



The RAP Trap: Survey of Reconciliation Australia registered Reconciliation Action Plans

March 2024

In the Name of Reconciliation

Close the Gap Research surveyed Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) registered with Reconciliation Australia to find what organisations did in the name of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a recent concept applied to Aboriginal politics in Australia, dating from the Hawke government's failure to advance Aboriginal land rights.

Reconciliation came about as an alternative vehicle to advance Aboriginal causes. Elsewhere, Close the Gap Research explains the genesis of [Reconciliation](#).

Although Reconciliation Australia claims 2700 organisations have created and registered a RAP, this number includes RAPs no longer in operation. There are 608 registered RAPs on the Reconciliation Australia website in four classes: reflect, innovate, stretch and elevate.

These indicate a class of RAP from entry-level to advanced as follows: 250 organisations have a 'reflect' RAP (15 sampled), 250 have an 'innovate' RAP (15 sampled), 92 have a 'stretch' RAP (15 sampled), and 17 have an 'elevate' RAP (all sampled).

The RAPs vary considerably in their years involved in a RAP process, organisation size, and complexity. For example, the Australian Society of Authors have recently joined, has six staff, and promises a bespoke Acknowledgement of Country.

By contrast, Wesfarmers, which joined in 2009, has staff in 1,000 stores around Australia and claims to be the only employer in the country 'deliberately focusing' on providing employment opportunities to a significant number of young Aboriginal people.

Reconciliation Australia supported the Voice to Parliament, the Uluru Statement from the Heart, and the Closing the Gap strategy. The Elevate and Stretch RAPs were the most active in these aspects; examples were Woolworths, CommBank, NAB, Life Without Barriers, Civil Aviation Safety Authority, GPT (a property company), Odyssey House Victoria and Lendlease. Many supported the Voice and Uluru; examples were BHP, Westpac, Wesfarmers, Coles, SBS, and Sydney University of Technology.

Twenty three RAPs in the sample of 62 supported the Uluru Statement from the Heart, a highly contested statement used throughout the Voice referendum. Elsewhere, Close the Gap Research explains the [Uluru Statement](#). Twenty three RAPs in the sample supported the Voice referendum, although the Voice proposal was not in public

debate throughout the duration of some RAPs. Twenty three RAPs in the sample supported the Closing the Gap strategy, although most were a mere mention of the plan.

Investment manager U Ethical, for example, has a RAP and has taken on monitoring progress in the companies they invest in. U Ethical has a very radical view of reconciliation. In 2022, it issued a January 26 Statement 'recognising the injustices, dispossession and trauma that began 234 years ago on 26 January 1788 and advocating for a date for a National Day which unites all Australians.'

While all RAPs are involved in reconciliation, by definition, the relative lack of mentions of Closing the Gap are significant and defines a separation in intentions, indeed the entire reconciliation exercise, which appears to favour recognition over closing the gap. In more general terms, they favour identity over solutions.

The Art of Presentation

Every RAP, except one, featured Aboriginal artwork of the dot point style. The broad appeal of Aboriginal culture displayed in Aboriginal art, the most famous being the dot paintings from the

western desert, is understandable. However, the genesis of Western Desert art must be understood. Clifford Possum, one of the leading lights in Western Desert art, studied with Albert Namatjira at Hermannsburg, Northern Territory.

He then moved to Papunya to take on construction work when the Aboriginal settlement was established in the late 1950s.

For a time, Possum taught at the school at Papunya and worked as a stockman. Less well known is that in 1971, a 30-year-old white artist and elementary school teacher, Geoffrey Bardon, encouraged the local men to paint.

Previously, Aboriginal art had consisted of body painting and drawing in the sand. The art inspired by Bardon was a departure from these origins.

Most important is Bardon's observation at Papunya, which suggests art as therapy as much as an expression of culture.

