



*Australian Government Solicitor's
Reconciliation Action Plan*

November 2009

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November 2009 to November 2012



Introduction

The Australian Government Solicitor's senior leadership is very proud to present our first Reconciliation Action Plan.

AGS has enjoyed a long history of service to the Australian Government and, as reflected in our corporate vision, we share a strong, collective aspiration to act in the national interest. Our core values of integrity, professionalism, collegiality and commitment to the public good are central to AGS's culture, and fundamental to our commitment to reconciliation. This commitment to the public interest and reconciliation strengthens us and what we offer to our clients.

Through our Reconciliation Action Plan, AGS will take action to build better organisational understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. We will seek out and foster mutually rewarding relationships, and work in equal partnership in pursuit of our reconciliation goals of justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. It is our vision for reconciliation that all Australians can enjoy and enrich our society.

We look forward to the next steps on our RAP journey.

Rayne de Gruchy, AM PSM
Chief Executive Officer

Louise Vardanega, PSM
Chief Operating Officer

Robert Orr, PSM QC
Chief General Counsel

Martin Bruckard
Chair, RAP Steering Committee

AGS's vision for reconciliation is to recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories and to work in equal partnership towards achieving justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, so that all Australians can enjoy and enrich our society.

Focus of our Reconciliation Action Plan

The focus of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is on supporting reconciliation in Australia by increasing our understanding of, and building respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories; celebrating their achievements; developing meaningful relationships; providing pro bono services; and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This RAP identifies the steps that AGS is committed to take in support of reconciliation, through:

- our operations as a government business enterprise
- our employment policies and practices
- our employee training and development
- our pro bono activities
- our community service and workplace giving programs.

Our business

AGS is the leading provider of legal and related services to Australian Government departments and agencies. We are one of Australia's largest law firms, with offices in every capital city.

As reflected in our corporate vision, AGS has a strong collective aspiration and commitment to act in the national interest. We see our RAP as part of furthering that vision.

Government mandate

AGS is a unique type of law firm in Australia: a government-owned business that has been established under legislation to support the Attorney-General in his role as First Law Officer of the Commonwealth. We fulfil this mandate primarily by providing legal services to the Australian Government and its agencies on a fully commercial and competitive basis.

Our clients

Our work is generally restricted to providing legal and related services on request to government departments and agencies, and to entities in which the Australian Government has an interest. We also act for state and territory government organisations at their executive government's request. While we do not provide services directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, a number of our clients do.

Our RAP journey

On the first anniversary of the National Apology, 13 February 2009, AGS gave a commitment to Reconciliation Australia to establish this RAP.

In August 2009, we established a steering committee to guide the development of our RAP and to oversee the achievement of its objectives. The committee is chaired by Martin Bruckard, Director AGS Melbourne, and sponsored by Rayne de Gruchy, Chief Executive Officer. The committee comprises AGS employees from many different legal and specialist areas across our practice, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. This membership demonstrates the widespread interest in reconciliation that is evident throughout AGS.

AGS would like to express its gratitude to the RAP Steering Committee, and in particular to Asmi Wood (Academic Adviser, ANU College of Law) and Abbie Burchill (lawyer with the Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions and former President of Tarwirri, the Indigenous Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria). Asmi and Abbie are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of our RAP Steering Committee, both of whom have been so generously working with us, and will continue to do so. We would also like to thank Reconciliation Australia for guiding us along this path.

This RAP sets out a three-year vision for actions and targets at AGS. Following the launch of our RAP, the steering committee will continue to meet to monitor the implementation of these actions across AGS. Progress against the RAP will be reviewed annually by the committee, and reported on to AGS's CEO and to Reconciliation Australia.

We commence our RAP in November 2009 with small steps along a new path, which will lead us to take up larger initiatives in time. We are eager to embark upon this journey, aware that there will be challenges but also many benefits that will be consolidated over the longer term.

1 Respect

We chose to begin our RAP focusing on respect, because respect is a prerequisite to genuine and lasting relationships and reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

Gain a broader organisational understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements

