



## **Statement: Reflecting on 25 years of reconciliation in Australia this National Reconciliation Week**

**27 May 2016**

This National Reconciliation Week, the NSW Reconciliation Council urges all Australians to reflect on the ongoing importance of reconciliation in Australia.

National Reconciliation Week is held annually from 27 May – 3 June and presents Australians with an important opportunity to engage with the past, present and future of our nation's reconciliation journey. 2016 marks 25 years of formal reconciliation in Australia, since the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991. This significant milestone in our nation's history should not slip by unnoticed; it should involve both a celebration of our reconciliation victories and a solemn acknowledgment of our many ongoing failures.

The recently-released report, *The State of Reconciliation in Australia* is a clear reminder of how much work there is still to be done before we as a nation can claim to have addressed the wounds inflicted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through colonisation. The report found that although a strong majority of Australians are very support of reconciliation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still experience disproportionate levels of discrimination, prejudice and exclusion throughout the country.

Worryingly, the current federal election campaign has yielded virtually nothing from either major party in terms of renewed commitment to reconciliation or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. Although we are delighted to see Aboriginal reconciliation advocates Linda Burney and Patrick Dodson running for positions in parliament, it is also vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a national representative body to advocate on their behalf to any future government. Currently there is no funding from the government for such a representative body.

It is also concerning that one of the most obvious points of reconciliation for us right now - the acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution and the removal of racist provisions from that document- has not been given its due importance. The delays of successive federal governments on starting the process to referendum has given rise to what has become an unfortunate 'either/or' debate that suggests that Australians can only take one of two paths – Constitutional Recognition or Treaty. These choices do not, and should not, preclude one another – indeed constitutional recognition should support the commencement of treaty discussions which will be complex and take time, for this is the nature of such negotiations.

This National Reconciliation Week the NSW Reconciliation Council urges it members, supporters, and the general public to re-commit themselves to the unfinished business of reconciliation, and to make your commitment to the cause known as far and wide as you can. After all reconciliation is and must always remain, a people's movement.