There were vicious fights among the various tribal groups, and the enforced stay and the attendant idleness at the camps and the absence of game nearby were only the beginning of the terrible enemy of all the people: drunkenness.¹

If an organisation is to understand Aboriginal culture, it must understand it in its wholeness. Learning a Disneyland version is not fair to staff or Aboriginal people.

Salient Features of RAPs

Each RAP consists of four elements: Relationships, reaching out to Aboriginal groups; Respect, learning about Aboriginal culture; Opportunities, developing Aboriginal employment; and Governance, the arrangements for operating the RAP. In broad terms, the Reflect, or entry-level RAPs, are promises to undertake work in each area. More advanced levels of RAP report on work achieved, with pledges to advance different aspects or innovations in a forthcoming RAP.

Relationships: ceding responsibility

The endpoint of Reconciliation Australia's strategy in relationships with Aboriginal people suggests that decisions about Aboriginal employees and, indeed, the services of the organisation should be ceded to outside groups.

Some service organisations have begun to vacate fields without proof that Aboriginal-controlled organisations would do a better job for their clients. Life Without Barriers, a disability service provider, for example, will 'progressively step away' from providing out-of-home care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by 2031.

By contrast, Northcott, a disability services provider, maintains partnerships with numerous Aboriginal service providers in NSW, but these do not amount to ceding services or control. Instead, they employ a relatively large number of Aboriginal staff.

One of the RAP's marks of approval is to have organisations sign up to Supply Nation, that is, to source goods and services from verified Aboriginal-controlled suppliers. This mechanism is subject to much criticism over black cladding, which is the act of using Aboriginal people to front but not control non-Aboriginal organisations.²

More importantly, while there may be a rationale for assisting Aboriginal organisations in the supply chain for government procurement, it may exclude others who employ Aboriginal people.

Over-reliance on outside consultation risks transferring decisions to Aboriginal organisations as if their views are more important than those of

either the Aboriginal employee or, indeed, the employer.

It also risks lowering the standard of services to Aboriginal clients. In any other context, the equivalent would be an organisation that would consult political parties instead of talking to employees. These relations are essential and, as such, should be treated very carefully lest the organisation cede control to others for whom it should not share responsibility.

Respect: take it seriously or not at all

Most RAPs involved ‘cultural training’, including Welcome to Country and Acknowledgements. The South Australian Museum, for example, reviews the wording of the Museum’s Acknowledgement of Country annually.

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority introduced Indigenous language lessons in their offices and distributed Acknowledgement of Country cards to more than 800 staff members.

Stockland ensures that senior people receive an annual ‘Cultural Immersion’ experience to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for example, by attending the Garma Festival. Stockland should

know that immersion is not the same as attending a festival, nor is Garma reflective of the lives of most Aboriginal people in Australia.

Learning about culture is a serious business. For example, the captain of the Fremantle Dockers remarked, ‘I don’t think I would have the same level of connection to my culture if I wasn’t at the Club.’ Whose culture is it if it is learned from the local football club? Learning about Aboriginal culture to advance the organisation requires considerable investment for those who need to understand the organisation’s legal obligations and get the best out of the workforce.

Welcome, Acknowledgment, snippets of language, and short programs are not likely to close the gap or reconcile anyone to anything.

Employees should not be treated as identities; they are, first and foremost, individuals who possess the skills that an organisation wants. Inevitably, cultural ‘learning’ refers to elements of a previous existence or history that may not apply to individuals, may be regarded by employees as private matters, or indeed are not unlike the experience of all peoples. As such, any short courses should concentrate on general protocols for all staff behaviour.

Wanslea, a child care group, asserts that ‘cultural knowledge, life skills and experiences

are respected and valued in the same way as qualifications.' It would be better not to prejudge such knowledge but rather assess it against the organisation's needs. Assessment may require understanding cultural and intellectual property rights, for example, as undertaken by Lend Lease.

Organisations must be cautious with their language. Steiner Education 'Acknowledge and support the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which pre-exists state sovereignty.' This is a meaningless statement at law but may invite demands that, while not falling on Steiner headquarters and its four staff, fall to others, usually the government, to satisfy.

