




Reconciliation: *Building Relationships between Victorian Water Businesses and Aboriginal Communities*

October 2013

Learnings and Reflections from a CUAC workshop



Acknowledgement	The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre Ltd. would like to acknowledge the contributions of Colin Hunter, Chris Kirby & the water businesses that attended the workshop
Cover Image	Artwork by Reanna Bono
Please note that	The word 'Aboriginal' is used throughout to refer to Aboriginal communities in Victoria. However, when referring to Reconciliation Action Plans, the word 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who reside in Victoria.

Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre Ltd (CUAC)

172 Flinders Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
P (03) 9639 7600
F (03) 9639 8966
www.cuac.org.au

ACN 100 188 752

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INTRODUCTION

About the Report

The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) is publishing this report based on key outcomes and learnings from a recent Reconciliation workshop, which was tailored specifically for Victorian water businesses. This report serves as a resource to learn more about Reconciliation Action Plans and to encourage industry to take proactive steps towards Reconciliation with Victorian Aboriginal communities. The feedback received from workshop participants has been overwhelmingly positive. CUAC is eager to assist other water or energy businesses wishing to develop or learn more about Reconciliation Action Plans.

The structure of this report is modelled on the workshop agenda and includes reflections on Reconciliation from an Aboriginal Elder, a brief overview on the key components of a Reconciliation Action Plan, insights from workshop participants who are developing plans, and recommended resources for Reconciliation.

For the purpose of this report, the acronym 'RAP' is used as a short form for Reconciliation Action Plan. This is not to be confused with Registered Aboriginal Parties. The term 'Reconciliation' is used to refer to reconciliation between Aboriginal people and other Australians.

Background

CUAC is a specialist consumer organisation established in 2002 to represent Victorian energy and water consumers in policy and regulatory processes. As Australia's only consumer organisation focused specifically on the energy and water sectors, CUAC has developed an in-depth knowledge of the interests, experiences and needs of energy and water consumers.

CUAC's work is guided by strong principles, including monitoring the needs and interests of low income, disadvantaged, and rural consumers. One of CUAC's key strategic priorities since 2011 has been conducting research and engaging with Victorian Aboriginal communities to ensure water and energy policies are serving their unique consumer needs.

Further to this work, CUAC has relied on its specialist knowledge to develop and implement strategies through its continued engagement with both government and industry. In 2011, CUAC undertook research and consulted with Aboriginal communities in Victoria to produce the report - *Wein, Paen, Ya Ang Gim: Victorian Aboriginal Experiences of Energy and Water*.¹ The report examined Aboriginal consumers' experiences and needs in relation to electricity, gas and water, and provided a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges in Victorian Aboriginal communities in a sustainable way.

¹ A copy of this report can be found by visiting: http://www.cuac.org.au/index.php?Itemid=30&option=com_docman.

Key recommendations from this report included to improve outreach to Aboriginal communities, and to engage with both the water and energy industries with a view to developing 'Reconciliation Action Plans' (or formal agreements) with traditional Aboriginal owners of the land.²

Reconciliation Action Plans are intended to assist organisations to develop a business plan that documents what they will do within their organisation to further Reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.³ The plans outline practical actions the organisation will take to build strong relationships and enhanced respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.⁴

To support industry in this important area, CUAC organised a workshop on Reconciliation Action Plans specifically tailored for the Victorian water businesses, recognising that they are in a particularly unique position to address issues that affect Aboriginal communities with respect infrastructure and land.

While none of the water businesses have developed a Reconciliation Action Plan to date, some of the businesses have already commenced the process to develop such a plan and we commend these initiatives.

About the Workshop

On 21 August 2013 CUAC hosted a Reconciliation workshop for Victorian water businesses at the Royal Society of Victoria in Melbourne. The aim of the workshop was to support water businesses to develop Reconciliation Action Plans.

The workshop provided an opportunity for businesses to learn more about Reconciliation, share experiences in relation to developing Reconciliation Action Plans and Cultural Heritage Plans, and to reflect on industry specific approaches to developing Reconciliation Action Plans.

