTH, HEALING, ACTION: YOORROOK JUSTICE COMMISSION'S JOURNEY

Victoria made history with the establishment of Australia's first formal truth-telling commission. Yoorrook Chair, Professor Eleanor Bourke says truth-telling is now here to stay.

The 2023 Voice referendum defeat exposed serious gaps in our understanding of Australia's colonial history and its ongoing impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Truth-telling is essential to filling these gaps and building stronger relationships between First Nations peoples and other Australians based in truth, justice and respect.

In the absence of a national truth-telling process, several state-based formal truth-telling initiatives are underway, and Victoria has taken a significant step forward with the Yoorrook Justice Commission. The nation's first formal First Nations-led truth-telling process.

Set up by agreement between the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government, Yoorrook has been tasked with creating a public record of past and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria since colonisation. The commission – named for the Wemba Wemba/Wamba Wamba word for truth – will, at the end of this process, deliver findings to help inform Victoria's treaty negotiations.

Unearthing the Past and the Present

Since its launch in March 2022, Yoorrook has hit the ground running with a series of public and private hearings and the delivery of two interim reports ahead of the final report due in June 2025.

Truth-telling is not just about recounting history; we need to ensure that our stories are heard and that they lead to genuine empowerment and agency for our communities.

Professor Eleanor Bourke, a Wergaia/Wamba Wamba Elder and Chair of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, told Reconciliation News that Yoorrook's work hasn't been without its hurdles.

'We started this journey during the pandemic,' Professor Bourke recounted. 'It was a tough start. Yoorrook could only connect with people online for the first six months, and during that time, we were also working on the first report.'

The referendum result was another setback for the community in Victoria, but Professor Bourke also sees it as a pivotal turning point in societal attitudes.

'We thought that Victoria would get over the line in our community, so it was a big shock for our people in Victoria. However, I think there is now a greater interest – for some people, other Victorians – to find out more,' Professor Bourke said.

'Firstly, it is necessary to know the history and truth about settlement in Victoria. It is not about what we want, it is about how First peoples were treated and forced off their lands. Most Victorians do not know the story about legislation prescribing where we could live, of the racist legislation about identity and the generational impact.'

The commission's hearings provide a space for individuals to share their deeply personal stories which often involve confronting painful memories.

'We're hearing people's lived experiences – good, bad, and ugly – spanning poverty, the legal and criminal justice systems, and child protection. It's distressing to see how deeply embedded these issues are due to colonial legislation creating barriers that span generations,' Professor Bourke reflected.

'It's a tough process for everyone involved, but it's also profoundly healing. For many, it's a chance to finally speak their truth and be heard.'

Truth-listening

One significant aspect of Yoorrook's work involves truth-listening – that is, engaging with institutions to ensure that they listen to the truth and confront their own histories. While progress can be slow, there is evidence that institutions are beginning to acknowledge the need for change.

'Earlier this year, the Victoria Police apologised to our people for their involvement in the Stolen Generations and committed to change. Now, that's been overshadowed by the commitment to raising the age to 14 not being kept. Within their organisation, however, the Victoria Police have identified 79 actions that they do want to happen to change their culture,' Professor Bourke said.

'We'll see what comes of it in the coming months, but it means somebody's taking responsibility to hear what's being said and to make those changes, and that's really important.'

'Institutions are often like big ships that move slowly, but real change takes time.'

Institutions are now faced with the reality of their past actions and are beginning to address their role in historical injustices. However, Professor Bourke acknowledges that the road to substantial change is long. 'These institutions must take responsibility and commit to real action. It's about transforming understanding into tangible reforms.'

'Truth-telling is not just about recounting history; we need to ensure that our stories are heard and that they lead to genuine empowerment and agency for our communities.'

From Words to Actions

Addressing systemic racism in education remains a critical challenge and Professor Bourke acknowledges the gaps, 'We need to ensure that Aboriginal histories and perspectives are adequately represented and taught. This is a crucial part of addressing systemic racism.'

