



9th December 2021

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Secretariat

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into How the corporate sector establishes models of best practice to foster better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers

Westpac Banking Corporation (Westpac) would like to thank the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs (the Committee) for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

Founded in 1817, Westpac is Australia's first bank and oldest company, one of four major banking organisations in Australia.

Across our portfolio of brands, which include Westpac, St.George, Bank of Melbourne, BankSA, BT and RAMS, Westpac Group provides a broad range of banking and financial services, including business and institutional banking and wealth management services.

The role of our Reconciliation Action Plan

Westpac is currently developing its fifth Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), having launched our first RAP in 2010. Our participation in the RAP program and engagement with Reconciliation Australia (RA) helps us navigate our reconciliation journey, creates accountability to deliver on our commitments and challenges us to be innovative in how we seek to deliver banking services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We believe RA and the RAP framework play an important role in driving reconciliation commitments and outcomes in corporate Australia, creating opportunities for organisations to be more transparent about their progress, learn from one another and share best practice.

Developing a new RAP every three years presents a continuous journey of learning and improvement. Key to this process is stakeholder engagement through:

- engaging with customers, employees, community representatives, non-government, and government organisations
- researching and gaining insights to assist us in being informed, and continue to understand the needs of our people, customers, and communities
- partnering with stakeholders both locally and internationally

- engaging with RA and participating in its leadership and industry working groups
- participating in surveys, benchmarks and reporting such as RA's Workplace RAP Barometer Survey and RAP Impact Report
- publishing an overview of our RAP performance in Westpac's annual Sustainability Appendix, a part of Westpac Group's annual reporting suite.

The importance of governance structures and stakeholder engagement

We continue to evolve our RAP governance and oversight structures. Westpac's Indigenous Advisory Committee (WIAC), which is comprised of independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and leaders from Westpac, acts as a guiding body to our organisation on Indigenous issues. They advise us on the implementation of our RAP and help us address issues that relate to ongoing business activity, including new opportunities and advocacy.

Since the establishment of the WIAC in 2014, the expertise, knowledge and broader stakeholder perspectives offered by the external Committee members have helped us remain accountable for delivering on our RAP commitments. We have learnt the importance of meaningful consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within and outside our organisation, to continue to adapt to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

When we have encountered obstacles with our RAP commitments, our RAP governance structure and stakeholder consultations have helped us better understand business and community expectations, as well as assess options and possible solutions. We also seek to learn from other businesses and from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations through regular sharing forums and learning circles. We believe the best outcomes are achieved through continuous conversation and collaboration.

Through ongoing stakeholder consultation and monitoring our progress against our RAP commitments, we can see where we are doing well and where we need to improve. It also enables us to assess new and emerging opportunities and challenges. In our role as a financial services provider, one of the areas in which we can have the greatest impact is in how we support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers living in remote and very remote Australia through better banking experiences. For example, areas of challenge can include access to banking, such as receipt of cards and poor digital literacy, identification and verification issues, and distance to services.

To better understand the specific challenges and identify solutions, we sought feedback from and consulted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups and individuals in selected remote regions, as well as engagement with remote service providers and reviewed published studies. Insights have informed changes to our identification and verification procedures to better suit the circumstances of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers in remote and very remote locations. Over the last three years we have also introduced several new dedicated services designed to improve service delivery including:

- Westpac Remote Services (WRS)
- Westpac Indigenous Connections Team, *Yuri Ingkarninthe*, which means "deep listening" in the Kaurna language, and
- a First Nations financial education section on Westpac's Davidson Institute website.

Dedicated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and communities

Westpac Remote Services (WRS) supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers in remote communities who may face geographic, language and cultural barriers to accessing financial services. The delivery of services in community removes barriers caused by geographical exclusion and builds trust with community members, allowing them to feel more comfortable and confident in their banking interactions. WRS provides in the moment education and support on financial products and services, along with guidance on how and where to find banking support. By understanding cultural norms and practices, the WRS team aim to provide help to remote customers in a culturally considerate way. WRS has been prioritised to five geographical areas and is currently delivered where there are mutually understood and identified issues with access to banking, or at the request of the hosting community group or service provider to a community.

