



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL

Reconciliation Policy Statement
Adopted 19 July 2011

Commitment to Reconciliation

Hobsons Bay City Council acknowledges that the Kulin Nation were the first people of Hobsons Bay.

Hobsons Bay City Council recognises the historical, social and cultural injustices inflicted on Indigenous people and acknowledges the disadvantages of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders which have resulted from these injustices.

Consequently, Hobsons Bay City Council recognises the culture and uniqueness of Indigenous communities and is committed to reconciliation both now and into the future.

The Purpose of this Policy Statement

This policy statement will serve as the Council's statement of commitment to the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. The policy statement provides a basis for strategies and actions to be delivered by the Hobsons Bay City Council to support reconciliation initiatives and objectives.

The First People of Hobsons Bay

The Aboriginal people who lived in what we now know as the City of Hobsons Bay are known as the Yalukit-willam, a name meaning 'river camp' or 'river dwellers'. The Yalukit-willam are associated with the coastal land at the head of Port Phillip Bay that extends from the Werribee River, across to Williamstown, Port Melbourne, St. Kilda, and Prahran.

The language of the Melbourne people, includes three dialects, Daung wurrung, Woi wurrung, and Boon wurrung, and is part of a group of related languages collectively known as the Kulin group of languages, or the Kulin Nation. (The Yalukit-willam: The First People of the City of Hobsons Bay, 2010).

Indigenous people's spiritual connection with the land now called Australia extends back over 40,000 years. At the time of colonisation, Indigenous people were dispossessed and displaced from their land, disrupting their traditional way of life.

The current population of Indigenous residents in Hobsons Bay is 316 (ABS Census, 2006). This number has increased from 262 in 2001, but continues to represent 0.4 per cent of the total Hobsons Bay population although research indicates that a lack of trust in government data collection often results in this community being under represented statistically.

The greatest proportion (48 per cent) of Indigenous residents in Hobsons Bay are aged between 20 and 49 years. A large proportion (22 per cent) of Indigenous residents in Hobsons Bay are aged under nine. In terms of family composition, Indigenous residents live primarily in couple families with children (38 per cent) or within one parent families (24 per cent).

What is Reconciliation?

According to Reconciliation Australia, reconciliation *'involves building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone's best interests. Achieving reconciliation involves raising awareness and knowledge of Indigenous history and culture, changing attitudes that are often based on myths and misunderstandings, and encouraging action where everyone plays their part in building a better relationship between us as fellow Australians'*.

In a broad sense, reconciliation means a coming together of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Reconciliation requires all Australians to work together to overcome the reasons contributing to the division and inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

According to Reconciliation Australia, reconciliation involves symbolic recognition of the honoured place of the first Australians, as well as practical measures to address the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people in health, employment, education and general opportunity.

Reconciliation can involve a range of activities which recognise past experiences, increase understanding and promote trusting relationships in an effort to build a fair and equitable society.

Historical Context of Reconciliation in Australia

The term reconciliation was first used in Australia in the 1990's following the Australian Government's establishment of a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation whose aim it was to promote a process of reconciliation between Indigenous people and the wider Australian community.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation had a vision for *'a united Australia, which respects this land of ours; values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides justice and equality for all'*.

The need to address the disadvantage still experienced by Indigenous people has been a concern for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians for the last 50 years. Indigenous people are among the most disadvantaged in Australian society today. Their disadvantage stems directly from the ongoing effect of dispossession and forced marginalisation and is reflected in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across all social and economic indicators.

In particular, Indigenous people are more likely to be involved in the justice system; and are less likely to finish school, attend university and/or have a sustainable employment. Most alarmingly, Indigenous people are more likely to suffer chronic illness and health problems resulting in a life expectancy approximately 17 years shorter than the national average.

In ceasing its operations ten years following its establishment, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation provided the former Prime Minister John Howard with the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation document outlining strategies to advance reconciliation.

Since then, both the Victorian Parliament in 1999 and the Australian Parliament in 2008 have apologised to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. In February 2008 Hobsons Bay City Council resolved to support the initiative of the Federal Parliament's formal apology to the Stolen Generations.