Opportunities: muddled thinking

Opportunities for Aboriginal employment have become muddled. Organisations often report on the percentage of Aboriginal employees as if their organisation represents all employment opportunities for all parts of the market, that all Aborigines are suited to their organisation, or that Aborigines have particular skills and interests.

For example, the City of Moreton Bay has vowed to work with traditional custodians in revegetation and fire management. Traditional owners in this urban and near-urban district north of Brisbane

may not possess knowledge or interests relevant to these activities.

An organisation should be open to all potential employees. For example, GPT, a property management company, guarantees an interview to 'First Nations' job applicants and uses the CareerTracker alumni job board for 'identified' roles.

Should an organisation segment its workforce? It is better to invite all applications to open positions. It is rare that 'identified' roles are necessary jobs. Instead, they reinforce differences that should be overcome, not encouraged.

As for treating employees differently, all staff should be supported in their careers. BHP, for example, has grievance procedures that are accessible and culturally sensitive as a way to reduce turnover. The desire to review human resources policies and procedures and anti-discrimination provisions was common among the sample.

The desire to be inclusive, that is, to be open to the broadest possible talent pool, is sensible. While the Diversity Council of Australia recommended measuring inclusiveness in the workforce, it separated Aboriginal workers because it argued they 'have unique workplace experiences that differ from other culturally diverse colleagues.'³

Such separation belies the principle of inclusion. An organisation needs to know its potential workforce, regardless of its identity. There should be no pecking order.

Governance: another cost

Governance for Reconciliation Australia is evidence of another layer of organisational governance; it is the opposite of inclusiveness. Organisations must attend to the Reconciliation Australia agenda, which could be better spent with employees. Inevitably, the people who serve on governance structures around reconciliation are well integrated into the organisation or nominated because of their Aboriginal background. The first belies their experience, and the second insults it.

Lend Lease, for example, has placed a great deal of weight on First Nations governance. They have established an evaluation methodology underpinned by First Nations values defined by the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute and the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre.

The method used by these centres needs to be elaborated. Karen Mundine, CEO of Reconciliation Australia, sits on the board of the Centre, and both the Centre and the Institute are government-funded.

Behind these benign objects – relationships, respect, opportunities, and governance – are serious strategies that belie reconciliation.

The Reconciliation Australia strategy for reconciliation appears to be to capture a slice of the labour market for Aboriginal organisations and Aborigines against all others.

The means of capture are invoking culture, relying on constant deference to Aboriginal protocols (unexplained) and meetings, a mantra of acknowledgment, and embedding Aboriginal organisations in the stakeholder group.

Reflect RAPS

The Office of Parliamentary Counsel is based in Canberra and is responsible for drafting and publishing the laws of the Commonwealth of Australia. The rationale for their RAP is 'that the majority of Australians are the direct beneficiaries of the removal of land and power from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'

This is a highly contestable and political statement. They also state that 'the unique skills, experience, and insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are invaluable to the work we do.' And yet, despite being on their Reconciliation journey since 2007, not one of their 100 staff identified as Aboriginal.

What do they do for Reconciliation? They encourage staff to attend cultural and reconciliation events such as NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week and ensure 'substantial representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art obtained from Artbank.' Public money is spent on outings and art. They sit in a city filled with university graduates who claim Aboriginal descent and cannot attract a single one.

The Victorian firm Hive Legal made radical statements that sovereignty was never ceded but employed no Aboriginal person on their

professional staff. Instead, it purchased artwork for the office and children's books for its staff. Dark Emu is likely among the books, a false history of Aboriginal society, written by Bruce Pascoe, who is not Aboriginal.⁴

As remote from the needs of their business is Temple and Webster, who claim to be 'Australia's leading pure play online retailer of furniture, homewares and renovations.' They describe how they

... moved into their new Eora (St Peters, NSW) office. Brendan Kerin, skinname Japangardi, a cultural representative of the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council, welcomed through a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country. ... His personal story of re-discovering his identity by returning to Country was incredibly moving, and it really helped us appreciate the deep connections First Nations people have with the land.

