Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

December 2021 – December 2022

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

REFLECT

Legal Aid

Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission

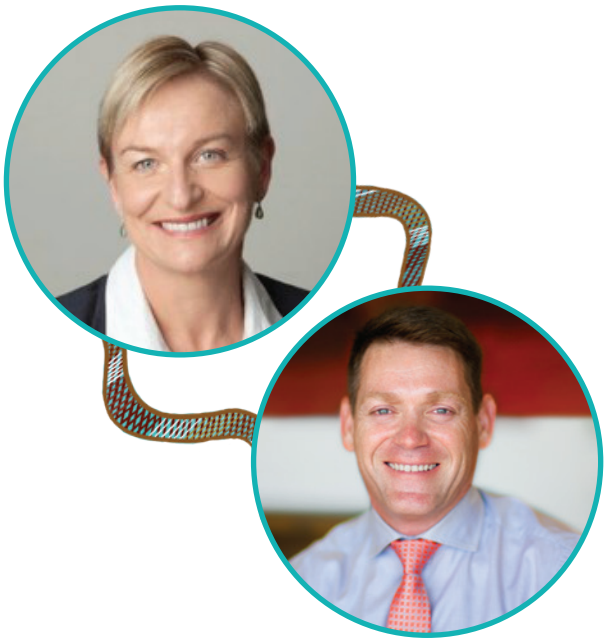
Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission

Statement of Commitment from the Director and Chairperson

This year the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission is launching its first ever Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), December 2021 to December 2022. Our RAP enshrines our commitment to reconciliation and providing high quality legal representation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities across the Territory through innovative services and true partnerships.

Our RAP also enshrines our support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart and First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We support and advocate for systemic and structural reform through our work. We are committed to being a leader in promoting reconciliation and structural change in the NT legal profession and across the justice system.

This RAP sets out the practical steps we will take to continue to achieve these commitments. It will guide us both internally, to inform and grow our workplace culture, and externally, to recognise the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities and to address disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



We have 3 main focus areas of our RAP with a range of actions to be delivered, some being:

Relationships:

- Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.
- Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.
- Encourage and support relationships between the legal/justice system and Indigenous community Elders, groups and senior people for the purpose of embedding culturally safe practices into the justice system including with respect to decision making - eg children's matters or sentencing processes.

Respect:

- Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.
- Identify spaces in our offices and space we use that can be named in the language of the Traditional lands where our workplace is located.
- Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.

Opportunities:

- Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.
- Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.
- Provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students and lawyers.

All of this greatly enhances the services that we as an organisation are committed to providing to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and communities across the NT.

Annmarie Lumsden
Director

Duncan McConnel
Chairperson

Mim Cole

Mim Cole, a Larrakia, Wardaman and Karajarri woman, is a visual artist from Darwin, Northern Territory. Mim has been creating art since she was a teenager, learning techniques through practice and observation of the art-making of her Mother, Uncles and large artistic family.

Mim is a natural artist who experiments with and applies her traditional and abstract compositions to a variety of media including painting, printmaking and a wide range of design work. Her sense of composition is particularly inspired by the rawness of ancient Aboriginal art.

Mim's creative practice, licensed under the name of Mimmim, holds a strong connection to identity, family, country, nature and community which she channels intuitively into her art. Mim enjoys pushing the boundaries of her arts practice using a mix of vibrant colours with a traditional palette to express dynamic movement in each painting and design.

Story

The centre circle represents the NT Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC). The lines travelling outwards are the connections, journeys, and travel across the NT that NTLAC achieve to guide and support community. The outer circles represent the people in community that NTLAC help.

The cross hatching is an honouring of Gulumoerrgin/Larrakia culture and country in which NTLAC is located.

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN
REFLECT

Reconciliation Australia welcomes Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission joins a network of more than 1,100 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 Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission 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 Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, 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 business

The Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC) is a statutory body established under the Legal Aid Act which provides legal services to people in the NT and aims to uphold a fair NT and national justice system and to ensure that people in the NT understand their legal rights and disadvantaged people have access to quality legal services. NTLAC auspices the Domestic Violence Legal Service (DVLS).