'The rich material we're gathering will make excellent curriculum content for future generations. It's essential that we use these stories to educate and inform.'

Yoorrook will also hold accountability hearings to review what institutions, and the government have done in response to its recommendations. This process will help ensure that commitments made are followed through. 'It's crucial that our work doesn't just end with the hearings. We need to see action and real improvements.'

Community Truth-telling

More local communities are working together to research previously untold and unrecognised parts of their histories. These community-based activities are a crucial part of the national conversation on truth-telling and reconciliation.

Professor Bourke agrees, 'We see a lot of the community activities going on in our media feeds and it's a very good thing to see, because it means people are doing the work where they live. They're learning about the beginning of the story, as well as how they got to where they are now.'

'Whether it's the bail act or not raising the age, these issues are going to stay on the agenda. People will either be horrified, or they'll want to do more. So, there's no relaxing from what needs to happen to make our country a better place.'

To learn more about the Yoorrook Justice Commission, visit:
yoorrookjusticecommission.org.au



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Katie Kiss. Photo: Australian Human Rights Commission

IN CONVERSATION: KATIE KISS

Kaanju and Birri/Widi woman Katie Kiss, the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, has worked in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs for the past 25 years. She spoke to Reconciliation News about the necessity of a human rights-based approach and her commitment to working with communities to develop positive solutions and outcomes.

What led you here to the Human Rights Commission?

Human rights and the fight for social justice has always been in my blood. My grandfather, who is my inspiration, was a staunch rights advocate and played a big role in the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, education, housing and legal services in Rockhampton.

As a mother, aunt and grandmother, I have a commitment to ensuring the world in which my families live, respects who they are and that they are safe culturally, physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually, and where they are free to pursue their goals and dreams with confidence.

I've been involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs at local, community, state, national and international levels, for the past 25 years, working across issues affecting First Nations Peoples; community development, constitutional reform, social justice, governance, native title and land management, and education and employment.

I spent a formative eight years at the Commission from 2006, including as the Director of the Social Justice Team during both Tom Calma and Mick Gooda's terms as the Social Justice Commissioner.

I then held senior advisory positions in the Queensland Government, and before this role, I was the Executive Director of the Interim Truth and Treaty Body supporting Queensland's Path to Treaty.

It is a real honour to follow the legacy left by the Commissioners before me. There is so much work to do and conversations to continue having. We need to elevate and empower our people, and this must be done together.

My role can help to move the debate from one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are considered to be a problem, to one that highlights our capacity to lead the response.

How does the position of Social Justice Commissioner fit into the political, cultural landscape in Australia?

A human rights-based approach requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are able to live their lives with dignity; and that our children are nurtured and developed in a culturally affirming, and discrimination-free society, rather than punished for circumstances out of their control.

As part of my role, I monitor the exercise and enjoyment of human rights by our people, and I provide advice to governments and others about ensuring the policy and legislation enables and realises our rights.

Ongoing national crises in cost of living, housing, domestic and family violence, mental health, child safety and youth justice, amplify the need for system reform that ensures the rights of all communities. Systemic racism and structural disadvantage exacerbate these system failures for our people, so transforming government, and consequently 'the system' is critical to closing the gap and achieving better outcomes for our people.

Since the Voice Referendum, our people have experienced a significant rise in racism and discrimination.

My role can help to move the debate from one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are considered to be a problem, to one that highlights our capacity to lead the response.

We need to move beyond building up ever greater piles of inquiries, reports, and recommendations into a space of greater accountability and evidence-based policy and action.

What's your assessment of the state of human rights in Australia?

There's far more work that needs to be done, the rights of First Nations Peoples are not being upheld.

I strongly believe Australia needs to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and this will be a key focus of my work. It has been 15 years since Australia endorsed the UN Declaration, having initially voted against it.

