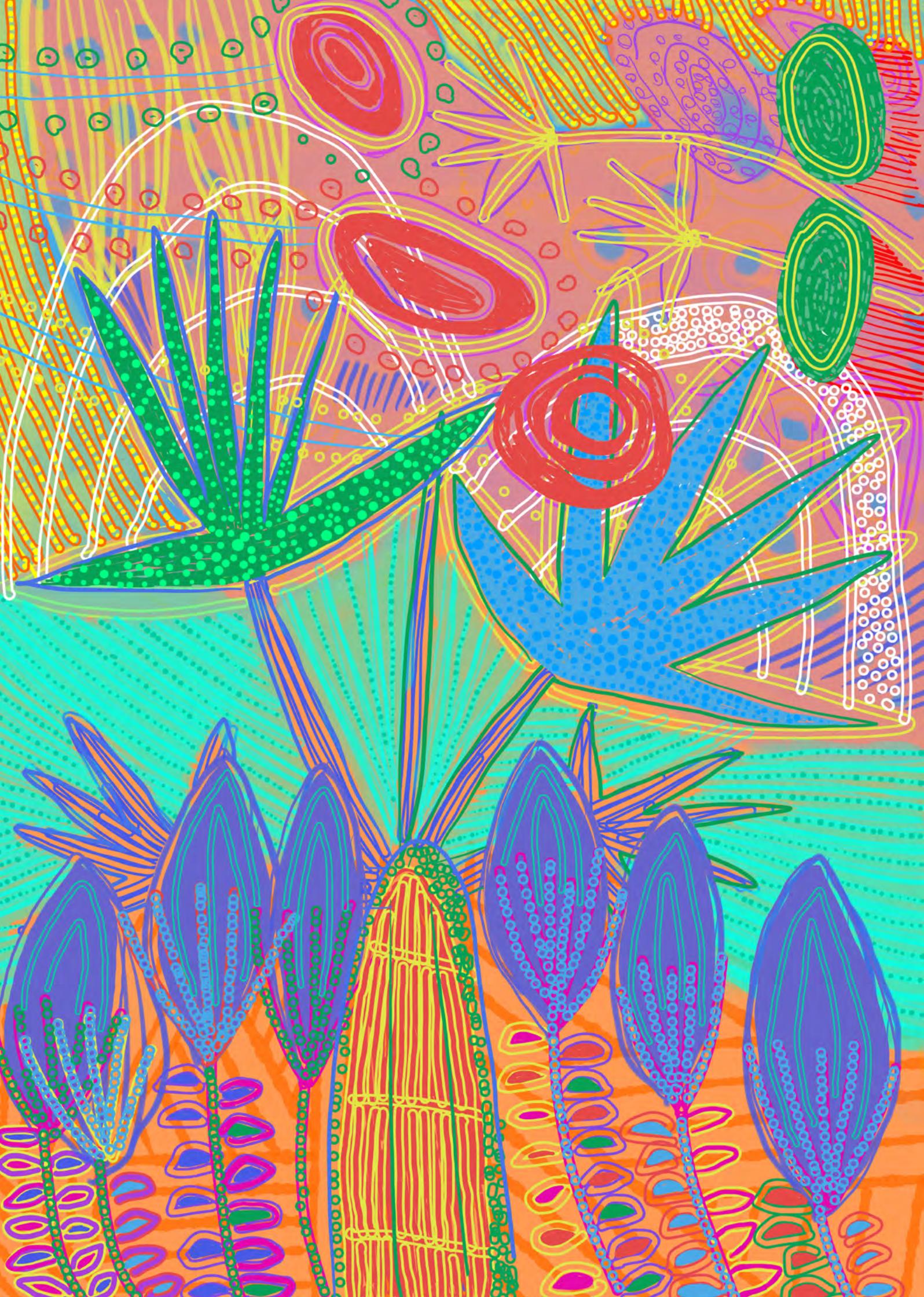


# Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan



July 2023 – June 2024





# Acknowledgement

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The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waterways, skies, islands and sea country across Australia. We pay our deepest respects to First Nations cultures and Elders past and present. We endeavour to continually value and learn from First Nations knowledges and educational practices.