More serious is the University of Queensland RAP, which intends to 'Indigenise' the curricula by incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

curricula in its courses. It also wants to investigate the inclusion of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander core course in UQ programs.

The University of South Australia and Swinburne University of Technology want to 'entrench' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'knowledges' in their curricula. This initiative has also occurred outside the RAP process as many Australian universities are developing institution-wide approaches to 'Indigenise' Australian content in undergraduate curricula.⁵

Carnival Australia, which operates cruise liners, held a very radical belief: 'We recognise their continuing connection to the land and its waters and thank them for protecting these ecosystems since time immemorial. Always was, always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and waters; sovereignty was never ceded.'

Such a statement is inaccurate and bears no relationship to Carnival Australia's work, staff, or potential Aboriginal employees.

By contrast, there are numerous examples of initiatives directly applicable to the organisation and Aboriginal people.

The Sydney Children's Hospital Foundation employed an Aboriginal Health Education Officer who works with Aboriginal communities in

western Sydney and is responsible for health promotion, education and programs.

The foundation also aims to increase the employment of Aboriginal staff with culturally appropriate and highly accessible services for patients and families. This indicates that they are not about to hand services to Aboriginal-controlled services.

Surf Coast Shire of southwestern Victoria has made very radical claims about the invasion of Victoria – 'a brutal, lawless and immoral period' - but has also come upon disagreement among its Aboriginal partners.

One group applauded the RAP, and a second did not favour RAPs over Aboriginal employment strategies. The Shire RAP also championed truth-telling. History should be told in all aspects. Doing so may convince the organisation there is no place for involvement in the exercise.

Innovate RAPs

Caraniche and Youth Projects provide mental health, drug and alcohol treatment services in Victoria to all comers. They quote the very radical mantra, 'This land always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land', and promote the concept of 'truth-telling'.

These statements invite numerous questions. Should non-Aboriginal people leave? Are Aboriginal clients' needs different from others? Are they aware that there are relatively few traditional owners in Australia and that they are unlikely to apply for a job in their organisation or be their clients? Are they aware that employing people in identified roles may compound their clients' problems?

Are they aware that assuming that Aborigines are the same, whatever their mob, wherever they live, and whatever their heritage may increase conflict and weaken services to their clients? Aboriginal clients may suffer from the same problems as others – mental health and intergenerational welfare dependence.

The one bright spot in the Youth Projects RAP is that they wish to 'capture relevant data that measure the impact' of their services. This is an excellent ambition, although there are no

measures, framework, or methodology to advance the aspiration.

Few RAPs subscribe to the highly contentious view that the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people is ongoing. Peninsula Community Legal Centre, for example, suggests that as part of its RAP, it is essential that the impact of colonisation 'is recognised and addressed'.

How a RAP addresses this fundamentalist view is left unsaid. The fact that most Aboriginal people are not suffering the impact of colonisation is ignored.

Monash Health provides an example of two challenges for those involved in RAPs. In 2021, Monash Health began offering free dentistry services for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Why would Aboriginal people receive this other than on a needs basis? How does middle-class welfare close the gap? This question becomes salient when Monash Health is 'keen on improving patient identification'. If free services are an insufficient incentive, why ask?

On the staff side, there is a similar level of insult. Monash provides Yarning Circles for First Nations staff to 'strengthen connections to cultural identity by providing opportunities to learn and

preserve cultural knowledge and customs.' Are Aboriginal employees unable to organise?

Monash meetings are facilitated by a local community member and Wayapa Practitioner, 'a practice rooted in the ancestral knowledge of Aboriginal people, centred on nurturing and connecting to Country'.

The Yarning Circle supports continuing traditional practices such as 'emu feather crafts' and using native plants to create 'smoking sticks'. What does this activity have to do with work? Are Aboriginal employees assumed to be interested in reintroducing 'traditional' activities?

