

Indigenous Reconciliation Statement of Intent and Actions 2020-25

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1. Acknowledgement

We acknowledge Australia's Indigenous People who are Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future and extend that respect to all Indigenous People.

2. Background

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap, updated in 2020, enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Agreement is established between the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations and all Australian Governments (Commonwealth, State, Territory and the Australian Local Governments Association) to the following 'Close the Gap' targets:

1. Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives
2. Children are born healthy and strong
3. Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years
4. Children thrive in their early years
5. Students achieve their full learning potential
6. Students reach their full potential through further education pathways
7. Youth are engaged in employment or education
8. Strong economic participation and development of people in their communities
9. People can secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need
10. Adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
11. Young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
12. Children are not overrepresented in the child protection system
13. Families and households are safe
14. People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing
15. People maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters
16. Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing

3. About the FRDC and Reconciliation

Reconciliation has been shown to deliver a range of benefits to organisations. Reconciliation actions are expected to deliver benefit for and through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) by:

- improved research, development (RD&E) outcomes for Indigenous Australians:
 - by ensuring that RD&E investments are planned and delivered with appropriate consideration to cultural protocols, and that wherever possible Indigenous Peoples are included as research partners, and Indigenous knowledge is incorporated in RD&E delivery, research projects are more likely to lead to the achievement of planned outcomes;
 - through effective engagement and advice, identify the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities;

- by sharing outputs in a format and manner that encourages Indigenous Peoples to access and adopt the R&D findings and outputs.
- enhanced effectiveness:
 - Create an inclusive environment to enhance two-way interactions and learning, and work to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to engage with government organisations with confidence and trust;
 - Informed and culturally aware employees and directors will be respectful and comfortable in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and will be empowered to demonstrate respectful behaviours, and operate in accordance with cultural protocols.
- opportunities for growth:
 - organisations build respect by increasing the cultural awareness and competency of their employees, and by promoting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples culture and knowledge
 - by having good relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the FRDC will increasingly be seen as an appropriate vehicle for managing third party investment focused on Indigenous fishing and aquaculture development, and opportunities to engage in appropriate cultural practices.

International, Commonwealth and State legislation oblige organisations to protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Legislation includes a requirement to consider human rights, discrimination, equal opportunities and the protection of Aboriginal culture and heritage. Fishing and aquaculture are key components within Indigenous culture and have been for tens of thousands of years. This is displayed all around Australia with numerous examples in all corners, from middens along the coasts and rivers to fish traps, recently discovered examples of aquaculture and ongoing clear examples of first nation's people involvement in harvesting, managing and protecting natural resources and environment.

The FRDC acknowledges that to achieve reconciliation and beneficial outcomes for Indigenous Australians we must embed and involve Indigenous Peoples and culture in all relevant research activities and structures.

The FRDC finds itself in a unique position regarding Indigenous reconciliation; there are actions which the organisation can undertake within internal culture, but the FRDC can also embed elements in how research and development is funded and the criteria that must be included for funding.

The FRDC shares the vision expressed by Reconciliation Australia: *'A united Australia which respects this land of ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island heritage and provides justice and equity for all.'*

The FRDC's shared vision for fishing and aquaculture by 2030 is: *Fish Forever 2030: Collaborative, vibrant fishing and aquaculture, creating diverse benefits from aquatic resources, and celebrated by the community.* This vision recognises that "diverse benefits" encompasses the many social and environmental values related to the commercial, recreational and Indigenous sectors.

The FRDC will:

- acknowledge the special relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with their traditional lands and waters
- value the experiences, knowledge, perspectives and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples, including in a formal sense within projects where appropriate, and protect these as we would any other intellectual property elements
- consistently seek to demonstrate informed respect for Indigenous Australians and work with our partners to achieve the same in developing research, development and extension projects and realising their outcomes
- incorporate Indigenous knowledge where relevant into research projects and delivery of outcomes.

4. Research and development on fishing and aquaculture for and by Indigenous Australians

The FRDC recognises several sectors within Australian fishing and aquaculture. While Indigenous Australians can be included in any of these, the FRDC also acknowledges that Indigenous connection and involvement in fishing and aquaculture as a sector in its own right.

The FRDC seeks to invest in R&D to achieve aspirations of Indigenous Peoples. The FRDC has established the Indigenous Reference Group; an expertise based committee of Indigenous people, with members from various areas of expertise and knowledge from across Australian fishing and aquaculture, including; industry, research and management, from all Australian states.

There are a number of key priority areas for the IRG:

- Primacy for Indigenous People
- Acknowledgement of Indigenous Cultural Practices
- Self-determination of Indigenous rights to use and manage cultural assets and resources
- Economic development opportunities arising from Indigenous People's cultural assets and associated rights
- Capacity building opportunities for Indigenous people are enhanced

Importantly these priorities have not been formed by the IRG in isolation, they have been tested and refined through several open forums over the last decade.

As well as directly funding research activities the IRG and the FRDC seek to act as a conduit in the space for Indigenous fishing. This includes linking with organisations seeking to do similar work such as the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, the CSIRO, the Federal Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment and various State Governments.