Fourteen of Victoria's water businesses were in attendance with representatives across a variety of disciplines, such as Customer Service and Community Relations. Metropolitan and regional water businesses in attendance included North East Water, GWMWater, Goulburn-Murray Water, Melbourne Water, Coliban Water, City West Water, Wannon Water, Westernport Water, Yarra Valley Water, South Gippsland Water, South East Water, Gippsland Water, Barwon Water and Western Water.

The workshop agenda included a presentation and an Q&A session on the importance of Reconciliation Action Plans, by Colin Hunter. Colin is a Wurundjeri Elder who has worked with CUAC on a number of projects in relation to consulting with the Victorian Aboriginal community on water and energy policy. As a Planner of Aboriginal Partnerships for the City of Yarra, he has assisted in developing a Reconciliation Action Plan for the City of Yarra.

² Aboriginal people are often referred to as the traditional owners and custodians of the land in Australia.

³ Reconciliation Australia: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans>.

⁴ Ibid.

Chris Kirby, Deputy CEO of Reconciliation Australia, provided a workshop presentation on how to create a Reconciliation Action Plan. The afternoon session included an open discussion on industry approaches to Reconciliation Action Plans and strategies for future direction, led by Jo Benvenuti, Executive Officer of CUAC, and Loren Days, Research & Policy Advocate of CUAC.

This was the first of a series of reconciliation workshops being held by CUAC. CUAC intends to hold future workshops for the Victorian distribution businesses and energy retailers in 2013/14.

PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICAL ADVICE ON RECONCILIATION: COLIN HUNTER

Session 1: What Are the Benefits of a Reconciliation Action Plan?: a discussion with Colin Hunter on the importance of Reconciliation.



Colin Hunter, Wurundjeri Elder & Planner of Aboriginal Partnerships for the City of Yarra provides personal reflections on Reconciliation to workshop participants.

Personal Reflections on Reconciliation

Personal Reflections on Reconciliation

- Understand history to better understand the meaning of Reconciliation
- Self-determination for Aboriginal people is central to Reconciliation
- There are simple and meaningful actions your business can take to recognise Aboriginal culture (e.g flying the Aboriginal flag, incorporating Aboriginal artwork in your lobby or on marketing resources, posting acknowledgement plaques, or giving a 'Welcome to Country' acknowledgement before big events)

In the first session of the workshop, Colin Hunter provided some personal reflections on Reconciliation as a Wurundjeri Elder who has assisted organisations to develop relationships with his people, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, for a number of years.

Colin identified the first step of Reconciliation as having a good understanding of history and recognising how Melbourne was colonised. By providing personal reflections of his family history and his Grandmother's experiences on the Mission at Coranderrk,⁵ he stressed the importance of understanding history in order to understand the continued effects of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal people today.

"There is the issue of Aboriginal people being dislocated from their lands, and the destruction of Aboriginal society through the breaking down of Aboriginal families, culture, and lore. These have all had generational effects and are still with the Aboriginal community today, and as Aboriginal people we are expected to get over this and get on with our lives. As you may be able to imagine, this is not so easy."

However, in order to achieve Reconciliation, Colin conveyed the importance of not dwelling on the past.

"Do not carry guilt or, we will never move forward."

A second key element of Reconciliation identified by Colin is self-determination for Aboriginal people. He stated that when working towards Reconciliation, Aboriginal people must have input into the development of processes.

"With Aboriginal input and proper community consultation, organisations and businesses can work towards creating meaningful Reconciliation Action Plans that will help to address these issues. Aboriginal people need to be in control of their destiny."

A third key element of Reconciliation identified by Colin is recognition of Aboriginal culture. He spoke of minor changes businesses can implement, including, posting a plaque acknowledging Aboriginal people or Aboriginal art work in a main lobby area of a business to make Aboriginal people feel more comfortable or welcome.

By way of example, Colin explained some symbolic acts by the City of Yarra.

"Some simple acts can have a powerful impact, for example, flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag 365 days a year. That's something the City of Yarra does, and it's simple."

A representative from Wannon Water shared their experience engaging with their local Aboriginal community, the Gunditjmara people, while undertaking a two year process to recognise a massacre site at a reservoir that is now referred to as the 'Quiet Place.' It was agreed by both Colin and workshop participants that this is an appropriate and powerful way to acknowledge and honour Aboriginal history.