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# Message from our CEO

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**I'm proud to present AERO's first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This RAP sets out actions that AERO will take as we build the role we can play in Australia's progress towards reconciliation.**

AERO's greatest potential contribution to reconciliation will be in support of the learning success of First Nations children and young people. AERO understands it can only make such a contribution using a partnership-focused approach. This means ensuring First Nations people lead relevant work inside our organisation and non-Indigenous staff deepen their understanding of First Nations cultures, histories and knowledges. It also means building our connections with First Nations communities and leaders and ensuring AERO's responsiveness to their needs.

AERO is a relatively new organisation and so a Reflect RAP is appropriate for our stage of development. This RAP gives us a framework to ensure that the foundational work of building our staff, our capability, our processes and our relationships is done systematically and effectively.

All AERO team members have been involved in developing this RAP and all parts of our organisation have volunteered to be involved in its implementation. I'm excited to see the actions in this document delivered and believe they'll position AERO well as we seek to make a significant, positive contribution towards First Nations education.

**Dr Jenny Donovan**  
**CEO**

# Message from Reconciliation Australia

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## Inaugural Reflect RAP

### **Reconciliation Australia welcomes AERO to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.**

AERO joins a network of more than 2,200 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables AERO to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations AERO, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

**Karen Mundine**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Reconciliation Australia**

# Our organisation

## Our work

AERO is Australia’s independent education evidence body.

Our vision is for Australia to achieve excellence and equity in educational outcomes for all children and young people through effective use of evidence.

Achieving excellent and equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is essential to this goal.

In support of this vision, we:



**generate  
high-quality  
evidence**



**present high-quality  
evidence that is  
relevant and  
accessible**



**encourage adoption  
and effective  
implementation  
of evidence in  
practice and policy**

## Our team

AERO currently employs 108 people throughout Australia, including 4 people (3.7%) who identify as First Nations people.

Over 30% of AERO’s workforce are or have been practising teachers or educators in Australian schools and early childhood education and care settings. Our team also bring a wide range of expertise from public, private, and not-for-profit sectors across a number of disciplines.

We work alongside First Nations people in the work that we do. Employing and supporting the development of First Nations people within our team is a priority for AERO.

## Our locations

We are a national, remote-first organisation. Our team live and work in cities, regional and rural areas. In 2023, AERO staff were working on across 39 Aboriginal Countries, across every state and territory in Australia.

## Our RAP

### Foundation for a RAP

AERO is committed to contributing to the educational success of First Nations children and young people through its work.

This commitment can only be realised by building positive relationships with First Nations peoples and communities. We need to listen, to learn and to partner in order to understand how best to collaborate and work together.

This Reflect RAP provides a strong base to support this.

### Our reconciliation journey to date

As a new organisation, we are at the beginning of our contribution towards reconciliation. We know that our staff are at different stages of their personal experience with reconciliation.

Among our staff there is a commitment to reconciliation. There is also a concern about not knowing the best way to go about it.

In a staff survey in 2021, 100% of respondents said they felt committed to improving educational outcomes for First Nations students.

As part of an AERO staff day in early 2022, a strong desire to engage in reconciliation efforts was confirmed.

During the staff engagement in the development of this Reflect RAP, staff were provided with an opportunity to share. Some said that we have a lot to learn and that, at times, there might be fear about not getting it right or being tokenistic. It was also acknowledged that staff saw reconciliation as important and as such, don't want to get it wrong.

### Why a Reflect RAP?

A Reflect RAP provides a 'roadmap' from which AERO and our staff can think further or more deeply about reconciliation. It also encourages staff to reflect on their own and collective experiences of reconciliation, as well as providing a starting point from which diverse views can be heard and better understood.



This Reflect RAP is focused on:

- learning as an organisation
- supporting individuals in their own thinking about reconciliation
- setting up effective processes and practices for ongoing reconciliation.

These efforts are needed to embed reconciliation within AERO's culture.

We know that listening to, learning from, and travelling alongside, First Nations peoples and communities will be critical for our reconciliation journey.

We also know that taking the initiative to continue to learn together as staff will be important for our success as an organisation.