We're dying younger, being incarcerated more often, our kids are being removed from their homes more often. Racism is widely embedded in structures which, in many cases, work against our people.

Australia can do much better.

The Declaration and a national Human Rights Act, which the Commission has set out and provided to government, will help this, but we need the political will and commitment to bring these human rights protections to life in Australia.

How are you approaching this work post referendum?

The Voice Referendum debate reinforced the experience of First Nations Peoples, that the hurtful and harmful impacts of colonisation are intergenerational, ongoing and entrenched in the social fabric of the Australian nation.

It also highlighted the need for a reframed, respectful and reconciled relationship that is grounded in truth, justice and healing, for First Nations People and the Australian nation. This is even more important since the referendum outcome, which has seen a marked rise in the experience of racism by First Nations People.

We need all governments to be promoting this reframed relationship if we are to progress improved outcomes for First Nations Peoples.

What inspires-enables you to continue with this work?

I am inspired by the strength and courage of our peoples, our families, our communities.

First Nations Peoples globally carry with them a sense of pride that is not solely a reflection of our histories but also embodies the resilience, strength and ongoing contributions of Indigenous communities to a diverse and inclusive society.

Our long and vibrant histories showcase innovation and cultural richness, from traditional knowledges that contribute to science, ecology, environmental and biodiversity management, and traditional healing and medicine, to our cultural ceremonies and our practices in art, music and storytelling, to significant achievements in environmental stewardship over generations and community leadership.

However, our people and our communities live with the legacy of colonisation daily, through systems that perpetrate ongoing injustices in all aspects of our lives.

There is so much work to do, and I feel the full weight of the responsibility this role carries with it. When I see and hear about the injustices faced by our people, I am inspired to engage in processes that help to start rectifying all the wrongs that have been endured.

I am passionate about hearing from our communities and understanding their unique perspectives and nuanced needs and priorities. Whether it be about Closing the Gap, youth justice reform, native title and land justice, truth-telling and treaty, or combatting racism and other structural barriers.

BASS COAST RECONCILIATION NETWORK: WALKING AND WORKING TOGETHER



The 2022 Bass Coast Bridge Walk for Reconciliation across the Phillip Island Bridge. Photo: Joel Sharpe

The Bass Coast is a small piece of Victoria possibly more famous for its penguins on Millowl (Phillip Island) than for its people.

However, it is its people that have been working hard on building strong and active reconciliation partnerships and relationships in innovative and collective ways.

Since 2019 organisations and community groups connected through Country, community, and their commitment to reconciliation in their region, decided to see how they could work more effectively together to build trust and increase the collective impact in their communities.

It was a smart move that meant pooling resources, ideas and influence – and leveraging the strength of their individual Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs).

Importantly, it was also an opportunity for the organisations to show First Peoples living on the Bass Coast, on Bunurong Country, their commitment to a respectful and authentic partnership. It was more than just knowing the calendar of important events, the dates to turn up, it was to grow together and become stronger so that sharing through reconciliation was now everyone's responsibility.

The Bass Coast Reconciliation Network (BCRN)'s aim is to be publicly accountable to show the tangible results of their combined efforts, and to measure their shared impact against a range of common RAP commitments within the RAP pillars of Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities.

Put simply they want to be a regional reconciliation role model in a reportable framework, and to develop a reputation for facilitating quality, meaningful events promoting reconciliation initiatives across the Bass Coast.

The Bass Coast team

The network comprises Bunurong Land Council (the Registered Aboriginal Party for and on behalf of the Bunurong of the Kulin Nation), Bass Coast Shire Council, Bass Coast Health, Westernport Water, Myli (My Community Libraries), Phillip Island Nature Parks, Bass Coast and South Gippsland Reconciliation Group, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Elders and Respected Peoples, South Gippsland Water, and West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

It has a total of seven completed RAPs to its name – with one underway and two in draft – and the organisations are on various stages of their RAP journeys: from first RAPs in draft, to organisations on their third (Westernport Water) and fourth (Phillip Island Nature Parks) RAPs.