⁵ Coranderrk was an Aboriginal Government reserve set up in 1863 to provide land for Aboriginal people who had been dispossessed by the arrival of Europeans.

The Importance of Reconciliation

Key Points on the Importance of Reconciliation

- Make it a priority
- Understand that meaningful and respectful relationships are rooted in trust
- Adhere to the values that underpin Reconciliation as provided by Reconciliation Australia: Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities
- Historically, water was considered one of the most important and sacred resources by Aboriginal people, therefore, a collaborative approach is central to Reconciliation processes

There are cultural and spiritual values that underpin connection to land and water in Aboriginal culture. Colin explained that it is therefore important for the water businesses to make Reconciliation a priority in their day-to-day operations.

"Your companies manage a resource that was considered by Aboriginal people as one of the most important and sacred, water. We all need water to survive, and the protection and management of our water way is just one example of where Aboriginal people and business need to work in partnership."

Colin outlined the importance of Reconciliation, particularly as it relates to honouring water as a respected resource in Aboriginal communities.

"The Wurundjeri did not 'own' the land, or water in the European sense of the word, but belonged to, or were 'owned by' the land. I see the relationship that Aboriginal people have with the land and water as very similar to your own organisations relationship with these very important resources. We have a common goal, which is the protection and management of these precious resources."

In order to develop meaningful and respectful relationships with Aboriginal people, Colin noted there must be an ongoing dialogue and relationship building to foster trust.

"The only way we can improve these issues is through a collaborative approach. Without the substance required to build these respectful relationships, Reconciliation will never be reached."

Colin encouraged workshop participants to reflect on the values that underpin Reconciliation Action Plans; Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities, and to use the plans as a tool that can guide the Reconciliation process.

"When [Reconciliation Action Plans] contain meaningful commitments, they can result in positive outcomes to the Aboriginal community."

Ways to Engage with the Victorian Aboriginal Community

Key Points on Ways to Engage with the Aboriginal Community

- When dealing with land management issues, consultation with the traditional owners of the land should be your first point of call
- Who to consult – Local Aboriginal Co-op's or local councils are a good starting point, not individuals
- Ensure your interactions are genuine
- Do not rush it: allow for time to develop meaningful and genuine relationships
- Consult early in the process
- Aboriginal Elders are in high demand and getting in contact may be difficult
- Offer "a good feed": this can help encourage participation
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan to connect with your local Aboriginal community members

Colin's primary recommendation was to make contact with the traditional owners of the land when dealing with land management issues. He noted that in Victoria, there are nine Registered Aboriginal Parties that serve as the voice of Aboriginal people in the protection and management of Aboriginal culture and heritage,⁶ with the Wurundjeri being the biggest.

Workshop participants asked questions such as who are the best people to consult with in the Aboriginal community, and whether there is disagreement among Elders.

It can be confusing to know who to contact in your local community, and as Colin noted, often businesses make the mistake of consulting with individuals as opposed to representative organisations.

"We can be our own worst enemies. Lateral violence⁷ is a problem [in Aboriginal communities]. Go to the Traditional Owners Council first, but not the individuals."

With respect to taking time to develop meaningful and genuine relationships with the community, Colin provided an example based on his experience assisting a project officer at CUAC engage with the Victorian Aboriginal community.

"I was working with Nadia [a project officer at CUAC] who was a real go-getter and wanted to engage with community. I took her to a cricket match. We got there at quarter to eleven and no one was there. Nadia started to panic. But at five past eleven everyone started to show up. I told her that she needs to be patient and realise that people do things in their own time."

Colin commented on the competing demands on Aboriginal Elders within communities, and cautioned businesses to be patient when making contact.

⁶ For a list of the nine Registered Aboriginal Parties visit: <http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council/registered-aboriginal-parties>.

⁷ Lateral violence can be defined as displaced violence directed against one's own people.

"At the Wurundjeri Tribe Land Heritage Council there are 33 Elders...there's not enough time [to consult with everyone] and we get pulled in a lot of directions. Know that there may be a fee [when consulting with Elders]."

