

COM.3	DRAFT RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN 2024
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Council Plan relationship:	1. Connecting communities 2. Healthy environment, healthy people 3. Business and tourism
Attachments:	Draft Reconciliation Action Plan 2024 Actions ↓

Summary

This report provides a final overview of achievements under the INNOVATE Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2023 and presents a draft of Council's next Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2024 for consideration.

Recommendation

That Council endorses the release of the draft Reconciliation Action Plan 2024 actions for public comment for a period of four weeks.

Background

Council commenced its RAP journey in 2019, with the INNOVATE RAP adopted in September 2021, and most actions completed by 30 June 2024. The remaining three actions are included in the new draft RAP attached.

Within the Reconciliation Australia RAP framework, the INNOVATE RAP has a focus on implementing change, strengthening relationships with First Nations people, gaining a deeper understanding of the sphere of influence, and establishing best approaches to advance reconciliation.

Through the implementation of the INNOVATE RAP, Council has demonstrated its commitment in working towards the organisation's vision for reconciliation. Significant achievements include:

- Embedding Welcome to Country Ceremonies in Council practice for significant events and activities.
- Acknowledgement of Country on external facing communications and print collateral.
- Cultural immersion programs for staff and community, including on Country experiences and yarning circles.
- Cultural Safety Training provided for staff, senior leaders and Councillors.
- Events for both Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week that have provided a significant learning experience for staff and community that acknowledge and celebrate First Nations culture.
- Meaningful achievements in the four core pillars of Relationships, Respect, Opportunities and Governance.

Despite the progress with achieving RAP actions, it is important to note that ongoing and meaningful engagement with Traditional Owners has proved challenging, with the shire's location on the edge of three Traditional Owner Countries one factor contributing to this.

Discussion

Reconciliation provides an opportunity to strengthen relationships between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous peoples to benefit all Australians. Moving forward with the next RAP demonstrates Council's sustained commitment and vision for reconciliation.

The Stretch RAP was the identified next process on Council's reconciliation journey. To achieve an endorsed Reconciliation Australia Stretch RAP, the organisation must successfully complete a Reconciliation Australia audit. This RAP requires organisations to embed reconciliation initiatives into business strategies, so they become 'business as usual'.

The development of the draft RAP has taken time and considerable consultation. The strong foundation built from implementing Council's first RAP has advanced reconciliation across the shire. The draft RAP gives Council the opportunity to embed reconciliation initiatives into business strategies and practice in preparation for a future audit and endorsement by Reconciliation Australia.

The actions contained within the draft RAP, once successfully delivered over a three-year period, would provide a staged approach for Council to work towards a Reconciliation Australia endorsed Stretch RAP at a later date, should it choose to.

Consultation and engagement

Over the course of three months, a total 36 individual consultations were held, engaging with community, staff and Traditional Owners - Djaara, Taungurung Land and Waters Council and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

A First Nations consultant was appointed to support the planning and development of the draft RAP. All consultations were conducted to ensure cultural safety at all times. Methods of engagement varied, with groups attending face-to-face or online, individuals face-to-face, by phone and one by written communication.

The consultant provided the findings and a list of priority actions from grouped responses, identifying that all actions highlight a need to improve internal processes for cultural safety as the next step in Council's reconciliation journey.

In summary, analysis of the findings indicate that Council needs to move toward a RAP that is inward focussed. Proposed actions will develop clear and consistent strategies, process and protocols that will lead to outcomes resulting in culturally safe engagement strategies to improve relationships between Council and First Nations people. These internal actions focus on two clear areas:

- People and relationships, and
- Policies and procedures.

Reconciliation Australia has been consulted during this process, and they are aware and supportive that Council is preparing to move to a new RAP as Council's commitment to the continue its reconciliation journey.

The consultant recommendation is that: *This RAP should be an interim RAP, with a term of at least two to three years. At the completion of this, Council could apply to Reconciliation Australia to develop and implement an endorsed Stretch RAP.*

The draft RAP attached has been prepared with consideration of the above recommendations, as agreed in consultation with the RAP Working Group, staff and subject matter experts.