RAPs then become the notes for the successful implementation and process of a good relationship.

The diversity of the network spans from an organisation that supplies essential water services to more than 23,000 customers, to the local reconciliation groups that have been around since the early 2000's, to driven community members like Patrice Mahoney OAM who was a key instigator and founding member of the BCRN.

The spark

After moving to the area more than 20 years ago from her Anaiwan Country in the Northern Tablelands of NSW, Aunty Patrice realised that the Bass Coast community had minimal knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal history, and limited opportunities or will to learn about – let alone celebrate – local Aboriginal achievements across its communities. There is also the reality of the relatively low known number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (around 500) living in the region.

She first took on the battle of getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags displayed alongside the Australian flag at the Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC) offices, something many communities across the country now take for granted. She encountered fierce opposition and racism in the process, but she succeeded in the end.

Aunty Patrice has worked with Phillip Island Nature Parks for over a decade, and with Bass Coast Health and Westernport Water to establish and implement their Reconciliation Action Plans. She contributes to boards and committees for Aboriginal health, education, and justice organisations while also advancing her own arts practice.

Aunty Patrice emphasises everyone has a role in the development of building trust, friendship and respect.

'When that happens is when we can create a landscape for shared stories, learning and culture. RAPs then become the notes for the successful implementation and process of a good relationship,' she said.

How they work together

Aside from steering their own workplace RAPs, the network meets regularly to check they are on track with their broader commitments to advancing reconciliation and recognition, focussing on the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities.

They work collectively on targets like employment and events, but they've also learned that some of that can be too hard or cumbersome to do collectively, and they must be smart and realistic about their spheres of influence and what they can achieve.

Strengthening knowledge and relationships through events, cultural respect and activities are some areas where they can leverage their impact by working together.

BCRN Co-chair, Geoff Russell from Westernport Water said the RAP framework provides the scaffolding for the network.

'We use our local knowledge and connections to keep the network strong and relevant locally, and we use the Reconciliation Action Plan framework to guide and measure our work both as individual organisations and as a network,' he said.

As of July this year, the network's impact boasted: 21 complete sets of flags flown across the region; 49 community events related to days of significance (eg NAIDOC, National Reconciliation Week), 47 workplace events and initiatives, and around 1500 employees have engaged in cultural learning.

BCRN organisations have contributed \$62,000 in pro bono activities and spent \$1.465 million with certified First Nations suppliers.

And there's more. However, the BCRN is not about big noting itself. Above all they want to show that – with the will to work together and to form strong relationships – this is the kind of impact that can be achieved within, and supported by, the RAP framework.

Think about what you could do in your area.

REGIONAL RECONCILIATION NETWORK TIPS

Keep it manageable, focus on your sphere of influence

Be clear on your focus and objectives

Concentrate on collective goals and public activities

Be mindful of the demands on First Nations people

Listen to First Nations voices, nothing about us without us

Lean on leadership

Provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, organisations and communities



Kinchela boys outside the mobile education centre bus. Photo: Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation

BONDS NEVER BROKEN

Over 20 years ago, a group of Kinchela Boys Home survivors set out on a journey of reconnection and reclamation through truth-telling. Now, they're sharing their stories to support other survivors and their families to heal.

In 2002, a group of Kinchela Boys Home survivors returned to the site of the home in Kempsey NSW for the first time since they were boys.

With strong childhood bonds never broken, the men were on a journey to reconnect with each other, reclaim their past and support survivors and their families to heal.

Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home was run by the NSW Government from 1924 – 1970 to house Aboriginal boys forcibly removed from their families in order to assimilate them into white Australian society. Built on the stolen land of the Dunghutti, it holds memories, painful and otherwise, for Survivors, and it is a place of deep importance for them, their families, and communities.