A final recommendation offered by Colin to engage with the Aboriginal community included offering lunch at community events or consultations to encourage participation. He also noted that developing a Reconciliation Action Plan is a good way to foster relationships with Aboriginal community organisations.

Tips for Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan

Tips for Businesses Developing Reconciliation Action Plans

- Do not be too ambitious with your Reconciliation Action Plan in the first year; make sure it is a plan that is manageable
- Implement your plan across the entire organisation
- Get buy-in from the top down (CEO or Managing Director, preferably)
- Recognise your Reconciliation Action Plan is a working document that will change over time
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes
- If possible, make sure your Reconciliation Action Plan committee meets four times a year

Based on his experience assisting the City of Yarra to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan, Colin provided some tips to consider when developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (listed above).

Among these tips, Colin recommended making sure a Reconciliation Action Plan applies across an organisation to formalise buy-in. He encouraged participants to reflect on how their role in their respective organisations relates to a Reconciliation Action Plan, and to understand that it is a process that must be championed across the organisation.

"You need to think about what you can do in your role. And how does that relate to any of the actions in the RAP."

In his concluding remarks, Colin again stressed the importance of including Aboriginal people in the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

"Make sure you've got Aboriginal people at the table for their input. How can you work out how to help Aboriginal people if they're not around the table? Aboriginal people know what's best for Aboriginal people."

WHAT IS A RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN?

Session 2: A Presentation on How to Create a Reconciliation Action Plan by Reconciliation Australia



Chris Kirby, Deputy CEO of Reconciliation Australia provides an overview of Reconciliation Action Plans to workshop participants.

How to Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan

- **Building a Business Case** – Consider the Reconciliation Action Plan as a business case and think about what you are trying to achieve for your organisation
- **Reconciliation Australia's Framework** – The framework is based on three principles: Respect, Relationships, and Opportunities
- **Types of Reconciliation Action Plans** – There are four different Reconciliation Action Plan frameworks to consider: Reflection, Innovation, Stretch, and Elevate
- **Resources** – There are a number of resources that can assist with developing a Reconciliation Action Plan and enhancing community outreach

Introduction

Chris Kirby, Deputy CEO of Reconciliation Australia, provided an overview and facilitated an open discussion on how to create a Reconciliation Action Plan.

He began by clarifying that Reconciliation Australia is not a government entity, but a non-profit organisation that was established in 2001 by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Questions by Workshop Participants

Chris provided an opportunity for the workshop participants to raise questions and share their motivations for attending the workshop. Workshop participants expressed a general desire and curiosity to learn about the Reconciliation Action Plans, so that they may consider whether developing a plan would be good for their businesses.

The following are topic areas that were raised by workshop participants:

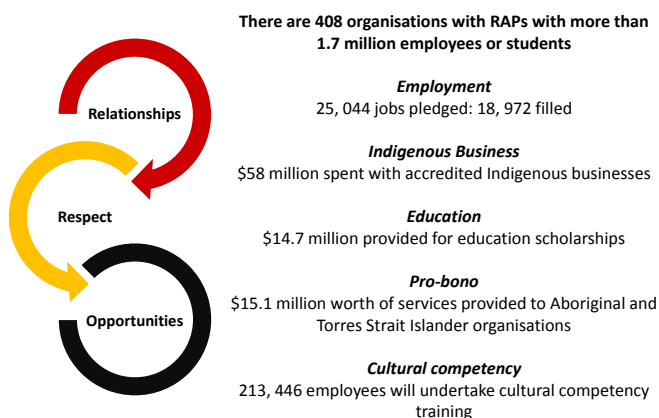
- What are Reconciliation Action Plans?
- How to engage/involve existing Aboriginal organisations
- What should be the scope/sphere of influence?
- Should we do a Reconciliation Action Plan/Is there a business case?
- Heritage vs. Projects vs. Customers vs. Staff (business case)
- What's in it for us?
- How to get started
- What are the different types of Reconciliation Action Plans?
- How to get internal buy-in
- How to handle customer/hardship assistance
- Will it be a requirement of the Government?

Reconciliation Australia's Overarching Principles

Reconciliation Action Plans are based on Reconciliation Australia's overarching principles of Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities. Chris identified each of these areas as vital to the success of a Reconciliation Action Plan.

