

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Organisation: Reconciliation Australia
Name: Ms Barbara Livesey
Position: Chief Executive Officer



Hon Ian West MLC
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
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Dear Mr West

Inquiry into closing the gap – overcoming Indigenous disadvantage

Reconciliation Australia's ambition since early 2006 has been to close the seventeen year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. That the life of an Indigenous child is likely to end 17 years earlier than a non-Indigenous child's is not acceptable in an affluent country like ours. All the work we do with our project partners is dedicated to narrowing that gap. Our three core areas of business are:

- Identifying, analysing and sharing evidence of approaches that actually work in generating good results for Indigenous people
- Educating and engaging the Australian community to build win/win relationships and partnerships
- Influencing governments and others sectors to develop evidence-based policies and practices.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program launched in July 2006 was specifically set up to provide a mechanism for all sectors – private, public, not for profit and Indigenous – to contribute to closing the gap. All RAP organisations take measurable, targeted actions in three key areas of **relationships, respect** and **opportunities**.

As we do not have the resources to make a detailed submission to your inquiry, we have enclosed three documents that highlight our views on the essential elements that must be put in place to close the gap. These are:

- What works in Indigenous affairs
- Reconciliation Action Plans, Reconciliation Australia co-chair Mark Leibler AC for Social Compass magazine, April 2008
- Reflections on the 2020 Summit, Options for the Future of Indigenous Australia, by Barbara Livesey and Jason Glanville, Reconciliation Australia

We hope you will find these documents useful to your inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Livesey
Chief Executive
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What Works in Indigenous Affairs

Any policies for Indigenous communities should be based on evidence of what works, supported by strong research into how it works and why. The numerous reports, studies and research papers published over the years outline clear and repeated principles that can guide successful Indigenous programs and policies.

As Reconciliation Australia Director Fred Chaney says, *'...the answers, while complex, are now known. And that means... governments, and all of us involved, have no excuses left for failure.'*

Here are 10 ingredients for successful Indigenous policies and programs:

- Genuine engagement with communities in talking about, developing and implementing policies.
- Active and well-supported Indigenous led decision-making in program-design.
- Grass-roots, bottom-up approaches that knit together local knowledge within a national framework.
- Local and region specific programs that are tailored to the needs of particular communities rather than one size fits all approaches.
- Investment in and support for local Indigenous leadership.
- Long-term investment in strengthening communities at a local level to decide and manage their own lives.
- Programs and policy approaches that are geared towards long-term achievements.
- Real investment of dollars and people based on need and ongoing support for programs that work.
- Regular and independent public evaluation of government programs and policies to make sure we learn from mistakes and successes.
- Co-operative approaches by State, Federal and Local Governments and their agencies which reduce the burden of duplication and red-tape on community organizations.

These points are a summary of recommendations and findings from the following sources:

The Productivity Commission Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2006, 2005 & 2004

The Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2006

Anderson, P. & Wild, R. Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred" Report, 2007

Reconciliation Australia & CAEPR, Hunt, J. & Smith, D. Indigenous Community Governance Project: Year Two Research Findings 2006 and Building Indigenous Community Governance in Australia; Preliminary Research Findings 2005

Dr Ken Henry, Treasury Secretary "Creating the right incentives for Indigenous Development" Address to the Cape York Institute Conference, 2007



Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Action Plans and the Role of Corporate Australia

By Mark Leibler AC



Biography:

Mark Leibler is the non-Indigenous Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia. He is the senior partner in the Melbourne-based law firm Arnold Bloch Leibler and a prominent leader of the Australian and international Jewish community. A specialist in taxation, Mark has served in various advisory capacities on tax matters, including to the Commissioner of Taxation, and regularly lectures and writes on taxation and related subjects. Mark is a former director of Coles Myer Ltd and also serves on other company boards.