The return was not an easy process, as survivors had to confront their experiences – which many had buried. The deep bonds they formed as boys helped them to endure the abuse and harsh conditions of the boys' home, where they were assigned numbers instead of names.

'Some of the Uncles said we need an organisation that's ours, that looks after the brothers and looks after our families,' Tiffany McComsey, CEO of the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC) said.

'And from that journey this organisation started, and the hope that truth-telling would really lead to change.'

My love in my heart, as a kid, is still in that bloody home. It's a fact and returning the ownership to KBH survivors is going to allow me to return the love that I lost in that place.

Kinchela's mission

Over time, KBHAC have developed a survivor-led model of governance and healing. Survivors own their stories and tell them from a place of self-determination.

'We know how to develop the programs that we need to be able to help the rest of the families and brothers feel in a safer place,' said KBHAC Chair Uncle Michael Welsh.

KBHAC members emphasise the power of truth-telling to prevent a repetition of the abuse they endured and to create social change.

'Talking is never easy because it brings back memories that I shut out for so many years but if we don't keep doing this it allows this trauma to grow. That's the strength that I gain from this and the journey of the KBH brothers,' said Uncle Michael.

Truth-telling on the move

In 2020, KBHAC launched a mobile education centre, or 'site of conscience'. Set up in an old commuter bus, it is an immersive experience designed to convey hard truths about the Kinchela Boys Home.

The front half of the bus is an exhibition that was developed in consultation with the survivors. The back is a cinema and yarnning space, where a short, animated film produced by survivors is shown.

The immersive experience helps people to viscerally understand in a way that reading a report does not.

'We've had ministers who have been told multiple times and then all of a sudden, they're like, "Wait, you were numbers? You didn't have names?"' Tiffany said.

The mobile education centre also has a recording booth where visitors can share their reflections, community members can record their stories about KBH, and the Stolen Generations, and related community histories can be documented. These truths become an educational resource and record for future generations.

Tiffany explained that sharing these experiences between descendants of survivors allows for the sense of isolation to be broken down: 'It's like this light bulb goes on and it's like, it wasn't just my family.'

Driving engagement

The mobile education centre facilitates a safe space for meaningful engagement. It's a survivor-led opportunity to extend stories beyond the act of personally retelling their trauma and encouraging two-way interactions.

KBHAC wants the mobile education bus to connect with the hearts and minds of future generations, which is why its content and media target a young audience. The yarnning circle space brings in oral testimony, archival material, artifacts, film, images, audio and interactive materials.

The future of Kinchela

Uncle Michael and Tiffany emphasise that truth-telling is an ongoing process – institutional change is slow and intergenerational trauma cannot be addressed in a one-off event.

While the mobile education centre delivers truth-telling all over the country, the Kinchela Boys Home site has become a permanent place of truth-telling grounded in the power of tangible evidence.

The KBHAC has been campaigning to obtain ownership over the land so it can be turned into a national site of truth-telling and healing with the creation of a living museum and healing centre.

The site was added to the 2022 World Monuments Fund Watch List as one of 25 heritage sites of worldwide significance.

Creating a permanent site of truth-telling allows survivors and communities to reclaim their past by determining the future of the place that impacted them so deeply.

'My love in my heart, as a kid, is still in that bloody home. It's a fact and returning the ownership to KBH survivors is going to allow me to return the love that I lost in that place,' said former resident Roger Jarrett.

'Just the thought of going there makes you feel a little bit better than you were before, giving you a feeling that you achieved something. I achieved my last little bit of pain easing, you know.'

This account of truth-telling in action is based on a case study from the Recognising community truth-telling: An exploration of local truth-telling in Australia report. The collaborative study between Reconciliation Australia and Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation documents 25 community truth-telling projects.