Chris explained that Reconciliation Action Plans have made notable impacts on behavioural attitudes towards Aboriginal people (see slide below).

RAPs are driving social and economic change...



Chris identified Aboriginal employment as an area that businesses often struggle with when trying to create and fill job opportunities for Aboriginal people. He then asked participants to reflect on what attracts them to a particular job or work environment. By way of example, he compared it to women entering the workforce after graduation from law school, who might choose law firms with female partners in the leadership because they feel more welcome. He concluded that a more inclusive environment can make a business more attractive to potential applicants.

Relating this to the Aboriginal context, he noted this can include minor changes such as having Aboriginal artwork in the lobby or putting up plaques of recognition to make a business appear more approachable. He explained that these changes can increase the likelihood of success in efforts to recruit Aboriginal employees and that Reconciliation Action Plans can be a potential avenue to overcome these challenges.

What is a Reconciliation Action Plan?

Chris provided a basic overview of a Reconciliation Action Plan using a table (see below) and providing an explanation of what each column represents. He explained the framework as taking Reconciliation Australia's overarching principles (Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities), categorising them as actions and converting it into a business plan.

"A [Reconciliation Action Plan] is a simple three part model that turns it into a business case. It's a good thing to have in the event you have a CEO that is a champion [for the RAP] and they leave your business."

	Actions	Who/Responsibility	Timing	Deliverable/Measureable Targets
Relationships	RAP Working group			

Respect	Protocol (‘Welcome to Country’)			
Opportunities	Employment			

An outline of the key elements of a Reconciliation Action Plan

The following explanation of the elements of a Reconciliation Action Plan can be found by visiting the Reconciliation Australia website (<http://raphub.reconciliation.org.au/program/getting-started>):

Action column → This is where you provide brief details of the objectives your organisation will focus on achieving. Try to use plain language and avoid jargon or organisation specific acronyms as much as possible. It’s also a good idea to number your actions so they are easy to reference later.

Responsibility column → Commitments within the Reconciliation Action Plan should be distributed across the organisation to ensure broad ownership of the Reconciliation Action Plan. Ensure all relevant areas of your organisation are engaged in your Reconciliation Action Plan and have actions specific to their knowledge area that they will take responsibility for delivering.

Timeline column → This column is essential to ensure everyone within your organisation has agreed to achieve actions by specific dates, or to regularly measure and assess progress. If your action is a new action, include the month and year you aim to have the action implemented by. If the action is ongoing, include the date that you will review the action for effectiveness. This might be your first planned reporting date. If actions are long-term, it is important to have milestones along the way that your organisation can celebrate. Long-term actions can have an overarching timeframe of several years punctuated by short, medium and long-term targets. It is important to include a month and year in your tracking and progress section when your organisation will report on your Reconciliation Action Plan progress.

Deliverable column → This column should be succinct and straightforward, and describe what your organisation will do to meet the objectives in the ‘action’ column.⁸

Chris explained that a company’s business case can encompass a variety of areas relevant to a business, including, employment, regulatory requirements or leadership. He noted the scope of the plan would also have to be worked into the framework (e.g. staff issues or customers assets), however, that it must include the minimum actions.

⁸ For more information on the key components of a Reconciliation Action Plan visit: <http://raphub.reconciliation.org.au/program/getting-started/>.

All RAPs contain minimum actions

Relationships	Respect	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your RAP working group• Build local relationships• National Reconciliation Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural awareness• NAIDOC Week• Cultural protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment• Supplier diversity



Chris encouraged workshop participants to consider the three principles (Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities) and reflect on how their business fits within these areas. He noted that people usually struggle with the "Respect" action, but concluded that in the context of the water businesses, it will not be as difficult to achieve (e.g. posting plaques on massacre sites).

Chris cautioned against being tokenistic and explained the importance of pre-engagement with communities when developing these plans, rather than being prescriptive.