Summary of key RAP Actions

Relationships:

- Maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations stakeholders and organisations.
- Exploring models for a First Nations Advisory Panel and the feasibility and need of a Gathering Place.
- Continuing to build relationships, promote positive relationships and promote reconciliation.

Respect:

- Increase understanding, value and recognition of First Nations peoples through cultural learning.
- Incorporating language in the naming process for roads, features and localities
- Demonstrating respect to First Nations people by observing cultural protocols.

Opportunities:

- Improving employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.
- Increasing First Nations supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes and updating procurement tender and grant processes.
- Investigating the feasibility of recruiting a First Nations Engagement Officer.

Governance:

- Maintaining a RAP Working Group and appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP Commitments.
- Developing systems and processes facilitating ongoing input from First Nations stakeholders in the planning and governance processes of Council.
- Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings – internally and externally.

Upon completion of a consultation period, the draft RAP will come to the September Scheduled Council Meeting, seeking adoption.

Collaboration

The process to develop the draft RAP has included the engagement of the three Traditional Owners, the RAP working group, staff and community as well as Reconciliation Australia.

Innovation and continuous improvement

The development of the new draft RAP has included consultation and guidance from Reconciliation Australia. The engagement of a First Nations consultant to review and provide feedback on Council's reconciliation journey to-date has provided culturally safe engagement, report findings and recommendations. Additionally, the inclusion of First Nations staff and a representative of Macedon Ranges Truth and Reconciliation Group on the RAP Working Group provides an authentic cultural lens.

It is envisaged that with ongoing engagement with the Traditional Owner Groups, First Nations controlled organisations and other key stakeholders, additional opportunities for collaboration will be identified, beyond those actions identified in the draft RAP.

Relevant law

There is a selection of legislative requirements that have been taken into consideration in developing the draft RAP 2024. These include:

- *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*
- *Native Title Act 1993 (Clth)*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*
- *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2016 (Vic)*

In accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, a Gender Impact Assessment has been conducted in relation to the subject matter of this report. Based on findings from the gender impact assessment, it is recommended that, as far as is practical, action is taken to ensure that First Nations women and carers, First Nations staff and community are always considered when developing, implementing or reviewing the RAP (and its individual actions).

Relevant regional, state and national plans and policies

Since the first RAP was endorsed in 2021, the state government released a strategic framework to guide local government:

- Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026

Importantly, the RAP is aligned with Traditional Owners' priorities, including the:

- Dhelkunya Dja Dja Dja Wurrung Country Plan 2014-2034
- Taungurung's Country Plan, Taungurung Buk Dadbagi

The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation continue the process of developing their Country Plan. The RAP is aligned with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung strategic priorities as are understood at this time.

Relevant Council plans and policies

The RAP aligns with the Council Plan priorities of Connecting communities, Healthy environment, healthy people and Business and tourism. Aspects of the RAP specifically align with the actions in Council's:

- Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021
- Environment Strategy 2021
- Visitor Economy Strategy 2021
- Economic Development Strategy 2021
- Events Strategy 2021
- Arts and Culture Strategy 2018-2028
- Youth Strategy 2018-2028

Climate Impact Assessment

In accordance with Council's Zero Net Emissions Plan, Counting-Down-to-Zero and the Climate Emergency Plan, a Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted in relation to the subject matter of this report.

The impact of energy usage and risks to climate change will be minimal, as the actions and deliverables of the RAP do not additionally impact operations.

Financial viability

The actions proposed in the draft RAP have no financial and resource implications in year one and will be delivered within budget parameters. As RAP actions are scoped out in the first year and resource implications become clearer, there may be a need to seek either external funding or an internal budget allocation considered through Council's budget process.

Sustainability implications

There are ongoing beneficial social and wellbeing implications from RAP implementation. These include building a stronger, connected community, recognition of shared history, and acknowledging and learning from truth-telling.

Officer declaration of conflicts of interest

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have declared that they do not have a conflict of interest in relation to the subject matter.