



Reconciliation and local government

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The Aboriginal Inclusion Framework currently under development in Victoria seeks to reshape the relationship between government service providers and Aboriginal communities. It suggests that local government has an important role to play in efforts to reduce discrimination and support diversity.

Some local councils could do more with their responsibility for reconciliation. Preliminary research undertaken for Reconciliation Victoria indicates wide variation in local council engagement with reconciliation. About 20 local councils (25 per cent) are well-advanced in achieving reconciliation outcomes. Another 20 local councils have recently or will soon implement reconciliation plans or activities. But 40 – half – of all local councils have no online evidence of reconciliation activities.

Improved reconciliation outcomes in local government would improve the life chances for Indigenous Victorians, and increase identification by non-Indigenous Victorians with Victoria's Aboriginal heritage.

Reconciliation Victoria, in conjunction with ANTaR Victoria, is focusing on improving reconciliation and reducing racism in local government.

This short article outlines opportunities to engage local councils in reconciliation, which may be of use to Local Reconciliation Groups and other ANTaR Vic members with influence in local government.



Local grassroots projects can make all the difference to reconciliation

Opportunities

Native title: The State Government adopted the Victorian Native Title Settlement Framework in June 2009 as the preferred method for negotiating native title in Victoria. There is an opportunity to work with Native Title Services Victoria to improve local council understanding of the Framework.

Aboriginal heritage: The Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council was created under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 to ensure that Aboriginal people throughout Victoria play a central role in the protection and management of their heritage. Local councils have responsibilities with respect to Victoria's rich Aboriginal heritage.

New representative arrangements: The State Government's new representative arrangements for Indigenous Victorians introduced Local and Regional Indigenous Networks (LINs and RINs). There is a need to strengthen relationships between the new representative arrangements and local councils.

Closing the gap: Victoria has agreed to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Closing the Gap commitments. Local government has a crucial role to play in many areas identified in the national integrated strategy, including the social determinates of health. There is a need to build local council capability to implement Closing the Gap strategies.

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities: One of the Charter's four founding principles is that 'human rights have a special importance for the Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters'. The Charter is to be reviewed in 2011 and self-determination for Indigenous peoples is a key human right to be considered for inclusion in the Charter. Local government has a major role to play in implementing the Charter with respect to Indigenous peoples.

Draft National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework: The vision of the Standing Committee of Attorney Generals' Framework is that 'all Australian governments, Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, service providers, and other relevant stakeholders, working together, can close the gap in Indigenous law and justice outcomes by embracing the values of reconciliation, trust and good will and an ongoing commitment to innovative and sustainable approaches'. Local councils can implement relevant practices to support effective law and justice outcomes.

Wannik: the Government's Education Strategy for Koorie Students requires schools to work in partnership with Koorie communities to develop an understanding of Koorie culture, including substantial professional support for school leaders and teachers. Local councils have a potential role to play in supporting schools in this task.

Actions

Reconciliation Victoria has presented a project proposal to state government for funding to work with the Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) and Reconciliation Australia (RA) to improve reconciliation outcomes in local government. VLGA and RA have indicated strong support for this work. It will build on RA's work with Reconciliation Action Plans. There is also a need to update *Toomnungi*, published by the Municipal Association of Victoria in 2002, that summarised reconciliation activity across local government.

In this year of the tenth anniversary of the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) final report and the bridge walks, it is important to focus on the grassroots opportunities provided by local government. 'Are we there yet?' Alas, in many local communities the answer is an unfortunate, very clear, 'no'.

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