## **Acknowledgement of our history in education and research**

In considering how to implement a RAP, we recognise that AERO's core business – education and research – has had a fraught history in Australia in relation to First Nations peoples. Education and research have been used as tools of colonial control and to shape society's perception of First Nations people. We also recognise that the effects of this harmful history are still present, from systems, structures and stories that impact the way society views and treats First Nations children and young people, to trauma and distrust in First Nations families and communities.

## **Implementation approach**

To implement our Reflect RAP, we have considered the following:

- staff engagement
- our research standards
- reflection and revisiting our actions.

### **1. Staff engagement**

In the development of our Reflect RAP, AERO staff have had time to reflect on what we as an organisation and as individuals might be able to contribute to reconciliation, and also why.

It has led to the identification of meaningful actions (see next page) and a shared understanding of how and why they are to be achieved.

This has created a basis for reconciliation to be fostered among our staff.

## 2. Our research standards

Implementation of our RAP will mean ensuring that reconciliation is central to AERO's core business. This includes and is not limited to:

- ensuring our work reflects the diversity of Australia; upholds First Nations rights; and has a positive impact for First Nations children and young people
- deep and respectful engagement with First Nations people and communities throughout the research process
- learning from and adherence to standards and guidelines that apply to our work – these include conditions laid out in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' Code for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council, and related documents
- adherence to our principled approach to the ethical and responsible conduct of research.

## 3. Reflection and revisiting our actions

We know that for our Reflect RAP to flourish, it needs to include:

- continuous listening, learning and reflection
- revisiting our actions to consider how we are travelling
- strong working relationships
- the ongoing ability to be honest with ourselves and each other.

Our RAP Working Group established for this Reflect RAP and convened by AERO's Principal Advisor, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy and Engagement, will play a role in monitoring and reporting on these efforts to ensure we are on track. This RAP has been developed by the Working Group in consultation with all staff. Our RAP Champion, David Boyd and the AERO leadership team, including directors, senior executives, and Board are committed to the implementation and ongoing monitoring of the actions outlined here, as the foundation of future RAPs.

Working group members come from departments across our organisation:

- David Boyd (Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact)
- Sally Cooper (Principal Advisor, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy and Engagement)
- Sarah Hayter (Digital Content Manager)
- Anne-Louise Semple (Manager, Research Governance and Ethics)
- Jesse Woodside (Engagement Coordinator)
- Adam Inder (Senior Researcher, Research and Evaluation)
- Ashleigh Collier (Researcher, Research and Evaluation)
- Rowena Muir (Engagement Manager, ECEC)

- Raina Hunter (Communications Officer)
- Annie Fisher (Senior Researcher)

We've also benefited from the input of previous Working Group members Marthese Nohra, Kate Griffiths, Benita de Vincentiis and Ivana Randjelovic. As highlighted by staff in the development of this RAP, a significant aspect of reconciliation is a commitment to listening deeply, actively seeking out relevant learning opportunities, exploring who we are and the meaning of reconciliation, and challenging ourselves with different ways of seeing, thinking, doing, and being (Howitt, 2001). We hope cultural safety training available to all AERO staff in 2023 will support this.

We will continuously seek other opportunities to support our staff throughout their collective and individual reconciliation journeys.

## Consideration of our actions

We have adopted the advice provided by Reconciliation Australia in the development of this Reflect RAP and on how best to reflect on our actions.

Reflecting on our actions began with consideration of why First Nations peers might have identified the actions as important for reconciliation.

We considered the purpose of the actions from AERO's perspective and thought about the specific activities we might undertake under each action.

The actions identified in this RAP are important to AERO and our reconciliation journey. Our aim is that they will help us to learn and grow in our journey of reconciliation, as an organisation and as individuals.

## Current activities underway

We have made a start on our work towards reconciliation and have formed a strong basis from which to achieve the activities outlined in our Reflect RAP.

Steps we have taken so far include:

- Participating in a suitable cultural safety training
- Conducting a survey on staff knowledge and confidence in relation to reconciliation; this also looked at specific topics people would like to learn more about
- Developing an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters where our staff are based
- Increasing staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols
- Rotating responsibility for beginning team meetings with an Acknowledgement of Country, so we learn about Country across Australia.

