

# Resetting the relationship with Tasmanian Aboriginal communities

## 2019 – 2020 UPDATE

In 2019-2020 the Tasmanian Government continued to deliver on its commitment to reset the relationship with Aboriginal communities. Work across Government has helped to:

- improve access to Aboriginal-specific programs and services, such as identifying and responding to family violence;
- build cultural understanding and respectful workplaces (for example through the Tasmania State Service Aboriginal Employment Strategy);
- foster cultural respect and safety in mainstream health settings through the development of the Improving Aboriginal Cultural Respect Across Tasmania's Health System – Action Plan; and
- support Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, including with targeted consultation during COVID-19, and financial grants to Aboriginal community organisations.

Moving forward, the key focus will continue to be on implementing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Refresh, reviewing the model for returning land to Tasmanian Aboriginal people and the review into the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975.

### **Key Priority 1 - A new approach to Aboriginal Eligibility**

A new approach to Eligibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs and services commenced on 1 July 2016.

All Tasmanian Government agencies are working collaboratively to ensure a streamlined approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania when accessing programs and services.

This work has included several operational improvements such as the introduction of Agency Guidelines; introduction of a more user friendly Eligibility Form; changes to acceptable forms of Aboriginal communal recognition; the expansion of organisations that may provide communal recognition; and all relevant agencies accessing and using a central Aboriginal Eligibility Register since January 2018.

### **Key Priority 2 - Focus on Tasmanian Aboriginal history and culture in the delivery of the Australian curriculum**

The Department of Education is leading the development and support of a collection of resources supporting the Australian Curriculum's cross-curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures in Tasmanian classrooms.

The multimedia platform, known as 'The Orb' ([www.theorb.tas.gov.au](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au)), is a resource that features Tasmanian Aboriginal voices sharing knowledge of people, community, identity, living culture, country, and place.

The Orb was officially launched on 15 August 2018.

The initial launch of The Orb included six multimedia *Living Cultures* teaching resources; ochre, stone tools, dance, shelters, mutton birding, and fibers. Sections on shell-stringing and food have since been added, and sections on song and fire will be published in 2020.

*Layers of Time* is the next major sphere of The Orb and is currently under development. It

will include resources that focus on Tasmanian Aboriginal history. Currently, it features a collaboration with Smithton High School on Tunnerminnerwait, a local Aboriginal historical figure. Four further sections are planned for release by mid-2021.

*Connection to Country*, the third major component of The Orb is also under development. Four place-based resources will be published in the coming year; Cataract Gorge in Launceston, Fanny's Church at Nicholls Rivulet, Wybalenna on Flinders Island, and the area around nungu / West Point on the West Coast.

Other support materials have been developed and include illustrations of practice and lesson plans. They can all be accessed via The Orb website.

### **Key Priority 3 - Constitutional recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal people**

An historic amendment to Tasmania's Constitution to recognise Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the first peoples of this land received Royal Assent on 15 December 2016.

This symbolic recognition of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people was followed shortly after by the formation of Reconciliation Tasmania in August 2017.

Reconciliation Tasmania continues work to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Tasmanians together in the spirit of reconciliation, including through the Reconciliation Collective which recently celebrated its first anniversary.

### **Key Priority 4 - Explore joint land management arrangements and review the current land return model**

In November 2017 the Government commenced a review of the model for returning land to Aboriginal communities as part of the Reset agenda.

The project included the public release of a Discussion Paper that examined the opportunities for, and barriers to, returning land to Tasmanian Aboriginal people under the existing land return model. The Paper was released for broader public comment from 9 August to 20 September 2018.

The consultation stage was completed with the release of the *Consultation and Feedback Report: Improving the model for returning land to Aboriginal communities* in June 2019, which is available at [www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/oa](http://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/oa).

The major issues raised during the consultation process included:

- returning more land, either as part of the review, or instead of it;
- developing a process for assessing land suitable for return, including agreed criteria;
- increasing Aboriginal representation in the voting processes for the ALCT; and
- improving governance and accountability for the management of returned land.

Responses by the Tasmanian Government to the COVID-19 pandemic, including provision of necessary support to Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, has interrupted and delayed progression of the next steps on improving the model for land return.

This work maintains its place as a high priority for the Government, and the next steps are being developed that will address the range of comments and suggestions received through the consultation process.