Read the full report at: reconciliation.org.au/publications

See more of Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation's research: deakin.edu.au/adi



RECLAIMING THE LENS

Actor, writer, producer and director Trisha Morton-Thomas bites back at Australia's one-sided telling of history in the satirical documentary *Occupation: Native*. Photo: Ronin Films

First Nations filmmakers are reshaping Australian TV and cinema all while using the power of film to take back control of the lens and share their stories, cultures and perspectives with the world.

The earliest recorded film by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is a nine and a half minute short produced by Bill Onus in 1946. It is untitled, and collates seemingly unconnected footage of First Nations soldiers, boys painted for ceremony, and excerpts of a 1946 theatre piece about the prolonged Pilbara walk-off.

Onus' film was never released, and its existence only became widely known after its rediscovery in 2013 at the National Film and Sound Archive. Before that, 1970s activist and documentarian Bruce McGuinness was called the first Aboriginal filmmaker. He and his peers – like Essie Coffey, the first female Indigenous director – are heralded as pioneers of First Nations filmmaking and self-determination on-screen, whose prominence coincided with the explosion of the Australian New Wave in the 1970s and '80s.

But while mainstream Australian directors were emulating the Hollywood style and subject matter, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander filmmakers were harnessing the power of the camera to tell their stories through their own lens. The early documentary makers blazed a trail for the first narrative filmmakers like Brian Syron and Tracey Moffatt. Those who came after are now household names – Rachel Perkins, Warwick Thornton, Leah Purcell, Ivan Sen... the list goes on.

Since the 1980's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Media Associations have been producing video program content for both their community and wider audiences. Some of the earlier productions to crossover to mainstream include the documentary *Straight from Yudaman's Mouth* and the *Bush Mechanics* series, produced by Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Media Association, and Warlpiri Media respectively.

On broadcast television both the ABC and SBS premiered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander current affairs programs from 1989. *First in Line* (SBS) and *Blackout* (ABC) aired stories and documentaries produced and presented by First Nations journalists and producers.

These stories are more than entertainment; they are powerful. Our industry, and the nation, can only become stronger through these stories.

Screen Australia First Nations and NITV

During this period, in 1993, Screen Australia's First Nations department was established. Maori and Malyangapa woman Angela Bates has been Head of First Nations since 2021. 'Our core focus is to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and the powerful screen stories authored by First Nations Australians,' she said. 'To see ourselves reflected on screen authentically is incredibly powerful and important.'

Another huge step forward in the growth of First Nations presence on Australian screens came in 2007, with the launch of Australia's first Indigenous TV station, National Indigenous Television (NITV).

'The role of NITV is to, first and foremost, tell Indigenous stories,' said Adam Manovic, a Gurang Gurang man and Acting Head of Commissioning and Production at NITV. 'Since NITV started 17 years ago there's been a massive move forward and you now see First Nations faces in the mainstream, which is such a big win.'

And the stats prove it. Screen Australia's *Seeing Ourselves* report from 2023 – which surveyed Australian television from 2016-2021 – found that First Nations people made up 7.2% of characters in Australian productions – up from 4.8% in the previous reporting period (2011-2015). It's direct evidence of the work of these bodies and others like them in widening the lens of the Australian screen.

'It's proof of what's possible when we are empowered to tell stories from our perspective,' Angela Bates said. 'It gives credibility to stories in a way that can't be replicated, slowly breaking down stereotypes and barriers. First Nations-led dramas like *Mystery Road*, and *Total Control* no longer just appeal to local viewers but global audiences too.'

Warwick Thornton's *The New Boy* was the only Australian film to feature at Venice Film Festival this year, and Thornton's son Dylan River's newest project, *Thou Shalt Not Steal*, premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in September before its release.

This work is not limited to narrative content. 'We have journalists, we have news broadcasters... pretty much the most important thing, because getting news out and telling it in our voice is so important,' said Manovic. 'And then events we do like the Koori Knockout, like the National Indigenous Fashion Awards, the National Indigenous Music Awards, NAIDOC... a lot of the people who are working on these shows are First Nations.'