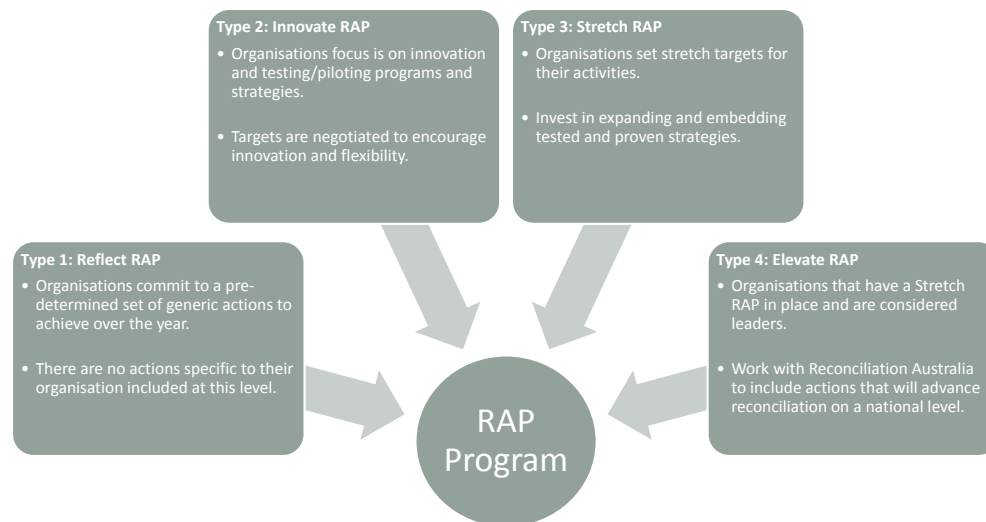
Chris flagged the importance of keeping the Reconciliation Action Plan manageable.

"It's better to start with a small number of quality actions and ideas rather than trying to do everything."

The Different Models of Reconciliation Action Plans

Chris provided an overview of the four different types of Reconciliation Action Plans: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate. He explained that a business should examine each of these plans and determine which plan might work best for their needs. The different models are based on the varying level of commitment an organisation is able to make or enables a business to build on current processes already in place.

Four types of RAPs



How is a Reconciliation Action Plan Approved?

Once a business has developed a Reconciliation Action Plan that addresses Reconciliation Australia's minimum requirements, it must be submitted to Reconciliation Australia for review. If it is approved, it will then be endorsed with the Reconciliation Australia logo and registered publicly on Reconciliation Australia's website.⁹

An Industry Position

The workshop participants discussed whether they should wait for the industry as a whole to develop Reconciliation Action Plans, or take a position individually as businesses. Chris advised that in other industries, such as banking, the position and/or adoption of plans took place from the ground up and by individual companies.

Workshop participants reflected that the water industry tends to work collaboratively and information is often shared among the businesses.¹⁰ They also expressed an interest to continue work and discussions in this area as a group based on outcomes from the CUAC workshop.

Workshop participants who were in the process of creating a Reconciliation Action Plan made the following observations:

⁹ Visit: <http://raphub.reconciliation.org.au/>.

¹⁰ A representative from City West Water indicated they would circulate their Reconciliation Action Plan to workshop participants upon completion.

"We started with the question of if we already have opportunities happening, what will the RAP add to the process? But ultimately it's about the context of community. [It is a] different context for us because Melbourne Water customers are retailers. Compliance has driven us to come to contact these groups. That's why we already have a cultural heritage approach which originated from compliance. It's important to get [your] expectations clear and realise it's a journey of discovery, but also a huge opportunity."

"[Our] approach is framed around culture and heritage. It made sense for us to take the next step [and develop a Reconciliation Action Plan]. Our whole approach was to make heritage work for us. We tried to shift away from compliance, although we are all affected by compliance, but had Registered Aboriginal Parties be involved in processes...partnerships and collaboration are critical."

"We turned around and asked the question, why not [have a Reconciliation Action Plan] instead of why."

"There is a need to get into this space as an industry. This meeting is the starting point...there is no one size fits all approach. There is a need to match intent but the approach must match your business."

Engaging with Community

A question was posed about the best way to engage with local Aboriginal community organisations. Chris recommended contacting Reconciliation Victoria¹¹ as a good source of information to provide advice on who to talk to and how to start building relationships. There was group consensus that it can take time to find the right people or organisations to engage with in a particular community.

Chris spoke to the challenge of staff turnover and maintaining relationships within a community.

