

# Journal of Indigenous Policy – Issue 5

Theme: Reconciliation the Way Forward  
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## Articles:

### *Introduction: Reconciliation – the Way Forward*

Editors:

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**Jason FIELD** - is a Senior Policy Officer at the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

On May 30-31, 2005, Reconciliation Australia hosted the National Planning Workshop on Reconciliation. It brought together key stakeholders with the aim of creating a new, honest conversation about the future of the reconciliation process, what needs to be done and who is responsible for making sure that it happens. It also sought to establish and develop effective relationships between the people and groups interested in the process of reconciliation, ensuring that where they exist they are strategic and sustainable. This emphasis on partnerships is based on the premise that the work of reconciliation will only get done through real partnerships based on equality and inclusion.

The papers in this edition were prepared in the lead-up to the workshop and covered the symbolic, substantive, economic, cultural, educational, strategic and aspirational aspects of the reconciliation agenda. These papers, taken together, offer a snapshot of where we are on the issue of reconciliation and what work still needs to be done.

We have also included some of the key speeches given at the workshop. What was apparent then – and can be drawn from the addresses delivered by the Prime Minister John Howard, Senator Amanda Vanstone, Hon. Kim Beasley MP and Patrick Dodson – is that there are very different views as to how we, as a nation, achieve it. These perspectives provide insight into how the debate is currently conceptualised.

We conclude with a reflective piece from Jason Field that suggests what the next steps for continuing a relevant and effective reconciliation movement should be.

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## *National Strategies to Advance Reconciliation*

### **Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation –**

This Roadmap for Reconciliation contains four national strategies. These strategies set out the most important actions for individuals, communities, organisations and governments. They recommend ways to transform our commitment to reconciliation into actions, so helping the nation put right the legacy of the past.

1. The national strategy to sustain the Reconciliation Process;

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2. The national strategy to promote recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights;
3. The national strategy to overcome disadvantage; and
4. The national strategy for economic independence.

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### *Commonwealth Government Response – Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge*

The Council's Final Report, which also contained the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and the four national strategies from the Roadmap for Reconciliation, is a substantial document reflecting the enormous work undertaken by the council for Aboriginal Reconciliation between its inception in 1991 and its formal conclusion on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2000 with the presentation of the Final Report.

*Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge* is the Executive Summary of the government's response to the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (the Council)

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### *An Evidence Based Analysis of Indigenous Population and Diversity*

**John TAYLOR** – is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy research, Australian National University.

And **Nicholas BIDDLE** – is a Senior Policy Researcher at the Australian Bureau of Statistics .

From time immemorial until the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1788, the entire Australian continent and offshore islands were the sole domain of peoples whose descendants are now commonly referred to as Indigenous Australians. Over these millennia it is estimated that some 2.5 billion such people were born and died. The actual size and distribution of those present when Phillip's fleet moored at Werrong (Sydney Cove) remains a matter for conjecture, though best estimates range between 500,000 and 750,000 with highest densities in well watered areas. At the beginning of the twenty first century, and in light of deliberations surrounding reconciliation, it is worth reflecting that the Indigenous population is estimated once again to be around 500,000 thus providing a sense of being back where we started over 200 years ago, at least in terms of population size. Of course, as Australians, we are far from where we started back then, as major demographic transformations have ensued along the way – the continental population has increased 40-fold and at varying times decimated, relocated, assimilated, emancipated, rejuvenated and enumerated. It is the last of these actions that allow us to report here on the relative circumstances of indigenous people in modern Australia.

One profound transformation over the past 200 years has been a geographic shift in population distribution with most Indigenous people now resident in urban and metropolitan centres.

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### *Sustaining the Reconciliation Process*

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**Shelley REYS** – is the Managing director of Arilla Aboriginal Training and Development.

And **David COOPER** – is the former national director for Australians for national Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR).

The National Reconciliation Workshop 2005 aims to consider and endorse a plan of action for positively engaging Indigenous peoples and the wider community in the lead up to the national Reconciliation Convention 2007, and beyond.

This paper considers issues relevant to sustaining the reconciliation process into the future. In doing so it:

- Examines the reconciliation process in the lead-up and subsequent to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's (CAR) final report 2000;
- Identifies key lessons learnt; and
- Clarifies issues to consider in planning the next steps towards the 2007 Convention.

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### *Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights*

**Megan DAVIS** - is a Senior Researcher at the Jumbunna Indigenous House of learning, University of Technology, Sydney.

In recent years advocacy for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights has been abandoned politically. Nevertheless, the recognition of rights remains a fundamental objective for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Such recognition is integral to the achievement of reconciliation in Australia, as evidenced by its inclusion in the National Strategy in the Roadmap for reconciliation that was presented to Corroboree 2000:

The full exercise and enjoyment of the human rights of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is an essential foundation for reconciliation.