Abstract

Reconciliation Australia is an independent, not-for-profit organisation fostering reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for the wellbeing of the nation. Its vision is “an Australia that provides equal life chances for all, recognising and respecting the special place, culture and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians”. In this article, Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia, Mark Leibler discusses the role of Corporate Australia in promoting reconciliation through their participation in a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Introduction

The recent apology by the Australian Parliament to members of the ‘stolen generations’ - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were removed from their families and communities as children under race-based policies of past governments - has been a transformative experience for the nation.

Our new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, made the apology because he recognised it was the right thing to do for Australia. Right because it acknowledges that successive governments devised and implemented seriously flawed policy which damaged people's lives. And right because it is the basis for us to build the kind of respectful relationships we need to get better outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and for all of us. While we have a lot to be proud of, Australia's history includes serious mistakes, and it is part of our maturing as a nation that we acknowledge those mistakes.

The apology is, of course, only one aspect of what needs to be done to close the unacceptable 17-year gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Some commentators in this country have created a false divide between so-called 'symbolic' aspects of reconciliation and practical issues like health and education. The reality is that how people feel about themselves, and whether they feel their culture and history is acknowledged and respected is a key element of facing problems and being able to turn things around.

The apology has provided a foundation of respect on which we can build a proper relationship and work together to improve the life chances of Indigenous people. It is only one piece of the complex puzzle of reconciliation, but it is the corner piece that sets us on our way – the piece without which the full picture cannot be formed.

The opportunity now is to keep all sectors of the community engaged in the business of reconciliation, and move people along the spectrum from vague interest to empathy and active involvement.

From day one, Reconciliation Australia has worked closely with corporate Australia. In many ways, we have found that **business understands the value and nature of reconciliation better than government, particularly in industries that engage with Indigenous people on a regular basis like mining and banking**. The difference between our partnerships with corporates and with government agencies has been the capacity of business to be more creative and flexible in the way it builds relationships with Indigenous stakeholders – and also its preparedness to set targets and devise strategies to meet those targets.

"I've run organisations for a long time and I make no bones about it. If we don't set targets, we're not going to achieve them. If you don't measure where you are and where you want to be, I can assure you no one is accountable."
John McFarlane, Chief Executive of the ANZ Bank

In 2006, Reconciliation Australia launched the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program to capture and extend the willingness and capacity of corporate and other organisations to improve the life chances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Organisations, of all kinds, are supported and encouraged to sign up to their own tailored Reconciliation Action Plan.

What is a RAP?

The RAP program was developed as a forward-looking aspect of last year's 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, Australia's most successful, in which more than 90% of voters supported the idea of equality of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The decade-long campaign that eventuated in this spectacular result was conducted by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working side by side to move the nation forward.

It was a grass roots campaign that demonstrated how **change is often driven not by people in power but through the determination of ordinary citizens.**

In launching the RAP program in July 2006, then Prime Minister John Howard said: "They (RAPs) remind us that reconciliation will come not as a result of eloquent rhetoric or high-level communiqués. It will come through Indigenous and other Australians taking millions of small steps in the right direction."

So what is a RAP?

A Reconciliation Action Plan is a tool that helps organisations build positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It provides a format for exploring how reconciliation can advance business/organisational objectives. And it represents an organisation's public contribution towards the national effort to close the Indigenous life expectancy gap.

A RAP formalises an organisation's contribution by encouraging it to identify clear actions and realistic targets, as well as lessons learnt. While each organisation shapes its own RAP, all plans include a creative blend of activities in three fundamental areas of reconciliation: building respectful relationships, demonstrating respect for Australia's Indigenous culture and creating opportunities for Indigenous people.

Eight organisations, including three corporates - BHP Billiton, ANZ and Canberra Investment Corporation - participated in the launch as 'trailblazers', signing up at the outset to develop a RAP.

It's created new awareness and established a road map for ways our staff can take action and participate in a way that also underpins their own values. It's

created significant pride across the organisation. It's also given our Indigenous staff the confidence and platform to share their backgrounds, which is a big shift for ANZ.

Adam Mooney, then Head of Community Development Finance, ANZ.

The first large corporate to launch a completed RAP was the ANZ whose plan set the benchmark in terms of the range and level of specific and broad ranging targets in employment (from trainees to management positions), cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous staff and financial literacy support for customers.