We employ 104 people including 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have six offices across the NT and provide outreach services in a range of other locations, including regional courts, remote and regional towns and communities and in our partner health and wellbeing services.

NTLAC delivers vitally needed services across the Northern Territory with the support of the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government. Some of the specific services and programs which the Commission has delivered in 2021 include:

- Legal information and referral through our Helpline services, which is the first point of entry for legal help
- Family law and child protection advice and assistance services across the Northern Territory
- Civil law advice and assistance services including for vulnerable people such as youth, those experiencing mental health concerns, disability and through the Indigenous outreach services
- Criminal law advice and assistance for people who are not able to afford the cost of private representation
- Continuing our existing strong Health Justice Partnerships with Danila Dilba Health Service, and Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service
- Commencing a new partnership with Tangentyere Council and Women's Safety Services of Central Australia
- Implementing the Report into Access to Justice in the Barkly Region in collaboration with legal services in that region
- Community Legal Education, with an increased focus on communication across language and cultural groups, and building capacity internally and among stakeholders on the use of resources such as 'Blurred Borders' materials.

Our RAP

We are developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) because we want to document our existing and future commitment to reconciliation and the practical steps we will take to further this. So far NTLAC commitment to reconciliation has been informal and not documented.

We want a document that can guide NTLAC internally to inform and grow our workplace culture and externally to recognise the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities and to address disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A RAP in furtherance of the values in our 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, which are:

- Social justice: Fairness and equity valuing diversity
- Culture: Acknowledging First Nations peoples and valuing our multi-cultural community
- Integrity: Performing our functions with respect, dignity, compassion and honesty
- Professionalism: Committed to the rule of law, ethical standards, innovation, and continuous review and improvement to ensure quality service
- Accountability: Accountable for actions and decisions
- Sustainability: A safe and supportive work environment.

NTLAC supports the Uluru Statement. First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination is set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We wholly support and advocate for systemic and structural reform, through our work.

The implementation of the RAP will be done by establishing a RAP Working Group which will be comprised of internal and external stakeholder representatives from across the NT.

Our partnerships and current activities

NTLAC has a long history of engagement and positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations including formerly North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (NAALAS), Katherine Regional Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, Miwatj Aboriginal Legal Service and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS).These services are now amalgamated under the umbrella of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA). We had formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with NAALAS and CAALAS about client referrals and library resources and have had an MOU with NAAJA about client referrals since 2018.

NTLAC has had a formal partnership with the Danila Dilba Health Service via MoU since 2016 and this continues to evolve and grow.

NTLAC has had a formal partnership with Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service since 2020 and Tangentyere Council since 2021 and hopes to develop more partnerships.

A high portion and growing number of NTLAC clients are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. NTLAC has been regularly travelling to and servicing key communities since 2007.

NTLAC has developed high quality community legal education and other resources in consultation with Aboriginal people and organisations in the NT and surrounding regions, including:

- Education videos translated into Tiwi, Warlpiri, Warumungu and Yolngu Matha
- Darwin Community Law Toolkit
- Blurred Borders Resources developed in consultation with Indigenous NGOs and community groups
- Access to Justice in the Barkly Report

NTLAC requires all employees to undergo cross cultural training and working with interpreter training.

Our commitment

First Nations people of the NT have been impacted by colonisation in many ways including through dispossession, war, discrimination and disadvantage. First Nations people in the NT are significantly over-represented as both victims and offenders in the criminal justice system and Aboriginal youth comprise over 90% of all people in youth detention. In the NT 90% of victims of domestic and family violence related assaults are Aboriginal. The imprisonment rate in the NT is almost 4 times the national average and the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment is the second highest in Australia, after WA.

These figures and many others form the basis of the development of an Aboriginal Justice Agreement for the NT. NTLAC has been privileged to contribute to the development of an Aboriginal Justice Agreement in the NT and sees this as an important opportunity to achieve the structural and systemic changes needed in the NT.