Some organisations have strayed into territory that Reconciliation Australia does not mention. Five organisations in the sample support the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

BG&E Resources, for example, believes that 'in the Australian context, this instrument relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights.' It may relate to it, but it is not part of Australian law; it is a declaration only.

Anglicare WA is investigating the transition of three appropriate services to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

The belief in a UN Declaration is no basis for abandoning services to those in need. Other organisations, under their Reflect RAPs, such as G8 Education and Great Southern Bank, are committed to the UNICEF Sustainable Development Goals, which seem remote from the needs of their staff.

Stretch RAPS

Ventia (infrastructure services) corporation found that up to 10 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants were denied the opportunity to progress their application due to a past criminal record. Most cases were often minor and occurred when the applicant was a teenager.

A criminal record may be an unreasonable and permanent barrier to employment, so Ventia created a set of guidelines and a framework to guide recruitment in this area. This is encouraging work but begs the question, is a RAP necessary for such work?

Similarly, the Department for Education South Australia runs an intensive Family Service program. It is aimed at re-engaging Aboriginal children and young people with school. The program works with Aboriginal families with complex family circumstances where their children have absences from school.

An Aboriginal community-controlled organisation delivers the program. This program seems reasonable but also begs the question, why a RAP? And why is this a reconciliation activity when it is a matter of compliance for children to attend? Hopefully, utilising an Aboriginal-controlled service is a successful strategy.

A Hearing Australia program provides free diagnostic hearing assessments and follow-up treatment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from 0-6 years of age who do not yet attend full-time school.

The program was co-designed with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Department of Health and Aged Care. It is entirely government funded. This is a valuable taxpayer-funded service, but is a RAP necessary to deliver it?

Their assertions, 'Helping our communities hear better will help keep the culture alive' and achieving a 'cultural competency' are unproven and doubtful. However, having them 'understand the impact of colonisation and past government policies' on health is dubious.

GPT, a property manager, has been a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact since 2012 and publicly reports on the ten principles of human rights, labour, anti-corruption and the environment. At a practical level, it helps the Clontarf Foundation, which has good results in lifting school attendance rates among Aboriginal boys and disdains a RAP.

The City of Sydney granted funds to the University of Technology to help launch Australia's first residential college for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The college aims to make accessing higher education opportunities easier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Whether a dedicated college for Aboriginal students is in their best interest is moot.

Elevate RAPS

Elevate RAPS were generally more likely to sign up for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and support the referendum and various UN instruments, such as the section of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that refers to the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous people in matters that concern them, the Global Compact, Sustainable development Goals, the Equator Principles and so on. International consortia are particularly partial to these instruments, such as BHP, Westpac, KPMG, Lend Lease, Comm Bank, and PWC.

The Richmond Football Club has taken a radical stance in being 'proactive' on Treaty, the Recognise campaign and Black Lives Matter. The worrying aspect of a football club operating at this level of abstraction is that it is susceptible to ideologies that are not in the least related to its role in sports.

For example, it boasts that in 2023, of those attending an 'Indigenous Round' game, 90 per cent

believed the game either 'somewhat' or 'definitely supports reconciliation', and respondents used words such as 'respect', 'culture' and 'togetherness' when describing the game. Given the game was adorned with such words and sentiments, it is no surprise that many remembered the advertising.

Richmond was effusive in praising the survey of members and stakeholders using the 'Indigenous Theory of Change methodology'. This theory is an ideology dressed up as a methodology that blames others. It serves to corral resources to Aboriginal-run organisations.

Life Without Barriers, a prominent disability service organisation, fervently believes the Black Lives Matter movement that racism is structural and institutional. It lauds its 'Cultural Learning and Cultural Capability Framework', which includes Truth Telling, Self-determination, Intergenerational Trauma, Structural and Institutional Racism, and Strategies to Challenge Workplace Racism.

