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Secretary of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

26 October 2012

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

## Introduction

Reconciliation Australia is the national organisation building and promoting reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community. We strongly believe that:

- Australia can build a more inclusive society that better understands and values the history, culture, rights and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Stronger relationships, built on shared knowledge and respect, are key to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders controlling their life choices and participating fully in the economic and social opportunities enjoyed by the wider community.
- In a reconciled Australia, the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not be seen as extraordinary.
- This in turn benefits all Australians in real economic and social terms, and in terms of our national confidence and reputation.

To achieve this, Reconciliation Australia aims to improve relationships and generate greater respect and equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

It is widely recognised, though not yet wide in practice, that if we're serious about closing gaps in life circumstance and expectancy, closing the gap in our relationships needs serious attention.

This is Reconciliation Australia's core business and it's where we work to support and add value to the contributions of other organisations across the Australian community— we create an environment for respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians to improve life circumstances (Figure 1).

We consider sport to be a key avenue for both building relationships and providing greater opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This submission looks at the way in which the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program is increasing support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and sporting programs. We also briefly examine the role of sport in Australian society as a powerful force for reconciliation.

**Figure 1 Reconciliation Australia's model of reconciliation is based on the three pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities.**

### **The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Program**

Reconciliation Australia's expertise lies in changing attitudes and building better relationships. One way that we work toward achieving this is through the RAP program.

A RAP is a business plan that uses a holistic approach to create meaningful relationships, display greater respect and create sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

As at 30 September 2012, there are 358 organisations who have registered their endorsed RAPs with Reconciliation Australia. This includes many of Australia's leading corporations, small businesses, not-for-profit organisations, agencies at all levels of government, schools and universities, and local and national sporting bodies, organisations and clubs.

Today, more than 1.7 million Australians work or study in an organisation with a RAP.

#### *RAPs in the Australian sporting sector – driving cultural and social change*

Sport is an important part of Australian life. It can break down racial and socio-economic barriers and offers a unique opportunity for all Australians to participate as equals. Sport is based on the principles of teamwork, fairness and equality which are also fundamental principles of reconciliation.

Sport is an area where there has been a high level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success and has been a conduit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians working together to create better relationships, greater trust and understanding and shared national pride.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and achievement in sports provide a platform for reconciliation, and can contribute to improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sports people provide strong role models for all young people, and fight against some of the negative stereotypes that exist about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Reconciliation Australia's *Reconciliation Barometer 2012* reveals that among both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement is characterised as being strongest in sports, a trend which has been consistent since the first Reconciliation Barometer in 2008.

Reconciliation Australia has been working closely with sporting bodies to develop RAPs which celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success; encourage understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and contributions; and undertake positive activities that help improve life opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The following sporting organisations currently have endorsed RAPs registered with Reconciliation Australia:

- National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Rugby League (ARL)
- Brisbane Broncos
- Melbourne Storm
- Ipswich Jets
- Northern Pride Rugby League Club
- Essendon Football Club
- Richmond Football Club
- Subiaco Football Club
- Cricketing Old Greats (COGS) Australia

The following sporting organisations are in the process of developing a RAP:

- Australian Rugby Union
- Queensland Rugby Union Ltd (Including the Qld Reds)
- Gold Coast Titans
- Australian Sports Commission
- NT Cricket

These sporting organisations are making a considerable contribution to increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in sport. Like Reconciliation Australia's corporate RAP partners, these sporting bodies recognise that becoming an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and athletes and maximise athlete potential and on-field success requires creating a work place and an environment that is culturally competent and engages with its community effectively.

While each RAP is highly individualised and tailored to the unique needs of respective organisations, there are a number of common elements in the RAPs of sporting organisations. These include:

- Providing cultural awareness training and cultural competency education for athletes and staff of the organisation.
- Setting up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory councils, player networks and support groups to advise on policy and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes to achieve their best— these are typically made up of current and former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, as well as prominent members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Developing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocols for both internal and external meetings and events.
- Developing procurement policies which access goods and services from suppliers

who have a RAP, have made a RAP commitment or who are Indigenous owned businesses registered with the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council.

- Developing strategies that create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and training within the organisation.
- Developing programs which place players and staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to conduct school and community coaching clinics.
- Developing partnerships with local clubs in remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with non-Government organisations and in the private sector to encourage and facilitate participation in sports and support and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and health initiatives.
- Promoting reconciliation by supporting community events and encouraging sponsors to support community events.