This paper draws upon the objectives of one of the four National Strategies in the roadmap for reconciliation, "Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights". It provides an overview of the framework of human rights, relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders rights, that exist internationally and domestically: universal human rights, Indigenous specific rights and domestic legal protections.

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### *Enhancing Economic Independence*

**Jon ALTMAN** – is Professor and Director of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.

And **Joe MORRISON** is a visiting Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University.

In *Reconciliation: Australia's Challenge*, The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (2000:113-14) proposed a National Strategy for Economic Independence. This Strategy sought a combination of economic independence equality and equity. Indigenous Australians should be in a position to enjoy the time this may need to be interpreted differentially – for

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some, economic lifestyles. This discussion paper provides some perspectives on how economic independence might be enhanced.

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### *Contributions from State and Territory Governments*

#### **Western Australia:**

This paper examines Aboriginal reconciliation from the Western Australia Government's perspective. The paper is structured around the four 'pillars of reconciliation':

1. Promoting recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights;
2. Overcoming disadvantage;
3. Sustaining and growing the reconciliation process; and
4. Enhancing economic independence.

#### **New South Wales:**

The NSW Government is actively committed to bridging the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This paper traces the commitment of the NSW Government to recognising the injustices of the past and to establishing partnerships between the Aboriginal community, government agencies and the private and community sectors to advance the rights of the Aboriginal community, and overcome the inequity that Aboriginal people continue to face.

#### **Northern Territory:**

While the Northern Territory Government has not formally responded to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation recommendations contained in its final report, a number of the policies and program activities outlined are consistent with the directions identified by the Council and its successor Reconciliation Australia.

This paper provides an overview of the Northern Territory Government's key activities addressing, the four pillars of reconciliation contained in the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's (CAR) final report:

1. Promoting recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights;
  2. Overcoming disadvantage;
  3. Sustaining and growing the reconciliation process; and
  4. Enhancing economic independence.
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### *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*

**Jason FIELD** – is a Senior Policy Officer at the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

The basis upon which reconciliation can be said to have been achieved, remains a somewhat vexed issue. It is taken as an absolute given, however, that the overcoming of Indigenous disadvantage is fundamental. Reconciliation simply cannot be achieved, or even

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viewed to be heading in the right direction, unless there is clear evidence that the extent of the disadvantage that Indigenous peoples experience compared with other Australians is being positively addressed.

This paper argues the need for greater clarity with respect to the relationship between overcoming Indigenous disadvantage and the achievement of reconciliation. By this I mean we need to have a better appreciation of how achievements, or a lack of achievements, inform the reconciliation process. Mindful of the need for a long-term outlook this paper poses the question of how the reconciliation process can add value to strategies for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, rather than simply being subject to such outcomes.

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***Addresses by the Prime Minister, John Howard; Federal Labor Leader, Kim Beazley; Senator Amanda Vanstone; and Patrick Dodson.***

Copies of addresses delivered at the National Reconciliation Planning Workshop, Old Parliament House, Canberra 30-31 May 2005.

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### ***The Next Steps in the Reconciliation Process***

**Jason FIELD** – is a Senior Policy Officer at the NSW Aboriginal Land Council.

Many commentators view the year 2000 as the high point of reconciliation. The bridge walks, the million or so walkers who were prepared to say sorry, the ceremony where every head of government in Australia received the outcomes of 10 years of public consultation and deliberation on reconciliation conjure vivid images. Inextricably linked to those images are the ceremonies in the same year around the Olympic games in which images of Australia brought our stories together as never before on a great nation occasion. An Indigenous woman, Cathy Freeman became the focus of our national hopes. The mixing of those events was made explicit by the former Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's (CAR) adoption of one of the Olympic images on the cover of its final report

Since 2000, the task of advancing reconciliation has been that of the mosaic of reconciliation organisations, including RA. State/Territory reconciliation bodies, some of which are supported by government, local reconciliation groups, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) and the national Sorry Day Committees. With limited resources, RA concentrated on areas, which in its view, responded to widespread Indigenous comment that reconciliation had to make a difference in their lives. With the support of a range of stakeholders, it worked on indigenous governance, access to finance and banking facilities, domestic violence and the rights agenda, publicly supporting others when they were working on reconciliation issues.

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### ***Book Review – Black Chicks Talking***

**Jilpia JONES** – is a Research Officer (History) at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

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A personal commentary on a book, published by Hodder Headline Australia, in which talented Film and Stage actor, Leah Purcell, brought together a group of young Aboriginal women so they could share their experiences of what it is like to be an Aboriginal woman in Australia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.