In launching the company's RAP, then chief executive of the ANZ John McFarlane, promoted the value of the program in this way:

"Over the last five years we have strengthened relationships through our Indigenous financial inclusion and employment programs and started to develop trust amongst Indigenous communities, but we have a long way to go. Financial literacy, access to appropriate banking services and employment in real jobs are all vital in enabling more Indigenous Australians to improve general wellbeing and increasing life choices. We also acknowledge that in our business, our branches, our call centres we need to improve our own capacity to welcome, understand and better meet the needs of our Indigenous customers. I see this Reconciliation Action Plan as a great framework to do this."

In 18 months, 50 RAPs have been developed by organisations and registered by Reconciliation Australia, including large corporates (Qantas, ANZ, BHP Billiton, Foxtel), government agencies (State and Federal), sporting codes (NRL and ARL), hospitals, schools and other organisations. There are literally hundreds more in development, among them Australian businesses in a range of sectors including financial services, mining, professional services, transport and retail.

Each of these individual RAPs represents a significant change in how Australia is doing business with its Indigenous citizens. The cumulative impact of the program has the potential to make real inroads in closing the life expectancy gap.

The benefits of developing a RAP

A RAP provides an organisation with a framework for the future, detailing steps and priorities to achieve Indigenous equality. This framework covers activities we know, from international and domestic research, can make a positive difference in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage – fostering respectful relationships, respecting the special contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Australia, and working together to ensure Indigenous children have the same life opportunities as other children in this prosperous country.

International experience and the growing evidence of what works in Australia proves that all these ingredients are vital. New Zealand, the United States and Canada have all improved their Indigenous life expectancy statistics. Australia has not. But a critical mass of RAPs will support the important role of governments in seeing Australia achieving in this area, as we do in so many others.

Encouraging corporates to engage in the RAP program was never going to succeed if it was based entirely on moral obligation. But as the program expands, the business case for corporates being a part of this national effort is becoming clearer.

By successfully implementing a RAP, corporates recognise they are helping to create a fairer society and at the same time they derive direct economic benefits. And the business case is continuing to build in this environment of post-apology optimism:

- ❖ **Value alignment** – To earn the trust of the community, to inspire staff, to have courage and create sustainable shareholder value
- ❖ **Staff engagement** – many corporates recognise that staff expects them to play a role in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. Younger staff in particular are interested in the social responsibility of their employer
- ❖ **Inclusive and confident customer base** – corporates who have Indigenous customers and/or clients are keen to develop a more broad-based relationship
- ❖ **Compliance** – frontline staff often lack confidence in dealing with Indigenous customers and are recognised as not meeting some customer needs.
- ❖ **Shift in customer and staff demographics** – generation Y (born after 1980) has a greater connection to social and corporate responsibility and makes this a day to day part of their lives. Consumer and employment choices are, and will increasingly be, influenced by organisation reputation and community orientation.
- ❖ **Timing is right** – 2008 is clearly a significant year for reconciliation and Indigenous affairs. Corporates want to be, and be seen to be, part of the action.

The RAP program is a rigorous and legitimate way in which corporates can go about realising CSR goals and objectives. In a number of industries, for example the banking industry, institutions are experiencing market saturation, with the market wholly absorbed in existing products and services. This encourages banks to look for ways of 'discovering' new markets and mobilising new customers – encouraging and properly servicing Indigenous people as customers and clients is a key aspect in the development of a RAP.

Creating service environments that are safe and accessible to 'new' consumers increases their access to the products. Creating these safe environments might mean hiring more Indigenous staff or increasing the cultural awareness of existing staff. Hiring Indigenous service staff means that Indigenous customers more readily trust the institutions and feel welcome.

RAP organisations report massive increases in cross cultural competencies of their staff, particularly senior managers.

Next Steps: Measuring, evaluating and sharing learnings

Capturing and sharing these learnings from the RAP program is the next, all-important and ongoing phase for Reconciliation Australia. Organisations whose RAPs are reaching the 12 month mark are required to provide an honest review of where they have achieved their targets in employment, cultural awareness training and other activities. Where targets have not been met, the lessons are equally valuable and we will be sharing what we learn among RAP organisations, and with policy makers.