Policy and Legislative Context

Protection and promotion of the rights of Indigenous Australians occurs within international, federal and state legislative contexts.

At the international level various Human Rights Charters and Declarations provide frameworks for the survival, dignity, wellbeing and rights of the world's Indigenous peoples.

At the federal level, in 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set out the National Indigenous Reform Agenda which introduced the *'Closing the Gap'* targets to reduce the differences between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians in the areas of life expectancy, health, education and employment.

At the state level, the '*Victorian Indigenous Affairs Framework 2010 – 2013*' (VIAF) sets out the state's long term strategic actions to improve the health and quality of life of Indigenous Victorians in line with the '*Closing the Gap*' objectives. The VIAF focuses long term, strategic and progressive effort to improve the health and quality of life of Indigenous people. It recognises that change requires joined up and strategic action across government that supports people across their whole lives. The key strategic areas are:

- Ø Improve maternal and early childhood health and development;
- Ø Improve education outcomes (formerly 'Improving literacy and numeracy and Improving Year 12 completion or equivalent qualification, develop pathways to employment');
- Ø Improve economic development, settle native title claims and address land access issues;
- Ø Improve health and wellbeing;
- Ø Build Indigenous capacity; and
- Ø Prevent family violence, and improve justice outcomes.

Furthermore, together with '*A Fairer Victoria*' social policy, the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (the Charter), the state government provides for an overarching framework for respect, protection and promotion of culture and anti-discrimination.

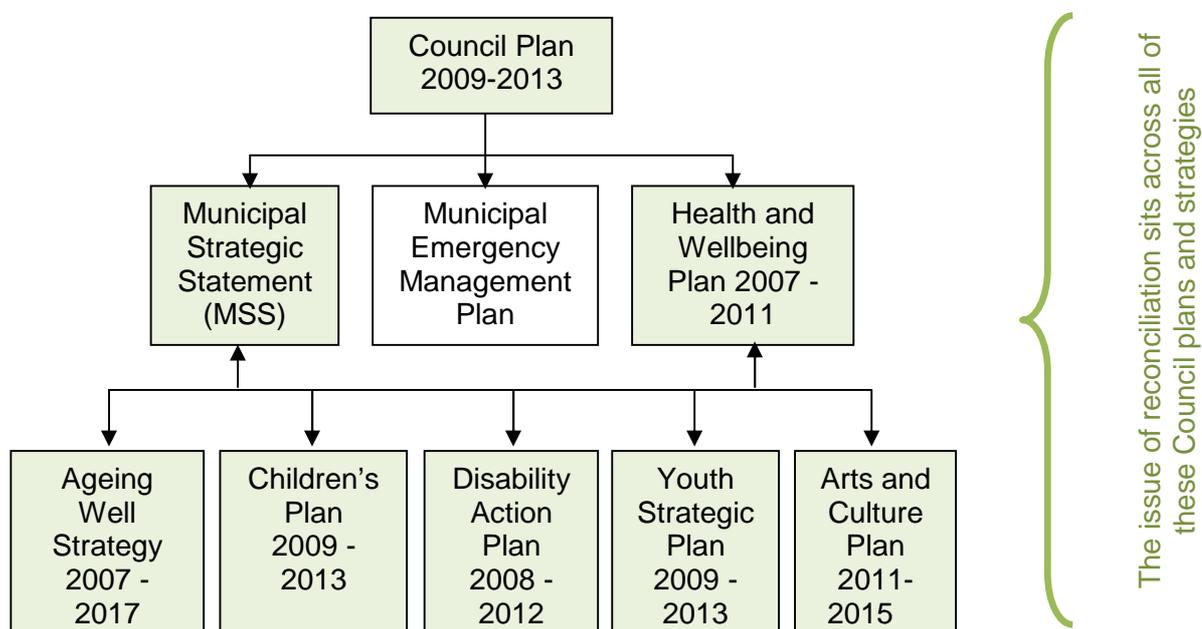
It is important to note, however that these state policies were current at the time of writing this policy statement.