NTLAC is a front line services provider and we identify significant policy and law reform issues impacting on our clients. Within our limited resources we advocate for system change to address these concerns. NTLAC has an important role to play in promoting justice reforms, which improve outcomes for First Nations Peoples, including young people, families involved in the child protection system, people experiencing domestic and family violence, in contact with police, in detention or custody.

The development of this RAP provides the platform for NTLAC to be a leader in promoting reconciliation and structural change in the NT legal profession and across the justice system by working to address a multitude of issues including Aboriginal incarceration rates, deaths in custody and systemic victimisation, and to advocate for and promote Aboriginal culture, lore and traditions into western legal systems as well as the importance of First Nations people working within these systems.

In 2021 our policy work has included:

- Supporting the need for a significant increase in housing infrastructure in the NT
- A focus on law reform, policy and practical improvement in Youth Justice, Child Protection and Domestic and Family Violence, to address some underlying disadvantages that our clients face when having contact with the criminal justice system.
- Championing key law reform issues, such as the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility, Mandatory Sentencing and the repeal of section 16AA and 16A(2A) of the Crimes Act 1914 (Cth) which prevents the consideration of the cultural background of Aboriginal offenders and is discriminatory.

This RAP provides the platform for NTLAC to continue our commitment to reconciliation and to be a leader in promoting reconciliation and structural change in the NT legal profession and across the justice system.

Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
1.Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	• Identify and list Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence.	April 2022	Deputy Director
	• Explore with stakeholders how we can strengthen existing relationships and create new ones.	July 2022	Deputy Director
	• Develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, including MOUs with organisations that support our mutual goals of reconciliation.	July 2022	Deputy Director
2.Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	• Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff.	April 2022	Deputy Director
	• RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event annually.	27 May – 3 June 2022	Deputy Director
	• Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW annually.	27 May – 3 June 2022	Deputy Director
3.Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	• Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff.	January 2022	HR Manager
	• Develop a list of RAP focussed organisations with similar goals that NTLAC can approach to connect with on our reconciliation journey.	April 2022	Deputy Director
	• Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	January 2022	Deputy Director
	• Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	February 2022	Deputy Director
	• Develop and implement a strategy to communicate our RAP to internal and external stakeholders.	April 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Promote active engagement with stakeholders through annual reporting of NTLAC RAP activities.	February 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager

Relationships

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
4. Encourage and support relationships between the legal/ justice system and Indigenous community Elders, groups and senior people for the purpose of embedding culturally safe practices into the justice system including with respect to decision making – eg children's matters or sentencing processes.	• Encourage staff to consult with and access information from cultural leaders, respected persons and formal and informal groups in legal matters, CLE activities, youth issues and community safety responses – eg the Kurdiji group at Lajamanu, Grandmothers in Alice Springs, Larrakia Nation in Darwin	April 2022	Deputy Director
	• Promote consultation with cultural groups in the Commission's development of new programs and initiatives.	April 2022	Deputy Director
	• Invite community Elders, senior people and groups to present to staff members to educate Legal Aid staff about opportunities to partner with and work with community groups/ senior people and Elders.	April 2022	Director
5. Develop relationships between NTLAC and other legal/ justice services that have established a RAP to share ideas and initiatives	• Contact legal organisations eg Supreme Court to see if they have commenced a RAP.	April 2022	Family Support Caseworker
	• Draw up/collect a list of RAP legal services in our sphere of influence.	May 2022	Section and Regional Managers
	• Meet with RAP legal service representatives to share ideas and initiatives.	May 2022	Deputy Director
6. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	• Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	June 2022	HR Manager
	• Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	June 2022	HR Manager