The Tasmanian Government is also continuing to progress and support Aboriginal joint management of reserved lands

in Tasmania. This priority area is supported by:

- Funding of \$200 000 per annum for joint management of reserved land, including a focus on the Aboriginal cultural values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; and
- Continued support for the Parks and Wildlife Service Working on Country Aboriginal Trainee Ranger program, with an investment of \$166 000 per annum towards funding of two trainee positions.
- Exploring options to develop a Cultural Burning Policy, the creation of new cultural burning positions in the Parks and Wildlife Service, and a trial grants program totaling \$100 000.

### **Key Priority Area 5 – Closing the Gap**

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Agreement) came into effect on the 27 July 2020. It has been signed by the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), the Prime Minister, First Ministers of all states and territories, and the Australian Local Government Association.

This historic Agreement is the first Australian national agreement to be developed in a partnership between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It also builds on a series of engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia, led by the Coalition of Peaks in late 2019.

Two primary partnership mechanisms support the new Agreement - a Joint Council on Closing the Gap and a formal written Partnership Agreement between Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks.

The Tasmanian Government is now working with Tasmanian Aboriginal people and organisations to develop a Tasmanian whole-of-government Closing the Gap Implementation Plan by July 2021.

This work will identify how government might formalise partnerships with Aboriginal organisations; build the capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector; transform government organisations; and share data and information with Aboriginal organisations and communities.

The Tasmanian Government also continues to invest in various activities that support

the broader Closing the Gap agenda, including the following projects:

Under the **Safe Homes, Families, Communities: Tasmania's action plan for family and sexual violence 2019-2022**, Aboriginal Family Safety Workers, based in Child and Family Centres (CFCs) at Ravenswood, Burnie and Bridgewater engage with Aboriginal families, provide additional frontline resources to increase engagement by Aboriginal families with CFCs and deliver activities that promote family safety and address family violence and its impact on children.

During 2019-20, 699 Aboriginal parents and children were supported by Aboriginal Family Safety Workers.

An **Aboriginal Employment Strategy** for the Tasmanian State Service. was released in June 2019. The three-year plan sets out several strategies to increase the proportion of Aboriginal people working in the Tasmanian State Service to 3.5%.

Key themes in the Strategy include: attracting and retaining Aboriginal employees in the State Service, developing and progressing the careers of existing Aboriginal employees, supporting culturally respectful workplaces and employing

Aboriginal people to deliver culturally safe and inclusive services.

Within the Department of Health (DoH), the **Improving Aboriginal Cultural Respect Across Tasmania's Health System – Action Plan** outlines how the Tasmanian state health sector will improve cultural respect for Aboriginal people from 2020 to 2026.

Strategies include creating a more welcoming environment by displaying the Aboriginal flag, Acknowledgement of Country plaques and local Aboriginal artwork; undertaking face to face Aboriginal cultural respect training; and developing Cultural Respect Action Plans and Aboriginal-specific employment opportunities.

A number of actions outlined in the Action Plan will support DoH's focus on the priority reform areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

#### **Additional activities**

A review of the **Aboriginal Heritage Act 1975** is currently underway. The review commenced at the end of March 2019 with discussions with key Aboriginal groups.

A Discussion Paper was released to support the first of several stages of consultation, a 16 week public comment

period. This process was completed at the end of 2019, with the public release of a Consultation Feedback Report.

A second round of consultation has now commenced and is exploring specific issues raised in the first round of consultations, with key Aboriginal communities and organisations, and non-Aboriginal groups.

A report detailing the outcomes of the review will be tabled in both Houses of Parliament, in accordance with the requirements in the Act.

The review is an important opportunity for all Tasmanians to have their say about how Aboriginal heritage is protected and managed in Tasmania.

The revised **Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy** was released in early June 2019.

In April 2020, as part of the implementation of the new Policy, the Government appointed a Reference Group with expertise in Aboriginal languages to provide advice to the Place Names Advisory Panel on all Aboriginal and dual naming proposals.

Under the Strong Families Safe Kids Child Safety redesign, three **Aboriginal Liaison Officers** were employed to increase participation in decision making and enhance

the safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and young people.

The three Aboriginal Liaison Officers commenced their roles in mid-2020 and are located in each region.

The **2021 Young Aboriginal Leaders Scholarship Program** builds on the success of the 2020 Tasmanian Young Aboriginal Women and Girl's Leaders Scholarship program has been expanded to include all Aboriginal young people in Tasmania aged between 15 and 29 years.

The purpose of the scholarship is to assist young Tasmanian Aboriginal people to meet costs associated with specific career or leadership opportunities that are additional to normal cost of living, education or training expenses.

There are two scholarships valued at \$2 500. Applications opened on 18 September 2020 and closed on 6 November 2020.