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**MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND RECONCILIATION  
MINISTER FOR CORRECTIONAL SERVICES  
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION**

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Ms Louise Gell  
Acting Secretary  
Legal and Constitutional Committee Secretariat  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Gell

I write in relation to the South Australian Government's response to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation.

Enquiries made by my office indicate that South Australia's response has not reached your office. It was my understanding that this response had been forwarded, however, may I apologise to the Legal and Constitutional References Committee for this oversight.

Enclosed is the response prepared by the Government of South Australia that was endorsed by the Cabinet in November 2002.

Reconciliation between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of South Australia is a key component of the Rann Governments Social Inclusion and Community Development policies. The South Australian Government is committed to fostering and building partnerships between community and government to further enhance service delivery to identified areas of need.

I look forward to further progressing reconciliation in South Australia and am committed to moving forward and building partnerships with all stakeholders in our community.

Hon Terry Roberts MLC

**MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS  
AND RECONCILIATION**

23/6/03

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**Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry into  
the Progress Towards National  
Reconciliation**

**Response by the  
Government of South Australia**

**November 2002**

## **Introduction**

In response to the terms of reference put forward by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee for inquiry into the Progress Towards National Reconciliation the South Australian Government has coordinated the following information for submission.

This paper introduces some issues for discussion and highlights key initiatives of the South Australian Government that can be viewed as good practice examples under the guidance of the terms of reference.

This inquiry is consistent with the strong focus on Indigenous communities since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to the reconciliation resolution in November 2000. In particular COAG stated in the Communique:

*"The Council agreed that many actions are necessary to advance reconciliation, from governments, the private sector, community organizations, Indigenous communities, and the wider community. Governments can make a real difference in the lives of Indigenous people by addressing social and economic disadvantage, including life expectancy and improving governance and service delivery arrangements with Indigenous people."*

Reconciliation is fundamentally important to Australia's capacity to face this century as a united, peaceful, proud and just nation. As a member of COAG, the South Australian Government is committed to progressing reconciliation with the aim of achieving a lasting settlement between Aboriginal people and other South Australians through fostering a greater degree of understanding and respect for different individual and community histories and cultures.

The South Australian Government is committed to work with all sectors of government and the community to address past wrongs and the disadvantages they have caused to Aboriginal people. It is recognized that much work is yet to be done to overcome any misunderstanding in the broader community as to the root causes of disadvantages endured by Aboriginal people. That misunderstanding is among the most significant barriers to reconciliation.

The terms "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" are used throughout this document and are intended to be inclusive of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia.

## **Discussion**

Aboriginal people are the original owners and occupiers of this land and were dispossessed without adequate benefit of treaty, agreement or compensation. It is fundamental to any reconciliation progress that this prior ownership and need for continued connection with the land is recognized by the wider community. As an advancement in the reconciliation process, the Premier of

South Australia, The Hon Mike Rann MP has recently announced that the South Australian Government has commenced the process of handing back to Maralinga Tjarutja the unnamed conservation park encompassing approximately 22,000 square kilometers (almost 2.5% of the State) in the far west of South Australia.

The actions of generations of non-Indigenous Australians and their governments have led to widespread conditions of poverty and extremes of social and personal stress and we now inherit this legacy.

Aboriginal people are worse off than any other identifiable group of Australians and suffer social exclusion on all levels. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people is estimated to be 23% compared with 8% for the rest of the community and incomes are approximately two thirds of the Australian average. Less than one third of Aboriginal students are finishing secondary school compared with a national retention rate of around 70% and Aboriginal people are far more likely to live in poor and over-crowded housing without essential services.

Aboriginal people have the worst health profile in the country with Aboriginal infants being four and a half times more likely to die during childbirth and three times more likely to die during their infancy. The life expectancy for an Aboriginal person is 20 years less than the national average. Aboriginal people also have a higher rate of alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide and incarceration.

The spirit of reconciliation continues to grow in the general community of South Australia. One key objective is the promotion and protection of the rights of Aboriginal people. Another is the empowerment of Aboriginal people to make choices that enable them to retain their cultural identity and participate in political, economic, and social lives where their cultural values, languages, traditions and forms of social organization are fully respected.

South Australian membership on the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) through the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, and COAG through the Premier, has allowed this State to be strongly involved in the reconciliation resolution put forward by COAG in November 2000.

COAG identified priority actions in three areas:

- Investing in community leadership initiatives
- Reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to ensure they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people. In particular, governments agreed to look at measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction

- Forging greater links between the business sector and Indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

To address these issues MCATSIA developed an Indigenous Indicators Framework that has been used by the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision to develop the *Draft framework for reporting on Indigenous disadvantage* as requested by COAG.

The intention is to have strategic indicators that will assist governments in the development of good cross-portfolio policy that will be of advantage to the Indigenous population.

The South Australian Government has fully supported these initiatives and the progress of the indicators and is currently considering the use of the final indicators with the whole of government trial referred to later in this paper under the heading "Tier 1".