The Reconciliation Action Plan demonstrates a real commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Australians as it relates to our own area of activity in subscription television. I am pleased that FOXTEL has been in dialogue with Indigenous stakeholders and advisers and potential industry partners to develop the Reconciliation Action Plan.
Kim Williams, CEO Foxtel.

Arnold Bloch Leibler (ABL) was the first law firm to launch a RAP in March of this year. One aspect of our plan is to actively share what we have learned in working with Indigenous clients over many years through supporting other professional service providers to become part of the growing RAP community.

We have been interacting with a substantial number of Indigenous organisations through our public interest law practice but developing a RAP gave us the opportunity to lend structure to what we were doing, and help us agree on key performance indicators.

From personal experience, I can now tell other organisations considering whether to do a RAP that, as well as engaging them in something positive and morally right, being involved in this program offers clear business benefits. ABL's work in this area is critical in attracting the best law graduates and making ABL a place where smart, motivated people want to get a job. Without question, our clients are also impressed to see what we are doing.

The wonderful thing about the journey the firm has taken with our RAP is that, for the first time, instead of contributing essentially in terms of empathy and good intentions, a variety of people from within the firm have started thinking about what we can do in a tangible, measurable way - how we can really make a real difference to people's lives.

Organisations across different sectors now understand the mix of changes in practices and relationships necessary to get better outcomes, and they are prepared to make these changes ... so let us now be prepared as Australians to focus ourselves on closing the life expectancy gap, and to be measurable and accountable on the success of our efforts.

Professor Mick Dodson, Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia

For information on the RAP program and to download a toolkit, go to reconciliation.org.au or phone one of Reconciliation Australia's RAP team on 02 6273 9200.

Reflections on the 2020 Summit, Options for the Future of Indigenous Australia

By Barbara Livesey and Jason Glanville, Reconciliation Australia

We went into the 2020 Summit with a shared conviction that the only way to succeed in Indigenous affairs is to build a relationship between our peoples. We told our networks the day before the summit that as delegates from Reconciliation Australia we were looking to build ‘a mutually respectful relationship that provides the essential foundation for a national plan to close the gap’.

We weren’t talking about building relationships just to be nice to one another. We were arguing that without mutually respectful relationships we can’t make progress in closing the gaps in Indigenous children’s health, education and overall life expectancy. The Head of the Northern Territory Intervention, Major general Dave Chalmers, said as much last week when he told media that the intervention was suffering because of a lack of communication and cross cultural understanding on the part of those trying to deliver services to Indigenous children.

Another Australian Government official admitted to us last week that her agency designs and delivers services to Indigenous families without engaging them in any step of the process. “And then we shake our heads and wonder why Indigenous people don’t turn up to use our service,” she said. The official was clear that her agency needed to fundamentally change the way it does business with Indigenous clients. That’s what building relationships is about – talking, listening and respecting each other’s views and ideas so that we can get somewhere in achieving our shared wish to improve the lives of Indigenous children.

Building relationships is **all** about practical outcomes – in health, in education, in housing, in economic independence - all the areas where Indigenous children are lagging behind other Australian children. That’s what we were all talking about in our stream at the 2020 summit. It’s not a case of prioritising some wafty conceptual idea over the welfare and education of children or economic empowerment.

It is about understanding and responding in a way that recognises Indigenous children’s safety and education as an inherent citizenship right. And it’s about being honest with ourselves that this won’t happen, neither the understanding let alone any long term positive outcome for Indigenous children, unless we have the respectful relationships we need.

One of our groups which included a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts including Marcia Ella Duncan, Mark Bin Bakar, Peter Yu, Mick Adams, Noel Pearson and Adele Cox described our ambition for a young Indigenous family in 2020 in the following terms:

The family would be functioning and confident, with at least one parent in paid employment. This parent would confidently stride down Collins Street in Melbourne,

well dressed and well educated. They would be able to speak their own language and wouldn't have had to compromise their cultural integrity to succeed in life. Their family values would be steeped in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander obligations and perspective and there would be strong leadership within the family.