As with most RAPS, it leaves out any aspect of a Cultural Capability program that may reflect on the culture. To honestly assess those matters that may affect a person's performance at work seems out of bounds for Life Without Barriers and Reconciliation Australia.

Life Without Barriers will cease to provide out-of-home care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by 2031. It partners with SNAICC, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Still, it provides no argument or evidence that Aboriginal-controlled organisations will be better for the welfare of children. At least it commits to measuring the impact of the transition, but evidence prior would be much more sensible.

SBS and the ABC specialise in spreading the word and images of Aboriginal Australia as their contribution to reconciliation. Each has vowed to increase the number and frequency of on-air displays of acknowledgements and the use of 'First Nations' names.

SBS is particularly strident in its views, 'First stories of contact between newly arrived people and First Peoples of this land are marked by the interacting of opposing philosophies – ownership as opposed to custodianship; individual benefit as opposed to community good. Different views environmentally, economically, culturally.' These are dubious generalities.

The Chair of Westpac wrote in their RAP that he would challenge his organisation to be 'brave in truth-telling and committed to transferring power to communities to drive their own

economic futures.' Westpac wants to achieve this goal by invoking Free, Prior and Informed Consent. They want to invoke this tool, for example, for extractive projects that may damage ecosystems, impact the health and well-being of traditional owners, or limit or remove the ability to build cultural enterprises or traditional land management practices and knowledge. How this interacts with numerous statutory obligations is unclear.

KPMG published the results of a survey of staff:

- Sixty-eight per cent said they considered Australia to be a racist country, up from 50 per cent in 2014.
- The more people are aware of the issues facing Indigenous peoples, the more they agree racism is an issue
- Three per cent disagree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a unique place as the First Australians and do not think the firm should be hiring more Indigenous people.

Of the last dot point, KPMG says, 'While we do have a positive story to tell about changing perceptions, this minority view indicates there is still progress to be made.' Perhaps the minority prefers that people be hired on merit? Maybe the majority were polite in following the values of their leadership team?

The proof of this fawning to those who have been highly unlikely to have suffered racism is this KPMG employee who stated,

I am openly able to celebrate other aspects of my identity at work; as a proud gay man, I feel completely accepted by my team, but as an indigenous man, I am still very much in the closet.

KPMG quoted a Diversity Council of Australia report that mentions ‘identity strain’. It is apparent in the photos of people on the RAP committee it consists of middle-class graduates with a distant Aboriginal heritage. Perhaps this reflects the man’s journey, not on society or his work colleagues.

There are severe inference errors in this survey. It is as likely that the perception of racism is tied to ‘awareness’ of Aboriginal people facing racism. Awareness is nothing more than a reflection of the amplification of misunderstood or misattributed causes of failure. For example, Aboriginal lack of education may cause their lack of success, for which they blame racism.

The Lend Lease RAP is painful to read.

In Australia, the protest movement highlighted the institutional racism

that has led to more than 400 Black Deaths in Custody since the 1990s ... Australians are aware that First Nations peoples continue to suffer and die today as a result of decades of systemic failure.

The rate of deaths in custody for Aborigines is lower than for non-Aborigines, and 47 per cent of Aboriginal deaths are from natural causes.

Because of the state of health of Aboriginal prisoners, it is improbable that deaths in custody can be further reduced even to, for example, the level of non-Aboriginal deaths from natural causes, which is 28 per cent. Although police or prison officials bear responsibility for those in their custody, people also die in hospitals, doctor’s surgeries, and at home.

Lend Lease builds ‘justice facilities’ and, in doing so, seeks ‘community-led solutions’ to address incarceration rates, a separate matter from deaths in custody.

They state that ‘data continues to show the most successful programs to generate ‘closing the gap’ outcomes are created and delivered by First Nations community-controlled organisations.’ There is no evidence that this is true.⁶

PWC and PWC's Indigenous Consulting RAP are similarly painful. In their 2017 report, *Indigenous Incarceration: unlock the Facts*, they state that programs exist that are effective in reducing the incarceration rates. They then volunteer, without proof, that 'Indigenous Australians must have control, ownership and involvement in the solutions.' Their key recommendation was that the right to self-determination should underpin strategies to address the high rates of incarceration. It means that they can seek solutions on their own. That does not mean that governments should hand over taxation monies for them to do so.