Action	Measurable target	Timeline/responsibility
1.1 Increase visibility of our respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by:		
— including our RAP in employee induction material	RAP included in employee induction material.	By January 2010 <i>HR & PD Services</i>
— maintaining, updating and promoting the collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander publications in our libraries	Collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander books, magazines, films and documentaries maintained in each AGS library, and the availability of the collections promoted through AGSNet News.	Annual news article <i>Library & Knowledge Services</i>
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander newspapers subscribed to and provided in AGS offices.	12-month trial from January 2010 <i>HR & PD Services</i>
— expanding our display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art using ethical traders and appropriate labels	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art displayed, having been purchased or leased from recognised ethical art traders and appropriately labelled. Offices encouraged to select Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art when sourcing new or replacement artworks.	Beginning January 2010 <i>Directors and reconciliation working groups</i>
— maintaining a reconciliation site on AGS's intranet (AGSNet)	AGSNet site on reconciliation at AGS established, and includes relevant resources and links to Reconciliation Australia.	By January 2010 <i>HR & PD Services</i>
— celebrating and promoting National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.	Share our Pride website promoted to employees via an AGSNet News article each year to encourage them to take the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural survey.	Annual news article <i>Steering committee</i>
	National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week celebrated by displaying posters in each office, promoting activities on our AGSNet reconciliation site, and publishing AGSNet News articles to coincide with these celebrations each year.	Celebrations each year <i>HR & PD Services; reconciliation working groups; oversight by steering committee</i>

Acknowledge Country and act respectfully

Action	Measurable target	Timeline/responsibility
1.2 Foster and demonstrate cultural respect and 'Acknowledgment of Country' by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — developing and implementing cultural protocols that include Acknowledgment of Country by AGS employees, and increase visibility of this respect — placing a plaque in each office with Acknowledgment of Country. 	A Cultural Protocols Guide developed in consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and distributed to all employees.	By February 2010 <i>HR & PD Services</i>
	Acknowledgment of Country made at all AGS public and client functions, and at external functions where AGS employees are guest speakers (where appropriate and practical).	By November 2009 <i>All AGS employees; HR & PD Services</i>
	Plaque in foyer of each AGS office, using wording recommended by local lands council or relevant body.	By November 2012 <i>Directors; reconciliation working groups</i>
1.3 Develop and disseminate a Cultural Awareness and Respect Guide for employees working on legal matters affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Guide developed and disseminated, drawing on existing guidance.	By June 2011 <i>HR & PD Services; steering committee</i>

Increase understanding of legal issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

Action	Measurable target	Timeline/responsibility
1.4 Expand understanding across AGS of legal issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — attending conferences — cultural awareness training — lectures. 	One lawyer to attend the National Indigenous Legal Conference annually. Information from this conference shared with AGS through articles, presentations and networks.	Each year <i>Reconciliation working groups; director of office in state/territory in which conference is hosted; AGS attendees</i>
	Cultural awareness training provided to at least 8 employees, including the AGS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Coordinator (see page 7) and AGS lawyers working on matters, including pro bono matters, involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or legal issues.	By July 2010 <i>Manager Pro Bono Services; HR & PD Services</i>
	This commitment reviewed and increased.	August 2010 to November 2012 <i>Steering committee</i>
	Tom Calma, Australian Human Rights Commissioner, invited to speak at AGS.	By June 2011 <i>Steering committee</i>

2 Relationships

Respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians are important to AGS because they enhance our understanding of the issues affecting the national interest and, therefore, our clients. Strong relationships are fundamental to the success of our business and to the successful promotion of reconciliation.

Develop a network of relationships to support our reconciliation work

Action	Measurable target	Timeline/responsibility
<p>2.1 Build a coordinated and inclusive approach to AGS's reconciliation objectives by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — forming office-based reconciliation working groups — preparing a list of ideas suitable for office-based activities to support the development of the goals relating to Respect and Relationships. 	<p>Reconciliation working groups established in all AGS offices.</p> <hr/> <p>Reconciliation working groups operating effectively to promote reconciliation in each office.</p> <hr/> <p>List of ideas produced, and provided to local reconciliation working groups to consider.</p>	<p>By January 2010 <i>Steering committee; directors</i></p> <hr/> <p>By January 2011 <i>Steering committee</i></p> <hr/> <p>By January 2010 <i>Steering committee</i></p>
<p>2.2 Invite and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to join AGS's RAP Steering Committee to provide guidance on RAP initiatives.</p>	<p>Steering committee renewed annually. (Terms of reference for RAP Steering Committee includes this requirement.)</p>	<p>November each year <i>CEO and Chair of RAP Steering Committee</i></p>
<p>2.3 Build relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and elders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — by hosting one event per office in consultation with communities and elders — through workplace giving. 	<p>Number of offices hosting an event with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, such as performing a Welcome to Country or similar ceremony. Feedback sought from communities and elders on the success of the events.</p> <hr/> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are considered when selecting charities for workplace giving.</p>	<p>By November 2012 <i>Steering committee; reconciliation working groups</i></p> <hr/> <p>By November 2010 <i>Reconciliation working groups</i></p>
<p>2.4 Support the commitment to reconciliation of our Australian Government clients by promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander barristers through equal opportunity briefing policies.</p>	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander barristers briefed where appropriate and agreed by our clients.</p>	<p>By November 2012 <i>National Practice Manager, Litigation and Dispute Management</i></p>

3 Opportunities

Providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at AGS is important to us as we value diversity, which enriches the culture and skills of our workforce and, therefore, our services. AGS recognises the importance of education and its ability to empower individuals and communities. Providing pro bono services is another opportunity for mutual learning and for improving and expanding respectful relationships.

Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students and graduates, and offer employment

Action	Measurable target	Timeline/responsibility
3.1 Develop a strategy to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including:		
— mentoring	Established mentoring programs investigated, and participation in appropriate programs organised where there is a need and interest.	By November 2010 <i>Reconciliation working groups; directors; HR & PD Services; oversight by steering committee</i>
— providing places at external training	Between 3 – 10 offers made to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students to attend AGS client training courses and programs on a complimentary basis.	By November 2012 <i>Manager Client Training; HR & PD Services</i>
— providing legal research training	A legal research training course presented at the AGS office library to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in our Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney offices.	By November 2012 <i>Library and Knowledge Services</i>
— presentation to law students by AGS lawyers.	One presentation offered by senior AGS lawyers at a university law school to review and discuss relevant legal topics with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	November 2010 <i>Reconciliation working groups; oversight by steering committee</i>
3.2 Develop a strategy to employ and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, covering:		
— recruitment and retention	Recruitment and retention strategies in place. AGS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Coordinator appointed with responsibility for reviewing, amending and implementing HR recruitment and retention strategies and application procedures.	By June 2010 <i>HR & PD Services; steering committee; AGS Employment Coordinator</i>
— ways to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for employment in legal roles and support functions.	Job advertisements include 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are encouraged to apply'. Where appropriate, jobs advertised in the <i>Koori Mail</i> or <i>National Indigenous Times</i> . Two positions offered each year for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take up on a casual, temporary or permanent employment basis. Offers may be made in relation to: — legal clerkship and traineeship programs — recruitment of full or part-time admitted lawyers — casual paralegal positions — other professional roles — administrative roles, on a permanent or traineeship basis. At least one of these offers to be taken up each year.	From June 2010 until November 2012 <i>HR & PD Services</i> <i>HR & PD Services; steering committee</i>

Seek ways in which our lawyers can contribute further to reconciliation goals through pro bono activities

<i>Action</i>	<i>Measurable target</i>	<i>Timeline/responsibility</i>
3.3 Undertake pro bono work for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including work relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — corporations — employment — in-kind support/services. 	Scheme established, in partnership with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, whereby AGS accepts referral of certain types of legal matters from non-profit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations, and acts as their legal adviser on a pro bono basis.	By March 2010 <i>Manager, Pro Bono Services</i>
	Suite of templates developed that clarifies legal issues related to employment, for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations.	From November 2009 until November 2012 <i>Manager, Pro Bono Services</i>
	Relationships developed that encompass the provision of legal and support services, including access to meeting space, library and technology services and workplace giving programs.	From March 2010 until November 2012 <i>Manager, Pro Bono Services</i>

Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses

<i>Action</i>	<i>Measurable target</i>	<i>Timeline/responsibility</i>
3.4 Support the success of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses by promoting and using them when possible.	National database developed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal professionals, with links to existing databases of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander goods and service providers, such as catering services, designers and entertainment.	By December 2010 <i>Reconciliation working groups; oversight by steering committee</i>

Tracking progress and reporting

Following the launch of our RAP, the RAP Steering Committee will continue to meet to monitor the implementation of the RAP actions across AGS, in conjunction with the reconciliation working groups. Progress against the RAP will be reviewed annually by the committee and reported on to both AGS's CEO and Reconciliation Australia. We will continually re-evaluate our RAP so that we can celebrate our achievements and learn from our experiences.

<i>Action</i>	<i>Measurable target</i>	<i>Timeline/responsibility</i>
RAP placed on Reconciliation Australia's website and on AGS's external website.	RAP published on both websites.	December 2009 <i>Secretary of the steering committee</i>
Monitor RAP progress.	Four meetings of steering committee held each year.	2010, 2011 and 2012 <i>Steering committee</i>
RAP report endorsed by CEO.	Report published on both websites.	November each year <i>Steering committee; those responsible for RAP actions</i>
RAP refreshed, based on lessons learnt through reporting process.	Refreshed RAP endorsed by AGS's CEO, and approved and registered by Reconciliation Australia.	December each year <i>Steering committee; those responsible for RAP actions</i>