# Deliverables and Actions

## Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Identify First Nations stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	October 2023	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
	Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.	October 2023	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
	Establish relationships with key First Nations stakeholders and organisations within our sphere of influence.	January 2024	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	May 2024	Digital Content Manager
	RAP Working Group (RAPWG) members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May – 2 June 2024	Convenor, RAP Working Group
	Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May – 2 June 2024	CEO

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff.	July 2023 – June 2024	CEO
	Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	July 2023	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
	Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey, such as Reconciliation Industry Network Groups.	July 2023, October 2023, January 2024, April 2024	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
	Participate in the RAP network with other agencies in the national education architecture.	May 2023, Aug 2023, Oct 2023, Feb 2024	Convenor, RAP Working Group
	Explore opportunities to work with Reconciliation Australia to advance reconciliation within education settings.	October 2023	Senior Manager, Engagement and Impact
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination, including arriving at an understanding of anti-racism and anti-discrimination.	December 2023	Senior Manager, Research and Evaluations
	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	December 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations



Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights through cultural learning.	Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights within our organisation.	October 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
	Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation.	October 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	Continue to develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters where our staff are based.	July 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
	Continue to increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	July 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
	Ensure meeting agenda template, PowerPoint template and signature blocks include Acknowledgement of Country and communicate internally about using these.	October 2023	Digital Content Manager

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols (continued).	Given we are a remote-working organisation with staff nation-wide, continue to rotate responsibility for beginning team meetings with an Acknowledgement of Country, so we learn about Country across Australia.	July 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
	Research best practice about language use, imagery, communications, content and update guidelines and internal style guides.	October 2023	Digital Content Manager
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week and of the particular NAIDOC theme for each year.	July 2023 and June 2024	CEO
	Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting participation in events where they live and virtual events.	July 2023 and June 2024	Convenor, RAPWG
	RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	First week in July 2023 and July 2024	Convenor, RAPWG



## Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
8. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.	Develop a business case for increased First Nations employment within our organisation including identified positions.	December 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
	Build understanding of current First Nations staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	December 2023	Senior Manager, Strategy and Operations
9. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	Develop a business case for procurement from First Nations owned businesses.	December 2023	Procurement Manager
	Investigate Supply Nation membership.	December 2023	Procurement Manager



## Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RAPWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	Maintain a RAPWG to govern RAP implementation.	July 2023	CEO
	Draft a Terms of Reference for the RAPWG.	July 2023	Convenor, RAPWG
	Establish First Nations representation on the RAPWG.	July 2023	Convenor, RAPWG
11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	July 2023	Convenor, RAPWG
	Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	July 2023	CEO
	Appoint a senior leader to champion our RAP internally.	July 2023	CEO
	Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	August 2023	Manager, Outcomes and Impact Measurement
12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings both internally and externally.	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss important RAP correspondence.	July 2023	Convenor, RAPWG
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	1 August 2023	Convenor, RAPWG
	Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September, 2023	Convenor, RAPWG and Manager, Outcomes and Impact Measurement
13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	June 2024	Convenor, RAPWG



## Artist's statement

The artwork represents the journey of life and our connection to language, spirituality, food, shelter, plants and water. It tells the story of the universe.

In the centre is the cabbage palm, *ma peal*, which is central to our lives. My knowledge of *ma peal* comes from the bush classroom, taught to me by my mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, who understood the interconnectivity of their surroundings.

This artwork is a declaration of my country and illustrates my rights to its ownership, to its freshwater and saltwater estates, and all the land from Staaten to Nassau River and east to Staaten River National Park.

## Artist biography

### Ma Wanjibung Pukun (English name, Shaun Edwards)

Wanjibung is a Traditional Owner and leader of the Kokoberrin peoples of western Cape York Peninsular. He is an established visual and cultural artist and the founder of Wildbarra clothing company.

Wanjibung's art is about his homeland, its creation and its story. His work is featured in such collections as the Art Gallery of NSW, ANU, Cairns Regional Art Gallery, and many private institutions.

Wanjibung was the Director of Opposition Research of the Give us a Go Campaign, the founder of the Kowanyama Baby Festival, and co-founder and spokesperson for the Indigenous Environment Foundation. In 2020 he received a cultural award as part of the Australia Day acknowledgements. He holds a Master of Philosophy in Public Health (University of Sydney) and is completing a Ph.D. Visual Anthropology.



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