The children would be attending school and would have options for accessing high quality education – either through existing boarding schools or mainstream schools that would be capable of meeting their needs and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge. They would be safe, secure and protected through the justice system with a strong sense of their own responsibilities. The family would have its own private space in an 'uncrowded' home that allowed parents and children to interact as a family unit – separate from any community space.

How do we achieve this ambition for a young Indigenous family by 2020? The discussion across the two days at the Summit brought up many ideas and was characterised by optimism, enthusiasm, a recognition that both short term and long term strategies were required, and that Indigenous participants across all streams had much expertise to contribute.

There were strong, recurring themes and ideas that emerged, and were well supported by the majority of participants who attended both days of the Indigenous stream. Those who dipped in to our stream for only the first day or only the second day brought particular viewpoints but did not have the opportunity to hear the breadth, depth and diversity of views. Some reflections on the Indigenous Affairs stream reported in the media since Sunday come from people who were not present at all.

It's also important in all of this for the media to stop stimulating then characterising a diversity of views among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as conflict, playing one against the other in a game that will only hamper positive change where we all recognise it's needed.

Discussion, debate, agreement and disagreement on a range of ideas in the Indigenous stream should be reported and viewed in the same way as it was in the economic stream, as healthy and constructive. As Sana Nakata said in her inspiring speech during the opening session of the Summit, "Every person's opinion should be treated with respect whilst being able to stand up to robust discussion".

That's what we felt in the Indigenous stream, having participated in it over the full two days.

It is ludicrous and insulting to suggest that our group did not care sufficiently about Indigenous children. Our deliberations centred on ambitions and ideas to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up to be healthy, strong, proud, well educated and active participants in the Australian economy.

The fact is that we talked about short term imperatives to protect and educate children at the same time as discussing the ingredients of a longer term plan to build the nation in a way that encourages generations of Indigenous children to flourish.

Australia can and must work on both the short and long term objectives concurrently.

We tried to do that at the summit, and we recorded our ideas in the following way:

1. Ambition: To build on the goodwill shown by the Australian people during the recent Apology, by committing to a national dialogue to negotiate a new definition of our relationship and how we might define it in the constitution or elsewhere.

nb: This ambition was reflected in the Governance stream which stressed the importance of Indigenous involvement in the development of a statutory bill or charter of rights.

Impact on an Aboriginal child – the child will have access to government services that are based on principles of mutual respect and equality leading to the right services at the right time

2. Ambition: To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and cultural integrity is valued and woven into Australia's global identity

nb: This ambition was reflected in the Creative stream which spoke of the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and that it should be a source of pride for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians

Impact on an Aboriginal child - the child will go to school knowing that they will be expected to achieve like any other child and that their Aboriginal culture will be valued and recognised within the school – they will want to attend school.

3. Ambition: To re-engineer how governments do business with and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to hold governments accountable for their service delivery responsibilities

nb: This ambition was reflected in various streams that spoke of the need for greater levels of accountability across all governments and the need to reform federalism

Impact on an Aboriginal child – the child will have access to government services that are meeting their needs – they will be efficiently, effectively and respectfully designed and delivered

4. Ambition: To build economic and enterprise opportunities among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Impact on an Aboriginal child – the child will see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people running their own businesses and in senior roles in companies, and they will have strong role models demonstrating what is possible for their future

Under each of these ambitions, there were a number of ideas put forward and energetically discussed that have not been written up or published as yet – we look forward to seeing the breadth of our ideas presented for the Australian public to consider.

In the meantime, we at Reconciliation Australia alongside many fellow summiteers, are getting on with the work we can see making a difference every day – in particular, our Reconciliation Action Plan program that involves businesses, government agencies, sporting codes, schools, hospitals and so many other organisations setting specific, measurable reconciliation targets and building respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to deliver them.

22 April 2008