At the local level individual government agencies are progressing a range of initiatives, including the development of reconciliation statements, reconciliation newsletters, reconciliation forums and cultural awareness programs in efforts to improve economic and social outcomes for Aboriginal people through the way they do business.

The Department of Justice is developing a number of policies and programs relating to Aboriginal justice issues, investing greater efforts in addressing the over representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system and expanding sentencing and diversionary programs and Aboriginal courts.

### **Examples of good practice in South Australia**

#### ***Whole of Government Reconciliation Implementation Reference Committee***

Under the auspices of the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs the Whole of Government Reconciliation Implementation Reference Committee has recently been established to progress the South Australian Government's commitment to reconciliation. Key objectives are to:

- Develop and implement practical reconciliation initiatives across government with particular attention to the wellbeing and quality of life for Aboriginal people in South Australia
- Oversee, coordinate and monitor the implementation of reconciliation initiatives across state government agencies

These two overarching objectives have been determined to acknowledge and help redress the injustice, marginalisation and cultural decimation suffered by Aboriginal people in South Australia since white settlement.

The Whole of Government Reconciliation Implementation Reference Committee aims to address these objectives through the following draft terms of reference:

- To ensure government agencies achieve the reconciliation objectives of the South Australian Government
- To establish across government linkages that support a collaborative approach to achieving the Committee's work
- To report to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation on a six-monthly basis about progress on the Committee's work (with recognition that the achievement of outcomes is a long-term process)
- To operate according to principles that support the spirit of reconciliation

### ***Tier 1***

As part of COAG's agreement to advance the work of reconciliation and address the social and economic disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians, South Australia has committed to participate in a trial of a whole of government cooperative approach.

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands Inter-governmental Inter-agency Collaboration Committee (commonly referred to as Tier 1) was prompted by concerns that despite large sums of money being invested in services and programs on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) Lands in the far north of South Australia, reports were still being received that serious health problems and poverty levels of Anangu communities show no indication of improvement.

Membership of Tier 1 comprises state and commonwealth government chief executives and senior executives who are committed to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for Anangu, ensuring a strong cross-portfolio and cooperative working relationship.

The terms of reference for Tier 1 reflect the agreement of all participants that the focus encompasses social issues, (including education, human services and justice) as well as industry, economic, environmental, employment and regional development, providing a true whole of government approach.

A key focus of Tier 1 is to work with local Anangu communities to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improve community capacity
- Ensure that Anangu have access to services necessary to sustain a quality of life comparable with that enjoyed by other Australians

- Design and deliver services in a manner that respects, promotes and sustains Anangu hopes and aspirations
- Monitor, evaluate and review programs and processes in light of the above

Members of Tier 1 are aware that business between government departments and Anangu needs to be done differently in order to achieve the aspirations of both Anangu and government to address the social and economic disadvantage on the AP Lands. It is apparent that one of the reasons for lack of success to date is a lack of coordinated funding and communication among services providers.

A project team has been established to support the work of Tier 1 with funding sourced from various key agencies.

Responsibility for Tier 1 and associated resources has recently been transferred from the Department of Human Services to the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs to ensure it receives full-time attention.

### ***Partnering Agreement***

To improve outcomes in priority areas, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the South Australian Government have agreed to undertake specific initiatives for joint action. Recognizing the need for partnership with Aboriginal people and the imperative for a multi-agency approach to achieving outcomes, these initiatives are implemented through relevant local, state and commonwealth government agencies, regional councils and the ATSIC Commissioner in South Australia.

The Partnering Agreement documents agreed commitments that aim to improve conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in South Australia. It outlines a range of priority outcomes to be achieved within each jurisdiction and in partnership over the next three years. There is provision for the monitoring of progress and for reporting on outcomes at the most senior levels of the South Australian Government and ATSIC.

Parties to the Agreement affirmed their joint commitments to the outcomes of the November 2000 COAG statement on the matter of Aboriginal reconciliation. Specifically the agreement to develop action plans and the statement *"Governments can make a real difference in the lives of Indigenous people by addressing social and economic disadvantage including life expectancy and improving governance and service delivery arrangements with Indigenous people."*

Improved community capacity for the management and administration of economic and social development underpins the joint approach to the following initiatives:

- Health and emotional wellbeing

- National Aboriginal Health Strategy
- Provision of essential services infrastructure
- Aboriginal economic development and employment action plan
- Aboriginal education initiatives
- Vocational education and training
- Land and sea initiatives (including resolution of native title claims and associated issues through state-wide Indigenous Land Use Agreement negotiations involving the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement and key peak industry bodies)
- Law and justice initiatives
- Family violence prevention
- Aboriginal youth participation forums
- Heritage and culture
- Indigenous art initiatives

Recognizing that the achievement of outcomes is a long-term and ongoing process, the South Australian Government and ATSIC have agreed to jointly report to Cabinet and the ATSIC Board on progress annually. Annual reports will include recommendations on areas requiring greater joint effort and strategies for action.