There is also a big focus on documentaries, many of which are part of the Reconciliation Film Club catalogue.

Reconciliation Film Club

In 2018, SBS and NITV worked with Reconciliation Australia to launch the Reconciliation Film Club (RFC), a catalogue of episodic and feature-length documentaries – all from First Nations filmmakers – that are available to hire for screenings by the public. Hosting a screening brings people together and supports First Nations filmmakers, who earn 100% of proceedings. In the increasingly fractured distribution landscape, initiatives like Reconciliation Film Club are vital.

'As a small, specialist distributor of independent social documentaries, we are genuinely enthusiastic about Reconciliation Film Club and love it when one of our films is selected for its slate,' said Andrew Pike, Managing Director at Ronin Films, distributors of multiple film club titles. 'In the current climate, popular streaming platforms are hard to compete with: they don't want our social documentaries, and rarely take First Nations stories, so the work of Reconciliation Film Club is really important to us and our filmmakers – and to the audiences.'

Reconciliation Film Club offers films and documentaries on art, activism, history, politics, justice, and culture. Screening a film is an opportunity to learn more about issues that affect Australia as a whole, or simply to connect with your own community.

Ingrid Langtry from Assemble Papers organised one of the more than 150 film club screenings during National Reconciliation Week. 'Screening a locally relevant piece was important for our work place,' she said. '*Kutcha's Koorioke* series features local spaces that we engage with regularly and that helps connect people with stories.'

Hosting a Reconciliation Film Club screening is one of the many small – but important – actions you can take towards advancing reconciliation.

'These stories are more than entertainment; they are powerful,' Angela Bates concluded. 'Our industry, and the nation, can only become stronger through these stories.'

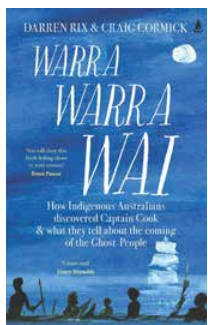
To request a Reconciliation Film Club screening and to access downloadable screening kits, discussion guides, features articles and ideas to support a successful event, visit: sbs.com.au/nitv/reconciliationfilmclub

LOOK FOR A BOOK!

Warra Warra Wai

Darren Rix and Craig Cormick

Simon and Schuster



Australians have a history problem. Too few know the story of Australia's violent creation; the frontier wars, massacres, First Nations

resistance and the loss and suffering that resulted from this continent's colonial conquest by the British.

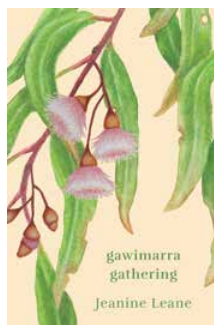
Warra Warra Wai details the first episode in that process; the voyage of James Cook's Endeavour up the east coast of Australia. These stories are told with both pathos and humour through the eyes of the peoples descended from those who witnessed it from the beaches and headlands of their Country. From the GunaiKurnai people in today's Gippsland to the Kaurareg people of the southern Torres Straits, this book reveals the oral histories passed down from that time and contemporary reflections on what Cook's voyage meant for First Nations peoples. As the authors themselves observe, 'The determination of First Nations people to have the truth told is strong, and the stories will be told.'

If we are to build a just and mature nation, these are the stories that Australians need to read.

Gawimarra: Gathering

Jeanine Leane

University of Queensland Press



Reading Jeanine Leane's third poetry collection, *gawimarra gathering*, is a bit like engaging in low-level telepathy, as the immediate, unrestricted nature of the form allows

us a peek inside Leane's mind. And just as our own minds are always moving, from one idea to the next, the poems in this collection never hew to a particular theme, but the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual throughline is clear.