"It can also be challenging when you have a business and a community that have had a relationship and you have been in a position for three years."

He highlighted the Reconciliation Action Plan as a tool to set processes in place so that in the event of staff turnover, relationships continue to exist.

Potential Road Blocks

Chris noted that among the challenges businesses may face when creating Reconciliation Action Plans, middle management can be among them. He encouraged workshop participants to get buy-in from the top down to overcome this challenge.

Chris cautioned the workshop participants to be open to learning from their mistakes.

"When people start often they are nervous and don't want to say the wrong thing. But if you go in saying you want to learn and find a way to work together; that is a better approach. People are people."

¹¹ Visit: <http://www.reconciliationvic.org.au/>.

Finally, Chris cautioned workshop participants against forcing Reconciliation Action Plans on their respective businesses to ensure a positive outcome.

For additional questions regarding this presentation, please contact Chris Kirby at Chris.Kirby@reconciliation.org.au

TAKING ACTION: A WATER INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

Session 3: Open Discussion: Reflections on the Reconciliation Action Plan Process



Workshop participants share their insights for a discussion on Reconciliation Action Plans

Reflections from Industry Participants

- **Frontline Service Provision** – Ongoing localised cultural awareness training should be readily available to staff
- **Connections with Local Community** – Identify local activities and organisations to assist with outreach in local Aboriginal communities
- **Barriers to Accessing Service** – Strategies must be in place to overcome shame within the Aboriginal community
- **Future Directions** – Moving forward, industry coordination will be beneficial to achieving Reconciliation

The afternoon session provided an opportunity for businesses to discuss approaches to Reconciliation Action Plans and to reflect on the workshop presentations.

Some businesses expressed an interest in pursuing improved training for staff, such as cultural awareness training. Continuing and ongoing cultural awareness training that is relevant to day-to-day operations was identified as being critical. There were discussions regarding how to tailor cultural awareness training that is reflective of local Aboriginal communities. One water business observed that water businesses may be making it too complex, and that demonstrating intent to learn more about Aboriginal cultures is a good first step.

Jo Benvenuti commented on the importance of understanding your customer base.

"Each water business has its own geographical area; water businesses can therefore work to understand their customer base and the issues that concern various groups."

She also recommended that businesses should make a point to include Aboriginal women in programs and community consultations to ensure all perspectives are captured.

With respect to community engagement, workshop participants shared a variety of methods their businesses have used and reflected on their varied success. Methods shared by workshop participants included getting involved with local footy clubs to better understand the local community, participating in National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC)¹² week events to improve outreach efforts, and participating in local council flag raising ceremonies.

With respect to barriers to making services more accessible and improving frontline service provision, general questions were posed as to how appropriate it is to have customers identify as Aboriginal. There was consensus among workshop participants that it is a complex area.

In the earlier session, Colin noted that as a hiring practice, employing Aboriginal Liaison Officers might be a good approach to make Aboriginal people feel more comfortable and overcome barriers to service accessibility.

"Aboriginal Liaison Officers are a good idea so people can talk to their own mob. Shame is an issue in our community."

As workshop participants reflected on future directions, it was noted that if businesses are ready to initiate the Reconciliation Action Plan process, that their innovation should not be inhibited by waiting for the industry to reach an agreement in this area.

In her final remarks, Jo Benvenuti stated:

"Industry may wish to spend more time on this issue. CUAC is happy to further support this important work."

¹² For information on the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) visit: <http://www.naidoc.org.au/>.

GETTING STARTED: TIPS FOR RECONCILIATION

Perspectives & Practical Advice from a Wurundjeri Elder

Personal Reflections on Reconciliation

- Understand history to better understand the meaning of Reconciliation
- Self-determination for Aboriginal people is central to Reconciliation
- There are simple and meaningful actions your business can take to recognise Aboriginal culture (e.g. flying the Aboriginal flag, incorporating Aboriginal artwork in your lobby or on marketing resources, posting acknowledgement plaques, or giving a 'Welcome to Country' acknowledgement before big events)

