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Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs  
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## **Re: Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business**

The Woolworths Group welcomes the opportunity to submit to the House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs inquiry into Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business.

### **Introduction**

The first Woolworths store opened in 1924 in Sydney's Pitt Street Arcade, and today Woolworths has a footprint of more than 3,000 stores across its five major brands, including over 1,000 supermarkets. In Australia, we employ more than 200,000 team members from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, including more than 4,500 who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This diversity brings a rich culture, personality and vibrancy to our business, and our commitment to being an inclusive organisation is at the heart of our RAP journey.

As Australia's largest private-sector employer we recognise the important role we play in creating opportunity for many Australians. We are especially pleased with the solid progress made over a number of years now to offer sustainable employment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which we hope is making a difference in their lives and their communities.

In addition, a key focus over the life of our current RAP is also the opportunity to diversify our supplier relationships by doing business with more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers. Across the country, we partner with many thousands of local farmers, producers and manufacturers to sell more than 100,000 different items, and servicing some 29 million customer interactions every week. We recognise the value of our procurement policies and the support that can be had not just on the business, but for the communities in which they operate.

For further detailed information, included as part of this submission is a full copy of our Reconciliation Action Plan, available at  
[https://www.woolworthsgroup.com.au/icms\\_docs/195562\\_reconciliation-action-plan.pdf](https://www.woolworthsgroup.com.au/icms_docs/195562_reconciliation-action-plan.pdf)



## Indigenous Employment at Woolworths

More than 4,500 of our team members identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is the total of team members currently employed who have joined Woolworths Group via our Resourcing the Future employment program as well as mainstream recruitment (actual numbers may be higher as self identification is optional).

We are proud of the work we have been doing under the Federal Government's Employment Parity Initiative, in partnership with Diversity Dimensions. More than 2,800 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers have been offered employment with the Woolworths Group since the program began three years ago. Sixty-five per cent of these roles were offered in regional or remote areas of Australia.

Our employment program, Resourcing the Future, is named after our push towards sustainable and meaningful employment where it is needed most. The success of the program has come from building it into workforce plans and ensuring we create a supportive environment through training and mentoring for both our new team members and the stores they join.

Over the last few years, our focus has been on embedding this program into the way we run our business. This has helped us better reflect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities we serve across Australia. A focus on greater diversity has increased cultural competency in our stores and helped us break down barriers around understanding reconciliation. This key action has helped us build a more inclusive workplace for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members.

Our employment path commenced in 2009 when we entered a partnership with Gandangara Council focused on local employment initiatives in western Sydney, Tamworth and Armidale. In 2010, we conducted an Indigenous employment program in partnership with the Consortium in South Australia, and partnered with the Salvation Army Employment Plus (TSAEP) and The Salvation Army (TSA) to implement the Queensland Indigenous Employment Program. In 2011, we entered our partnership with Diversity Dimensions to provide employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and in 2015 we joined the Federal Government's Employment Parity Initiative in partnership with Diversity Dimensions.

At Woolworths Group, we believe building a culture of respect is essential to embracing diversity in its many forms. We extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise and value their cultures, histories and achievements. Through our dedicated employment program, we have invested in learning opportunities that have fostered a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members and customers. This richness of learning continues to enhance the respectful relationships we are building with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

Some of the actions we continue to focus on to embed a truly inclusive workplace, which is a significant



aspect to ensuring the success of our employment program, includes:

- Continuing to develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness program that defines the cultural learning needs of team members in key areas of our business, and considers various ways cultural learning can be provided (online, face-to-face workshops or cultural immersion)
- Providing Resourcing the Future stores, and leadership teams supporting these stores, with cultural awareness training
- Providing cultural mentoring for program participants (and their leaders) where our Resourcing the Future employment program takes place
- Providing cultural immersion opportunities via our Jawun partnership to emerging and senior leaders
- Ensuring that induction for all new team members promotes:
  - 1) awareness of our commitment to creating a diverse and vibrant workforce;
  - 2) our commitment to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; and
  - 3) our network for all team members to connect and learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities
- Providing face-to-face and/or online training options for RAP Working Group members, RAP Steering Committee, RAP Champions, Culture & People partners and other key team members working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations
- Incorporating information about the Uluru Statement from the Heart into training sessions (online, face to face workshops and cultural immersion) to educate Woolworths Team Members about its aims
- Promoting Reconciliation Australia's Share our Pride online tool to team members
- Including an Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country at important internal events and meetings
- Inviting a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country at significant events, including our Annual General Meeting
- Encouraging our Resourcing the Future stores to support and be present at an external NAIDOC Week community event
- Using survey data to understand the needs and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members and to inform changes
- Continuing to grow and leverage our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander online community to raise issues, develop solutions, generate support and increase consultation
- Reviewing feedback mechanisms for team members to express cultural concerns and adjust as required, including communicating the mechanisms to express cultural concerns.