Loving, richly detailed evocations of family, culture, and Country like *The Honey Gatherers* sit alongside sharp, deeply considered, sometimes experimental excoriations of colony like *Forced into images (a poem to my colonisers)*. There are poems that examine – intimately and from on high – Leane's personal relationship with contemporary politics, like *On International Women's Day*, and the state of the natural and human worlds, like *Read the Rivers*.

Wiradjuri language is present throughout the book, dropping in and out as if to emphasise the disconnect between cultures, and between Leane's own past and present. Or perhaps it is a natural consequence of how Leane views the structure and journey of the collection: "Now is then is now." Always was, always will be.

The Skin I'm In

Steph Tisdell

Pan Macmillan Australia



Steph Tisdell's debut young adult novel is a hilarious delight that – with every page – sends you right back to your own awkward high

school years in all the best ways.

Layla's a headstrong 17-year-old with a big personality but is determined to fit in this year. It's her last year of school after all. We follow Layla as she tries to navigate typical teenage struggles—like friendships, unrequited crushes, and feeling left out. However, being the only First Nations student at her high school makes everything more complicated.

Things change when her troubled cousin Marley moves in, forcing Layla to confront her identity in a whole new way.

Tisdell does a brilliant job of blending humour with deeper themes, making you laugh, cry and laugh again. Layla's journey through her final year of high school is full of joy, tough lessons, and moments of self-discovery. It's a story about kindness, family, and finding strength in who you are.

Always Was Always Will Be
Aunty Fay Muri and Sue Lawson
 Magabala Books



Always Was, Always Will Be shares the ongoing fight for justice by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, from the first resistance against European invasion to the Day of Mourning protests in 1938, and more recently the 2023 Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum - and much more in between.

This book allows for a learning journey about First Nations justice and rights from the perspective of Boonwurrung Elder Aunty Fay Muri who said, '*Always Was Always Will Be* is an educational book for teachers and students alike. The stories in this book need to be told and are crucial to our First Nations history.'

A collaborative publication between Magabala Books and Reconciliation Australia, *Always Was, Always Will Be* allows First Nations children to see themselves in stories and is also vital to build non-First Nations children's knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander truth-telling and reconciliation.

An engaging read not just for young readers, but for parents, caregivers, grandparents, and all members of society.



***Waku – Minaral A Minalay*: Christine Anu**

Pride in her Torres Strait Islander heritage and a desire to preserve her ancestral languages has inspired Christine Anu's first album in almost 30 years, *Waku – Minaral A Minalay*. In fact, the album is largely based on songs originally written by her grandfather, Nadi Anu after she learned they were preserved in an AIATSIS archive.

'I hope that there's a sense of that connection the listener gets when they hear me singing my grandfather's words,' said Christine.

'For me, it's really about that connection back to my roots. Finding that and celebrating that.'

The first single and title song refers to the pandanus mats that signify a life's journey from cradle to grave in Torres Strait Islander culture. *Waku* translates to mat, *Minaral* means colours and *Minalay* means patterns.

'This album means so much to me and my family. The single *Waku - Minaral a Minalay* is the pinnacle of the album,' Christine explained.

Christine's evocative vocals are front and centre on *Waku*, but it also features soundscapes from Thursday Island as well as traditional instruments from the Torres Strait.

'You can only preserve [language] if you're speaking, singing it,' she said.

'It's been a beautiful journey just discovering all this music that my grandfather made about his time on the sea, his love of the sea, his love of his island home.'



National RAP Conference and Indigenous Governance Awards Gala Dinner

Now More Than Ever

6–7 November 2024

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre
(Meanjin)

The National RAP Conference 2024 will gather RAP representatives from over 3000 organisations for two days of collaboration, learning and action as we respond to the urgent work of reconciliation. On the first night, we'll celebrate and showcase the success of organisations across Australia that demonstrate leading Indigenous governance practice at the Indigenous Governance Awards 2024 Gala Dinner.

rapconference.com.au



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