The Role of Local Government

Reconciliation requires commitment from both community and government to undertake the necessary actions to address the inequality of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. As the level of government closest to the community, local government is well placed to promote reconciliation.

As such, the Hobsons Bay City Council has a key leadership role in acknowledging Indigenous contributions and in promoting tolerance and increased awareness and understanding of Indigenous issues. The Council acknowledges that reconciliation is an ongoing process that requires trust, mutual respect and a commitment to building understanding and recognition. As such, the Council plays an important role in the areas of: planning and development; facilitation; advocacy, leadership and education; community and service development; and partnerships.

The Council's planning processes adhere to the following structure, with the Council Plan providing the overarching vision for the Council's work:



Reconciliation is represented within the Council Plan 2013-2017 through the following key objectives and strategies:

Objective 1: Civic Leadership

- Strategic Action 1.1 Advocate on issues of importance to our community

Objective 2: Community Wellbeing

- Strategic Action 2.3 Promote and foster health and wellbeing in our community

Principles of reconciliation are also enacted through the Council's Arts and Culture Plan as well as the Council's Social Policies: Health and Wellbeing Plan 2007-2011; Ageing Well Strategy 2007-2017; Children's Plan 2009-2013; Youth Strategic Plan 2009-2013 and Disability Action Plan 2008-2012.

Principles of Commitment

The Council commits:

- To an ongoing process of reconciliation and apologises for the laws, policies actions and attitudes of successive governments that have afflicted pain, grief, suffering and loss on Indigenous Australians
- To encouraging the Hobsons Bay community to achieve just and respectful relations between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians in the spirit of reconciliation.

The Council respects:

- The people of Yalukit-willam of the Boon wurrung Country that makes up the Greater Kulin Nation as the occupiers and traditional owners of the land that now comprises the city of Hobsons Bay prior to Anglo/European settlement.
- The distinctive, special spiritual and material relationship that Indigenous people have with the land and the water, including trees, rocks, hills and valley creeks, creeks and wetlands of the area.
- The historical and environmental significance of sacred sites and special features and makes a commitment to the protection of such sites within the boundaries of Hobsons Bay municipality.

The Council recognises:

- That Indigenous people continue to be disadvantaged from the effects of displacement from their families, land and traditional culture. The Council expresses deep sorrow that these actions and attitudes have occurred and is determined that such occurrences will not be repeated.
- The richness of traditional language, including the five languages associated with the Kulin Nation especially Wurundjeri and Boon wurrung, the two languages associated with the Yalukit-willam.
- The diversity of the Indigenous population within the municipal boundary.
- That traditional elders of Yalukit-willam might live elsewhere.
- The value of the diversity and strength of Indigenous people and cultures to the heritage of all Australians, particularly the past custodianship of the land and the water; and also contributions made to many other areas of our human endeavour, including academic, agricultural, artistic, economic, environmental, legal, religious, social, sporting and political endeavours.

The Council will:

- Advocate for the rights and interests of Indigenous Australians and promote the principles of reconciliation.
- Consult with community, especially and particularly with acknowledged elders of the peoples of Yalukit-willam, their accredited representatives and leaders in reconciliation activities for the development and implementation of strategies and activities.

- Advocate on behalf of the people of Yalukit-willam of the Boon wurrung Country that makes up the Greater Kulin Nation to ensure the principles and commitment of this policy statement are upheld.
- Promote local Indigenous cultural heritage in a way that is significant, respected, and desired by the Indigenous people.
- Identify, protect, and promote when appropriate, Indigenous sites of cultural significance.
- Support the rights of the Yalukit-willam people to provide advice and participate in Council planning and decision making.

- Supports the rights of all Indigenous Australians as outlined in the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia.
- Facilitate tangible opportunities that will redress disadvantage through its social policies, programs and services.
- Provide equity in and access to services provided by the Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in or with links to the Hobsons Bay community.
- Promote awareness of Indigenous history within the municipality.