Top End

Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
7. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	• Provide cultural awareness training for our staff. - For new staff, within induction period. - For existing staff, refreshers annually and as needed (i.e. when practising in a new location/ engaging clients from different language groups).	April 2022	HR Manager
	• Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation	October 2022	Deputy Director
	• Conduct a review of cultural awareness training needs within our organisation.	July 2022	HR Manager
8. Identify spaces in our offices and space we use that can be named in the language of the Traditional lands where our workplace is located	• Identify spaces in each office	May 2022	Corporate Services Manager
	• Engage and consult with Traditional Custodians about possible names that could be used	December 2022	Corporate Services Manager
9. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.	• Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational areas.	December 2022	Deputy Director
	• Develop fact sheets for relevant communities and areas	December 2022	Outreach Manager
	• Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols to be implemented for all NTLAC meetings and events.	December 2022	Director
	• Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, and use of them, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols	July 2022	HR Manager
	• Develop fact sheets/guides for relevant communities and areas to assist.	July 2022	Outreach Manager

Respect

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
10. 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. Circulate NAIDOC week resources and materials to our staff.	April 2022	Outreach Manager
	• Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area and encouraging all staff to participate	First week in July 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event.	First week in July 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Assist with preparation of NAIDOC week by joining regional NAIDOC committee.	June 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Organise to host a NAIDOC legal breakfast event for all staff.	May 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NAIDOC week.	July 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Each regional office encouraged to be involved with local events	July 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager

Tennant Creek

Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
11. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	• Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	January 2022	HR Manager
	• Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	August 2022	HR Manager
12. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	• Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.	July 2022	Corporate Services Manager
	• Investigate and consider joining Supply Nation.	February 2022	Corporate Services Manager
	• Develop a policy to support the Indigenous business sector and/or use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned business as a first choice and where possible for procurement.	July 2022	Corporate Services Manager
13. Improve service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients	• Develop and adopt best practice guidelines for providing legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and include them in induction materials for employees, secondees, students and volunteers.	December 2022	Deputy Director
	• Ensure cross cultural training and working with Aboriginal interpreter training is available to all employees.	December 2022	Deputy Director
	• All employees use Aboriginal interpreters when needed.	December 2022	Deputy Director
	• Support Aboriginal Interpreter Service to train interpreters.	December 2022	Deputy Director
14. Provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Law students and lawyers	• Liaise with the Bilata Legal Pathways Program, CDU and NT Young Lawyers to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students.	July 2022	Deputy Director
	• Encourage applications for placement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GDLP students.	July 2022	HR Manager
	• Participate in events with Bilata Legal Pathways Program and Winkinku Rrumbangi NT Indigenous lawyers to promote NTLAC as an employer.	December 2022	Deputy Director
	• Develop a principle, which prefers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in placements (student/lawyer etc) within the Commission.	December 2022	Deputy Director

Opportunities

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
15. Continue to work to improve the justice system and outcomes for First Nations Peoples	• Prioritise law reform and policy activities which aim to change justice system outcomes which disproportionately impact on First Nations people, eg incarceration rates, alternative pathways to prison, discriminatory laws, domestic violence.	April 2022	Policy Officer
	• Support the implementation, governance and development of the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement.	April 2022	Policy Officer
	• Contribute to law reform and policy to increase the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years.	April 2022	Policy Officer
	• Advocate for the implementation of the recommendations of: - the Royal Commission and Board of Inquiry into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory; - the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee report on recognition of local Aboriginal laws in sentencing and bail; - the Northern Territory Law Reform Committee report on mandatory sentencing and community-based sentencing options.	April 2022	Policy Officer

Katherine Gorge

Governance

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility
16. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	• Maintain a RWG to govern RAP implementation.	February 2022	Deputy Director
	• Review and update Terms of Reference for the RWG.	May 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	May 2022	Deputy Director
17. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	• Define resource needs for RAP implementation.	May 2022	SARM
	• Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	May 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager, Deputy Director, Director
	• Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	February 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager Deputy Director
18. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	• Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
	• Include a copy of the RAP on NTLAC website.	February 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager
19. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	• Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	September 2022	Preventative Legal Services Manager

Central Region

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