5. Actions

The following sections outline the actions and activities the FRDC as an organisation is going to undertake. The FRDC is not in a position to fulfil a Reconciliation Action Plan at this time but has utilised some of the sections recommended for a Reconciliation Action Plan. Through this document and its ongoing monitoring and evaluation the FRDC will look towards implementation of a formal Reconciliation Action Plan. Additionally, there are actions we seek to take through our investment in R&D which are captured at the end of this section.

Respect

Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.

- Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation and maintain currency in training across the staff and Board.
- Develop, implement and communicate a cultural learning strategy for all staff including a commitment to on country engagement by staff with communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Facilitate within our work conversations and learning between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to improve two-way learning in the cultural space related to fishing and aquaculture.
- Maintain a contemporary understanding of the activities and documents which provide an understanding of value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning such as the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) and the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.

- Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.
- Ensure all FRDC communications including documents and presentations include a relevant Welcome to Country and or Acknowledgement of Country.
- Invite a local Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year.
- Include an Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of all meetings.
- Build an appropriate library (eBooks or links) that help to explain cultural protocols and first nation's literature.

Relationships

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and the FRDC

- Meet with regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.
- Develop and implement an engagement plan to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.
- Ensure a process is in place to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representation on Committees and Boards and in employment opportunities.
- Ensure opportunities exist in Fishing and Aquaculture Research and Development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence

- Implement strategies to engage our staff in reconciliation.
- Communicate our commitment to reconciliation publicly.
- Explore opportunities to positively influence our external stakeholders to drive reconciliation outcomes.
- Collaborate with other like-minded organisations to develop ways to advance reconciliation.

Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination and anti-racism strategies.

- Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify appropriateness of existing antidiscrimination provisions, and future needs.
- Develop, implement and communicate anti-discrimination and anti-racism procedures for our organisation.

Celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW)

- Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to staff.
- Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW
- Organise at least one NRW event each year.

Opportunities

Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development

- Implement short term graduate or secondment opportunities for Indigenous people to participate and learn about the FRDC.
- Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.
- Advertise job vacancies to effectively reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.
- Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace.
- Champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment in organisations the FRDC works with, including Fisheries Agencies, Universities and Industry groups.

Additional Immediate actions:

- Have the AIATSIS language map in the FRDC meeting room as a means to make this issue present in our activities, rather than an afterthought or something separate.
- Work with our partners to have Indigenous fisheries/Australian Indigenous Peoples/communities first in sentences rather than at the end.

- Ensure Indigenous Australian Peoples are acknowledged as the traditional custodians in areas where the FRDC undertakes activities on our various communications platforms: website, social media, FISH mag, annual report etc.
- Empower the Indigenous Reference Group and build a more comprehensive section on the FRDC website.
- The Indigenous Reference Group will continue to meet in a variety of locations around Australia with an open forum policy to meet and network with as many Indigenous Peoples as possible, to share what they are doing and hear from Indigenous Peoples about their needs and aspirations in regards to fishing and aquaculture.
- The Indigenous Reference Group will also invite guests from industry and Agencies to meetings to expand shared knowledge.

Research related actions:

- Ensure that a prior informed consent form is used in research projects when dealing with Indigenous Peoples and communities by ensuring that the application process has an explicit step to consider the need for this form and process.
- Ensure that all research adheres to relevant ethical guidelines when dealing with Indigenous peoples and communities. Make ethical guidelines part of research agreements, for example AIATSIS ethical guidelines.
- FRDC to adopt the [*Our Knowledge Our Way in caring for Country: Indigenous-led approaches to strengthening and sharing our knowledge for land and sea management. Best Practice Guidelines from Australian experiences*](#) to ensure that all those working on FRDC funded research and other activities follow the correct manner of engagement and are aware of the underlying principles.
- Where relevant, align our research activities with the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap targets](#)
- Recognise and protect traditional knowledge as intellectual property (in line with the *Our Knowledge Our Way guidelines*) under FRDC's policy and management of project IP.
- All research projects funded through the Indigenous Reference Group are to at least have an Indigenous co-investigator with budget to cover this involvement, and all projects to have considered the possibility and appropriateness of including an Indigenous partner. This is done to ensure two-way capacity building within projects.
- All research projects funded are conducted to achieve outputs which are of benefit and applicable to as many communities, including Indigenous Peoples as primary custodians of our natural resources, as possible.

Broader longer-term activities:

- The FRDC seeking to endorse the [*Uluru Statement from the Heart*](#) as a statement that sets the stage for our communities to come together and move forward on the same journey.
- Seek to further use the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) to assess areas which FRDC activities or research areas can have a positive impact on some of the targets such as: social and emotional wellbeing; cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters, and strong economic participation.

- Ensure that there is an understanding of the issue of constitutional recognition within the FRDC board and the broader organisation.
- Consider the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to inform the direction and manner of FRDC activities. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>

6. Evaluation

Each year prior to Reconciliation week FRDC will undertake an evaluation of the achievements in the activities and actions of this statement, for reporting to the FRDC board and then publicly. This evaluation in the first instance will be qualitative and largely discuss whether activities have occurred, what the learning might and whether we will make a change to the activity or action.

This evaluation process will inform future activities and may result in changes to some of the actions above. It is hoped that this evaluation will provide a basis for the FRDC to develop learning in the area of Indigenous reconciliation both for the organisation and for various FRDC stakeholders.