### ***Port Augusta Social Vision***

The Port Augusta Social Vision and Action Plan – *Shaping the Future* report, is an initiative of the City of Port Augusta. The work to develop this report was financially supported by the South Australian Government. The Attorney-General's Department has taken a lead role in forming a whole of government response in forming a partnership approach to advancing the recommendations of the report.

The *Shaping the Future* report is a result of extensive community consultation that identifies more than 140 recommendations developed in order to improve social wellbeing and reduce social problems in the City of Port Augusta. Approximately 25% of the recommendations are of specific relevance and significance to the Aboriginal community in Port Augusta.

The Department of State Aboriginal Affairs has undertaken a lead role in the development and implementation of the *Shaping the Future* report, particularly in areas relevant to the Aboriginal Community.



### ***Rekindling Family Relationships***

The Rekindling Family Relationships Framework for Action was developed from the Rekindling Family Relationships Forum held in Adelaide in April 2001 and provides a basis for the development and implementation of local community family violence action plans. The action plans are developed and implemented through a community development approach.

It is well acknowledged that to address issues such as family violence it is necessary to attend to a broad range of social and economic factors that affect the community, including the building of community capacity. The Framework for Action outlines the principles upon which government in partnership with the Aboriginal community can move forward in a commitment to provide holistic, collaborative support for Indigenous communities, determining and implementing local strategies to promote collective healing.

An intersectoral officers working group on Indigenous family violence is convened by the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs and includes representatives from state and commonwealth agencies as well as community and non-government organizations. From this working group a regional forums planning group has been selected to convene regional forums. One such forum was held in Ceduna on 12 and 13 June 2002.

### ***Framework for Governance***

The Framework for Governance project aimed at assisting local Aboriginal governing authorities to fulfill their governance role relating to "local government-type services".

From August until December 2001 the Framework for Governance project explored the nature of "local government-type services", the principles of good governance and relevant cultural issues. It picked up on the Local Government legislative provisions as they relate to governance as much as possible and dealt with "local government-type services" resulting in a generic framework. The report then specifically applied the generic framework for governance to the Nepabunna Community Council, a prescribed local governing authority in South Australia. Building on its existing constitution, the report provided the Council with a governance statement and a practical governance framework.

A working group project team guided the process and comprised representatives from the Nepabunna Community Council, Department of State Aboriginal Affairs, South Australian Local Government Grants Commission, Office of Local Government, ATSIC and the Local Government Association of South Australia.

A key feature of the process has been fostering and promoting Council awareness of the Local Government system in South Australia. Moreover, the agencies involved have had the opportunity to enrich their organizational

cultures, forge linkages to share information, and foster and increase knowledge on matters of shared interest within their spheres of influence.

### ***SA Aboriginal Health Framework Agreement***

In 1996 the South Australian Government entered into a Health Framework Agreement with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia and ATSIC to collectively address the health inequalities of Aboriginal people in South Australia.

The significance of the Agreement on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot be underestimated as it has led to the first comprehensive statewide consultations with all Aboriginal communities in South Australia and the development of state Aboriginal regional plans – *The first step* 1997. This enabled South Australia to attract significant funding from the Commonwealth with the Agreement extended for a further three years in August 2001.

The reporting process against the Agreement by all signatories presents an inclusive response to the health priorities of Aboriginal people, ranging from the Department of Human Services advancing reconciliation to the Aboriginal health advisory committees supporting and promoting regional planning for health services.

The Agreement has a number of new priority areas, in particular:

- The encouragement of expanded partnerships and collaboration at local and regional levels
- Prisoner health
- Sexual health

### ***The Department of Human Services Reconciliation Plan 2002-2003***

The Department of Human Services is active in advancing the key principles of reconciliation and has developed a Reconciliation Plan Reporting Framework. The reconciliation plan makes a commitment to the reconciliation agenda and incorporates the following Iga Warta principles into planning, policy and strategic development.

- Must be sustainable
- Must be proactive/preventative
- Must address environmental health
- Must encompass an Aboriginal community/family approach
- Must respect Aboriginal space and time

- Must address the need for coordination/continuity between regions

### **Access to Records**

State Records of South Australia provides a service to Aboriginal people seeking access to state government records for the purposes of family reunification or "rekindling of family relationships". The commencement of this service predated the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report, however the report has provided a focus for expansion of the service with the allocation of increased funding and the development of specific products to meet the needs identified in the report.

To date this expansion has resulted in the following initiatives:

- The engagement of a second Aboriginal Access Officer
- The production of a video *Distant Voices* to inform the community of the existence of the service
- The development of an outreach program
- The publication of an administrative history and guide to records relating to Aboriginal people entitled *A Little Flour and a Few Blankets*
- The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with SA Link-Up to assist in the provision of information to clients
- The development of a name index that currently has 70,000 entries drawn from the records of the Department of State Aboriginal Affairs

### **Conclusion**

The South Australian Government affirms the fundamental importance of reconciliation for a community that values diversity and the contribution of all people.

A commitment to develop enhanced, lasting partnerships based on shared understanding and mutual respect, and improvements in the cultural, spiritual, social and economic wellbeing of Aboriginal people in South Australia will remain a priority for the South Australian Government.