

The Hon. Mike Baird, MP  
Premier of New South Wales  
52 Martin Place  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

17 May 2016

Dear Premier Baird,

**RE: State action to address findings of the inaugural *State of Reconciliation in Australia* Report**

As the national organisation promoting reconciliation and the state reconciliation council for New South Wales, we are writing to you to consider your government's response to the inaugural *State of Reconciliation in Australia* Report, launched in Canberra on 9 February 2016. Please find enclosed a copy of the Summary Report. Copies of the full report are available via Reconciliation Australia's website at [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au).

The Report measures Australia's progress toward reconciliation against five dimensions: race relations, equality and equity, institutional integrity, unity, and historical acceptance. These five dimensions do not exist in isolation and Australia can only achieve full reconciliation if we make progress in all five areas.

We are heartened by significant steps that have been made across these dimensions by your government, and successive governments of New South Wales. Steps such as stolen wages reparations schemes, the apology to the Stolen Generations and for stolen wages and the recent launch of the Parliamentary Friends of Reconciliation Group, are ensuring that the state is contributing toward a reconciled, just and equitable Australia. But we still aren't making progress fast enough.

The findings of the Report show there is much unfinished business and many hard conversations remain before us. High levels of racism, limited regard for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and lack of sustained action to address wrongs of the past continue to be characteristic of Australian institutions and society more broadly. The Report found that:

- One third (33 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have personally experienced verbal racial abuse in the previous 6 months.
- Large and unacceptable gaps still exist between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians on all social, health, education and economic indicators.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have less enjoyment of their collective and individual rights as Indigenous peoples and feel insecure in their cultural rights.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not recognised in the Australian Constitution and we are yet to come to a widespread negotiated agreement or Treaty with the First Australians.
- Some of the wrongs of the past are being repeated today, most visible through high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander incarceration and children in out-of-home care.

We urge your government to consider actions to address the findings of the Report. In particular, we call on you to:

- Acknowledge the depth and breadth of shared history in NSW and appropriately acknowledge and compensate for these injustices promoted and carried out by past governments. We believe this is essential for the advancement of reconciliation in NSW. Importantly this must include continued efforts to pursue an adequate stolen wages reparations scheme and implementing an appropriate system to compensate Aboriginal people for forced removal and deaths in custody. In particular, we look forward to the findings of the current Legislative Council committee inquiry into Reparations for the Stolen Generations in New South Wales.
- Commit to the provision of stable and adequate funding to organisations that advocate for, and provide critical support to Aboriginal communities in NSW such as Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, Aboriginal community controlled health services, land councils, partnership alliances with NSWALC and Aboriginal Legal Services. Organisations like these provide critical interventions in building positive race relations and in pursuing equality and equity for Aboriginal Australians across a number of key areas including access to land, Aboriginal heritage and cultural rights, education, health and the justice system.
- Increase government funding for the NSW Reconciliation Council in its pursuit of reconciliation in NSW. Importantly the functions of NSW Reconciliation Council include developing and delivering events and programs that both acknowledge Aboriginal people of NSW as First Peoples and promote acknowledging, accepting and celebrating of all aspects of our shared history including the accomplishments of Australian Indigenous peoples, past and present.
- Use the Parliamentary Friends of Reconciliation Group as a means of engaging, negotiating and consulting with Aboriginal groups in NSW on issues relevant to them such as self- determination, constitutional recognition and reducing of Aboriginal

incarceration rates, through bodies such as the National Congress of Australia's First People, NSW/ACT Aboriginal Legal Service, NATSILS and Justice Reinvestment, First Nations Disability Network and of course, NSW Reconciliation Council.

- Implementing a NSW State of Reconciliation report in partnership with NSW Reconciliation Council to act as a state-wide barometer of reconciliation and a regular evaluation tool of NSW specific measures.

In 2000, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) concluded that:

*Reconciliation is hard work—it's a long, winding and corrugated road, not a broad, paved highway. Determination and effort at all levels of government and in all sections of the community will be essential to make reconciliation a reality.*

We know that there is much goodwill for reconciliation. Almost all Australians (86 per cent) believe the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians is important and 72 per cent believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are important to Australia's national identity.

Twenty-five years after the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, it is time to spark a renewed conversation about how, over the next 25 years, we can move towards becoming a reconciled, just and equitable Australia. Reconciliation Australia and New South Wales Reconciliation Council CEOs would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss the report findings and the contents of this letter at your convenience. To accept, please contact either [justin.mohamed@reconciliation.org.au](mailto:justin.mohamed@reconciliation.org.au) or [gilly.dempsey@nswreconciliation.org.au](mailto:gilly.dempsey@nswreconciliation.org.au) to arrange a time.

Yours sincerely,



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