Our dedicated cultural learning program is critical to the success of our Resourcing the Future Employment program. It's tailored to the needs of our store leaders, as well as the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members joining Woolworths Group. The cultural training is called Working



in Two Worlds and is supported by our employment partners Diversity Dimensions. The training is designed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainers and helps our store teams better understand the factors that may impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These could include cultural, historical and socio-economic factors, and may limit access to opportunities such as sustainable employment.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members joining Woolworths via the Resourcing the Future program, the training is called Walking in Two Worlds. It is designed to remove barriers to employment by focusing on face-to-face training, tailored work experience and job-based pre-employment screening, rather than conventional application forms and interviews. If the candidate and Woolworths store manager are happy to proceed, a formal job offer of a permanent part-time role is made. A mentor then works with the new team member and store manager for six months to help support the transition and improve the chances of retaining newly hired Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members. The supported program has helped achieve a retention rate of around 71% at six months of employment for the first cohort of team members, and a current 76% retention rate of team members who have joined under the second Parity contract. This rate was higher, but we have unfortunately seen an impact to retention rates as a result of COVID circumstances. For some team members who move on, however, the Woolworths work experience can make it easier to progress to other employment opportunities, often helping to break through the cycle of long-term unemployment.

It is our ambition to continue to investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace. We will continue to embed our Resourcing the Future program to remove barriers to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whilst continuing to focus on sustainable employment opportunities. We will use our Store Leadership Pathways program to define career development opportunities for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander store team members with leadership aspirations. We will also continue to employ a dedicated Talent Acquisition manager for mainstream Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment. We will continuously review exit data and mentor feedback from the Resourcing the Future program, along with employee survey feedback, to better understand current employment barriers and determine future support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members and their managers.

We also engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team members to consult on employment strategies, including professional development, including a focus on providing career development opportunities via a) trade skills and apprenticeship opportunities b) internships and work experience opportunities c) graduate opportunities d) undertaking other tertiary study.

## **Barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians, including access to employment and training**

Woolworths is very supportive of the Government's Employment Parity Initiative, on which we have partnered for several years now to support our Resourcing the Future program. Our learning through this program has been of the importance of ongoing flexible arrangements in order to reflect unforeseen circumstances which create barriers to fulfilling contractual elements of the EPI.

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In our experience, rigid adherence to job seeker stream classifications, and meeting fixed percentage allocations of those stream allocations under EPI contracts, has the potential to present unnecessary barriers to employing job seekers. Greater flexibility will allow the program to adapt to unforeseen circumstances, including those presented during COVID.

When Woolworths Group has run centralised graduate programs in the past, we have struggled to attract Indigenous students. We have found that Indigenous graduates are a highly competitive talent pool and have often had enduring relationships with other corporates for many years. We will continue our diverse graduate recruitment process, and in addition we are exploring opportunities to focus on other areas of the Indigenous talent market where we can add greater value, for example with school students and school leavers.

We have continued to have good representation of Indigenous Australians in our apprenticeship program. At the end of June 2020, 6.9% of our apprentices identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples.

## Indigenous Suppliers

A key focus in our 2019-2021 RAP is the desire to diversify our supplier relationships by doing business with more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers, which we acknowledge we have more to do.

Our priority plans include:

- Reviewing and updating procurement policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers for procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses
- Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy and strategy
- Auditing our database of non-trade Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers and map them to the needs of our different business areas
- Developing and communicating to our different business areas a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers that can be used to procure goods and services for our non-trade business
- Reviewing our database of trade suppliers and identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers
- Strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers by investigating opportunities to offer mentoring, coaching and knowledge sharing about how best to create and maintain successful commercial relationships with Woolworths Group
- Investigating a locally ranged sourcing model for procuring goods from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, to help remove potential barriers to doing business with us

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- Implementing improved processes to track Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier spend

To this end, we have also recently employed a Program Manager - Supplier Diversity, to support and drive our commitment to improvement in this space.

## Conclusion

Whilst we are proud of the work we have done, we acknowledge that we still have more work to do. We are excited about the opportunities we can create, the relationships we can build and the respect we can generate as we work together to deliver on our RAP commitments.