



25 November 2021

The House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Inquiry into “How the corporate sector establishes models of best practice to foster better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers”**

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry. We recognise the importance of ensuring the corporate sector better engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our submission will focus specifically on the third Term of Reference – *The impact of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) in developing targeted approaches on engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through such actions* – through outlining some succinct and broad guidelines regarding effective RAPs.

## Background

Over the past five years, Swinburne has provided national academic and industry leadership with Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) and reconciliation. Our 2017-19 RAP was the first university RAP to be recognised by Reconciliation Australia as an Elevate RAP. We joined just 20 other organisations, out of over 1000 in the RAP program, in achieving an Elevate RAP. In 2018, we co-organised, with Reconciliation Australia, the inaugural National RAP Conference, which attracted over 370 delegates across 24 industries. This conference is now a regular event. Also in 2018, we co-founded the National Elevate RAP Network, with Reconciliation Australia and other Elevate RAP organisations, to share our experiences and collaborate on developing initiatives to progress reconciliation at a national level. We also regularly provide expert academic and industry guidance and advice to a wide range of organisations, including the corporate sector, universities, government agencies, sports clubs, and community groups on reconciliation and RAPs.

In 2020, Reconciliation Australia also recognised our 2020-23 RAP as an Elevate RAP. Our key national reconciliation commitment in our 2020-23 Elevate RAP is to further develop our national academic and industry leadership in reconciliation and RAPs by creating the National Centre for Reconciliation Practice. This commitment is strongly linked to our 2020-23 Elevate RAP's Vision for Reconciliation, with its priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges. The National Centre for Reconciliation Practice will develop national industry, academic and community understandings on a wide range of significant reconciliation and RAP areas, and will strongly contribute to national systemic change in reconciliation. Through the National Centre for Reconciliation Practice, Swinburne will also continue to provide significant expert academic and industry advice to many diverse organisations across the nation.

## Brief guidelines for effective RAPs

In our substantial experiences with engaging with RAPs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – including developing our 2017-19 Elevate RAP and our 2020-23 Elevate RAP, along with our working with numerous organisations regarding their RAPs – there are several key areas that organisations need to address in order to develop effective RAPs. Organisations, including from the corporate sector, should:

1. focus on a **strength based** approach, rather than a deficit approach, in engaging with RAPs;
2. develop their RAPs in **reciprocal partnerships** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
3. **genuinely engage** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, communities and organisations;
4. create RAPs with realistic **accountabilities** and **timelines**, and not just have a 'tick the box' process;
5. develop RAPs that engage with Reconciliation Australia's call to **'move from safe to brave'**;
6. consider how their RAP can engage with Reconciliation Australia's **five dimensions of reconciliation**;
7. **embed** their RAPs across their **organisation**, and not just focus on specific areas such as HR;
8. have their **executive** leadership strongly and publically **commit** to, and engage with, their RAP;
9. acknowledge and address the **cultural load** on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
10. recognise and privilege **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges** within their organisation;
11. prioritise **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination** across their organisation; and
12. **combat racism** and be **culturally safe** places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. We welcome the opportunity to speak to the Inquiry.

Kind regards,



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