First piloted in 2018, *Yuri Ingkarninithi* is a call centre which supports customers in all states and territories across all Westpac Group brands. *Yuri Ingkarninithi* supports a variety of remote banking needs including access to cards or cash, establishing telephone and internet banking, and assisting with issues relating to scams and fraud. *Yuri Ingkarninithi* seeks to make banking more inclusive for Indigenous customers by:

- providing a service experience and support that bridges the geographical, cultural and language barriers for Indigenous regional and remote customers
- using language and translation services as required
- understanding the needs of customers and making recommendations for products and services that may be suitable for their needs
- making the customer identification process easier
- simplifying language on customer surveys and supporting information
- improving the mobile and internet banking capability of customers through one-on-one demonstrations and in the moment education.

Westpac's Davidson Institute also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people offering financial education and resources, such as the Financial First Steps program, which helps participants understand key financial concepts and establish good habits that will assist them to achieve their personal financial goals.

Ongoing insights come from customer surveys supported by *Yuri Ingkarninithi*, feedback received via our frontline employees and support services providers, through our complaints process, and through communication with service providers such as financial counsellors, who support our customers in remote and very remote Australia.

This ongoing communication and insight provide us with guidance on the design and delivery of our services, both in terms of improvement and areas where we are creating positive impact.

Responding to COVID-19

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been unprecedented and long lasting. We have focused on continuing access to our services while working to keep our people and customers safe.

When our program of remote visits had to be paused, the WRS team extended its phone, email, and video support, and proactively connected with other service providers in remote communities to understand the evolving challenges faced by customers and increase awareness of the services offered by *Yuri Ingkarninithi*.

We also recognised we had to diversify the way we delivered our financial education programs. One example is the creation of Davidson Institute *Mob Pods* – bite-sized podcast interviews which provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business owners to share their business insights and experiences.

Another challenge we faced at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic was helping our customers deal with a large amount of new information, including the need for health and safety practices such as social distancing, to access bank branches and other services. To address this, we partnered with Skinnyfish Music in the Northern Territory to produce three videos in the Yolngu Matha language of northeast Arnhem Land, with English subtitles, to share important COVID-19 messages. Using Indigenous-led dialogue, in language, our intention was to connect with a wider audience and share key messages in a relevant and inclusive context. These videos have been utilised in selected Westpac branches across Australia and are available on our Davidson Institute First Nations page.

Improving risk management and customer outcomes

Westpac is committed to delivering a sustained uplift in the way we manage and govern risk. In 2020, we announced a comprehensive program to support our transformation to a simpler, more agile, and accountable organisation. Our *Customer Outcomes and Risk Excellence (CORE) Program* is being implemented to strengthen risk frameworks and processes, further clarify accountability, and improve the Group's risk culture. It is a critical part of our Fix, Simplify, Perform, strategic priorities to become a simpler, stronger bank.

As with most transformation programs, as our CORE program progresses, more historical issues reveal themselves. We acknowledge that we get things wrong from time to time. And when we do, we want to put it right. To improve the way that we address issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers, we are seeking to strengthen our grievance mechanisms and complaints handling processes. We also seek to improve our customer remediation programs, with consideration given to:

- how we communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers, both present and past, particularly those living in remote and very remote Australia
- outreach programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers in understanding financial matters impacting them
- prioritising the efficiency and timeliness of remediation payments when errors are identified

Embedding reconciliation across our organisation

Our RAP drives accountability for us to learn from our experience of what has worked in our reconciliation journey and what has not.

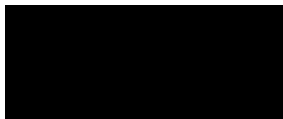
As an organisation we have learnt the importance of continuous improvement and of Indigenous-led initiatives.

Our continuous improvement also extends to our employees, and to the development of our organisation's cultural capability, ensuring we recognise the relevance and value of culture within our service chain. Our first step towards this has been to partner with an Indigenous-owned consulting business in the co-design of a new cultural learning module. The training module challenges and sparks curiosity among our employees and leadership teams by helping them to walk in our customers' shoes, inspire empathy and equip them with tools to provide better service. The ongoing development and diverse modes of delivery of cultural learning programs such as on country experiences and in-community immersions also support us in building a culturally intelligent workforce.

As an organisation we continue to work to strengthen engagement in reconciliation activities among all our employees, not only those working directly with remote and very remote communities. We recognise dates of significance within our organisation, embed cultural protocols and references within our processes, and create opportunities for our people to connect with and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Our work in this area over many years has shown us the value of business-led initiatives in supporting justice, equality, and inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians including employees, customers, and communities, and we are encouraged by this Inquiry into how the corporate sector can contribute further. We look forward to seeing its findings and continuing to learn and improve our engagement.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Collyer
Director, Westpac Government Affairs & Reputation Strategy