Key Points on the Importance of Reconciliation

- Make it a priority
- Understand that meaningful and respectful relationships are rooted in trust
- Adhere to the values that underpin Reconciliation as provided by Reconciliation Australia: Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities
- Historically, water was considered one of the most important and sacred resources by Aboriginal people, therefore, a collaborative approach is central to Reconciliation processes

Key Points on Ways to Engage with the Aboriginal Community

- When dealing with land management issues, consultation with the traditional owners of the land should be your first point of call
- Who to consult – Local Aboriginal Co-op's or local councils are a good starting point, not individuals
- Ensure your interactions are genuine
- Do not rush it: allow for time to develop meaningful and genuine relationships
- Consult early in the process
- Aboriginal Elders are in high demand and getting in contact may be difficult
- Offer "a good feed": this can help encourage participation
- Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan to connect with your local Aboriginal community members

Tips for Businesses Developing Reconciliation Action Plans

- Do not be too ambitious with your Reconciliation Action Plan in the first year; make sure it is a plan that is manageable
- Implement your plan across the entire organisation
- Get buy-in from the top down (CEO or Managing Director, preferably)
- Recognise your Reconciliation Action Plan is a working document that will change over time
- Do not be afraid to make mistakes
- If possible, make sure your Reconciliation Action Plan committee meets four times a year

How to Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan

- **Building a Business Case** – Consider the Reconciliation Action Plan as a business case and think about what you are trying to achieve for your organisation
- **Reconciliation Australia's Framework** – The framework is based on three principles: Respect, Relationships, and Opportunities
- **Types of Reconciliation Action Plans** – There are four different Reconciliation Action Plan frameworks to consider: Reflection, Innovation, Stretch, and Elevate
- **Resources** – There are a number of resources that can assist with developing a Reconciliation Action Plan and enhancing community outreach

Reflections from Industry Participants

- **Frontline Service Provision** – Ongoing localised cultural awareness training should be readily available to staff
- **Connections with Local Community** – Identify local activities and organisations to assist with outreach in local Aboriginal communities
- **Barriers to Accessing Service** – Strategies must be in place to overcome shame within the Aboriginal community
- **Future Directions** – Moving forward, industry coordination will be beneficial to achieving Reconciliation

GETTING STARTED: RESOURCES

Resources:

For information on how to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan contact:

Reconciliation Australia

Email: raps@reconciliation.org.au

Phone: 02 6272 2600

Website: www.reconciliation.org.au/RAPhub

Facebook: facebook.com/ReconciliationAus

Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre

Loren Days

Email: loren.days@cuac.org.au

Phone: 03 9639 7600

Website: www.cuac.org.au

For a list of organisations that currently have Reconciliation Action Plans visit:

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans/who-has-a-rap->

For cultural resources on Aboriginal history visit the Share Our Pride website:

<http://www.shareourpride.org.au>

To connect with Aboriginal community organisations in Victoria visit:

Reconciliation Victoria¹³

Email: info@reconciliationvic.org.au

Phone: 03 9629 7213

Website: <http://www.reconciliationvic.org.au/>

For information on the National Aboriginies and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) visit: <http://www.naidoc.org.au/>

For a list of Registered Aboriginal Parties in Victoria visit:

<http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/aboriginal-affairs/victorian-aboriginal-heritage-council/registered-aboriginal-parties>.

CUAC Resources

For a copy of CUAC's Report Wein, Paen, Ya Ang, Gim: Victorian Aboriginal Experiences of

¹³ Reconciliation Victoria is the peak body for reconciliation in Victoria.

Energy and Water visit:

<http://www.cuac.org.au> or contact Loren Days (loren.days@cuac.org.au) for a hard copy of the report.

For information on cultural awareness training, CUAC recommends contacting:

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association

Email: Melinda.eason@vacsal.org.au

Phone: (03) 9416 4266

Website: <http://www.vacsal.org.au/abs.html>

Based on feedback from workshop participants, CUAC recommends the following sample Reconciliation Action Plan developed by SA Water:

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/getfile?id=177&file=National+Water+commission+2013-2015+RAP.pdf>.

To view a copy of the Department of Justice's Koori Employment Strategy visit:

https://assets.justice.vic.gov.au/justice/resources/310163da-3600-4784-8a9e-01feb85669a4/mingu_gadhaba_web.pdf