They also recommended that mainstream services be 'culturally aware and responsive' to increase the effectiveness of services in reducing incarceration. There is no definition of what suffices as cultural awareness or evidence that cultural awareness solves anything.

PWC falls back on the typical list – 'lack of access to education, employment, health and adequate housing' - as underlying causes associated with incarceration. Access implies services that are not available. Previous generations, with fewer services, did not end up in gaol.⁷

Wesfarmers, by contrast, have partnered with Clontarf Foundation to improve school retention (as do Qantas and the NRL), and whose Youth

Employment Program will employ at least 1,200 extra young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over three years to help close the gap. They recognise that 'by earning an income ... participants, and their families, have greater autonomy and choice about how they live their lives.' This is very sensible, but it is not Aboriginal self-determination in the eyes of Reconciliation Australia or under Supply Nation, the Voice, or the Uluru Statement.

Wesfarmers claims to be the only employer in the country 'deliberately focusing' on providing employment opportunities to young Aboriginal people. In addition, Wesfarmers maps the footprint of their business, which is more than 1,000 sites, against census data for Aboriginal people, which helps identify the most extensive opportunities for recruitment and retention.

This includes regional towns in Queensland, Western Australia, and large parts of Western Sydney and the NSW Central Coast. This approach is very sensible and takes note of the local labour market. Few other organisations track and use data in this way to support employment ambitions.

Conclusions

The endpoint of Reconciliation Australia's strategy in relationships with Aboriginal people suggests that decisions about Aboriginal employees and, indeed, the services of the organisation should be ceded to outside groups.

Organisations with a RAP or contemplating entering a RAP need to understand this requirement.

Learning about culture is a serious business. Learning about Aboriginal culture to advance the organisation requires considerable investment for those who need to understand the organisation's legal obligations and get the best out of the workforce.

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An organisation should be open to all potential employees. The desire to be inclusive, that is, to be open to the broadest possible talent pool, is sensible. As for treating employees differently, all staff should be supported in their careers.

Governance for Reconciliation Australia is evidence of another layer of organisational governance; it is the opposite of inclusiveness. Organisations must attend to the Reconciliation Australia agenda, which could be better spent with employees.

Inevitably, the people who serve on governance structures around reconciliation are well integrated into the organisation or nominated because of their Aboriginal background. The first belies their experience, and the second insults it.

- 1 Bardon, G. and J. (2004). Papunya: A Place Made After the Story, the Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement. The Miegunyah Press, page 8
 - 2 Supply Nation is a private company that verifies indigenous businesses with which organisations in a RAP are encouraged to operate. A review of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Procurement Policy, which sets the degree of indigeneity and proportion of indigenous business required to be sourced to purchase government supplies, was announced on 19 December 2023.
 - 3 Diversity Council of Australia. (2021). *Counting Culture: Towards a Standardised Approach to Measuring and Reporting on Workforce Cultural Diversity in Australia*, page 14
 - 4 O'Brien, P. (2019). *Bitter Harvest: The Illusion of Aboriginal Agriculture in Bruce Pascoe's Dark Emu* (Quadrant Books) Sutton, P., & Walshe, K. (2021). *Farmers or Hunter-gatherers?: The Dark Emu Debate* (Melbourne University Press)
 - 5 Norman, H. (2014). Mapping More Than Aboriginal Studies: Pedagogy, Professional Practice and Knowledge. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 43 (1) 42-51
 - 6 Johns, G. (2024). 'You get what you ask for' *The Productivity Commission on Closing the Gap: from measuring to meetings*
 - 7 <https://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/mp/files/resources/files/indigenous-incarceration-may17.pdf>
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