### *RAPs in the corporate sector – supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sport*

The corporate sector plays a leading role in promoting, encouraging and facilitating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in sports, and delivering sporting programs that bring lasting benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

A number of Reconciliation Australia's corporate RAP partners have partnered with, or have committed to partner with, sporting codes and non-government organisations to deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sporting programs. Examples of three prominent non-Government sporting initiatives that rely heavily on support and funding from corporate Australia are provided below.

1. The *Clontarf Foundation* forms partnerships with schools to use Australian Rules Football to help improve educational outcomes, discipline, self-esteem, life skills and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men. The program has been supported by a number of corporate RAP organisations, including Woodside, Qantas, Transfield, Landcorp, Water Corporation, Wesfarmers, BHP Billiton, Freehills, Georgiou, Intercontinental Hotel Group (IHG) and Rio Tinto.
2. The *National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy* use role models, leadership figures and trained professionals to implement a range of programs for Aboriginal students and young people which encourage school attendance and inspire positive lifestyle choices, as well as promote self-confidence and encourage participants to take pride in their history and culture. The program has been supported by a number of corporate RAP organisations, including KPMG, Westpac, Accor, Allens Arthur Robinson, Australian Rugby League (ARL), National Rugby League (NRL), Corporate Express, Principals Australia, Commonwealth Bank and Crown Limited (RAP in development).
3. The *National Rugby League All Stars* game is an example of the role that sport can play to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and positively impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One of Reconciliation Australia's corporate RAP partners, Harvey Norman, has been the naming rights sponsor for this initiative since its inception in 2010.

All money raised from the All Stars match is invested through community programs and initiatives across NRL clubs in partnership with Rugby League's One Community program. These initiatives have a strong focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, employment, health, culture, heritage and social and emotional wellbeing. In 2011, these programs reached over 21,000 youth and adult participants; over 700 schools; and over 200 communities.

## **Sport is a Powerful Force for Reconciliation**

Sport breaks down barriers, bringing people together for a shared passion and common cause. Everyone is seen as an equal when they're cheering for the same team and wearing the same team colours. As a result, sporting matches and events present an opportunity to access sports fans and supporters to promote better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians outside of the sporting arena.

The role of sport as a force for reconciliation has been displayed by the National Rugby League (NRL) and Australian Rugby League (ARL) through their commitment to the RAP program since 2008 (the first RAP in Australian sport). With each round of the Telstra Premiership attracting 4 million viewers and more than 500 000 participants at the junior and elite level, the NRL/ARL have put in place a number of initiatives that reach beyond the playing field to promote the key messages of reconciliation. These include the National Rugby Leaguer All Stars game as well as the annual staging of the Close the Gap round, incorporating the Reconciliation Cup.

Australia's most popular sport, Australian Rules Football (AFL) also offers considerable opportunity to engage new audiences in reconciliation. In 2011, AFL matches entertained over 6.5 million attendees at stadiums all over the country and reached over 4 million television viewers per round.

Reconciliation Australia and Woodside are in the early stages of developing a program that engages AFL fans in reconciliation activities. This initiative aims to promote better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians by facilitating shared experience and learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories and helping to create the right environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs to be effective.

We hope that this project will be replicated in other major sporting codes.

## **Conclusion**

Sport provides the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians to come together and to work together in the spirit of teamwork, fairness and equality; providing a platform for practical reconciliation. Our research has shown that the sporting sphere is one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised for high achievement and for providing all young people with positive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role-models.

Reconciliation Australia, through the Reconciliation Action Plan program, works with sporting bodies, non-Government organisations and the corporate sector to support and develop programs that encourage and facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in sport and use sport to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and create better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader Australian community.

Reconciliation Australia believe that sport provides the opportunity to cultivate relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians which are based on shared knowledge and respect and create the right environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate fully in the economic and social opportunities enjoyed by the wider community.

Please do not hesitate to contact our General Manager of Policy, Research and Government Affairs at [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED] if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission.

More information about the RAPs outlined in this submission is also available at [Reconciliation Action Plan](#).

Kind Regards,



Leah Armstrong  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
Reconciliation Australia