

Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

February 2020 – August 2021



Artwork statement

Brendan Kennedy was born at Robinvale on Tati Tati Country and is a descendant of the Tati Tati, Wadi Wadi and Mutti Mutti tribal lands and language groups. Brendan is a member of the First Peoples Yulendj Group who collaborated with Museum Victoria to produce the award-winning First Peoples exhibition. He has previously served on the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee; is a Tati Tati delegate for Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations and is the Director of the Tati Tati Aboriginal Corporation. Brendan is an artist who specialises in painting and creating cultural and ceremonial objects.

Brendan is co-curator and artist of the River of Language mural at the Melbourne Museum. An excerpt from this work was selected for our Reconciliation Action Plan to reflect Environmental Justice Australia's ongoing partnership with Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations, and our collaboration with them in First Nations' ongoing struggles for indigenous water justice.

Environmental Justice Australia also acknowledges and thanks Museums Victoria as the source of the image used, along with the photographer, Rodney Start.

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Note: A six-month extension to August 2021 has been granted in light of COVID-19.

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Environmental Justice Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and knowledge.

Statement from the Chair and CEO

The work of Environmental Justice Australia (EJA) is concerned fundamentally with notions of justice, in particular environmental justice. That is, we seek to use the law to protect nature and defend the rights of communities to a healthy environment. Our vision of healthy, empowered communities depends upon a broader vision of a reconciled, just and healthy Australia. Without reconciliation, we cannot build healthy communities and our vision cannot succeed. Without reflection, we risk our efforts towards reconciliation being tokenistic, at best.

Reflection involves taking steps to educate and inform ourselves about Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and histories. Reflection prompts us to explore the impacts and benefits of our work for these communities, recognising that our work may bring both. By increasing our knowledge and understanding through the work that we have committed to do in this Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), our organisation can build opportunities: for awareness, collaboration, action and positive change. The actions arising out of this RAP will directly benefit our staff, board, membership, clients, and collaborators in multi-faceted ways. Ultimately, they will support the realisation of our vision for healthy, empowered communities.

We are at a turning point in our history as a nation. Australia's relationship with its Indigenous past and present is being widely re-evaluated. Through this RAP we have an opportunity to set the foundations for a constructive relationship with Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and histories.

As Chair and CEO, we are proud to present EJA's first Reconciliation Action Plan to you.

Chiara Lawry (Chair) and Brendan Sydes (CEO)

Our business

Environmental Justice Australia (formerly the Environment Defenders Office, Victoria) is a not-for-profit public interest legal practice. We operate independently of government and are largely funded by private donations, philanthropic grants and some fees for service. Our legal team combines technical expertise and a practical understanding of the legal system to protect our environment.

We act as advisers and legal representatives to community-based environment groups, regional and state environmental organisations, and larger environmental NGOs, representing them in court when needed. We also provide strategic and legal support to their campaigns to address climate change, protect nature and defend the rights of communities to a healthy environment.

We pursue new and innovative solutions to fill the gaps and fix the failures in our legal system to clear a path for a more just and sustainable world.

We are based in Melbourne, Victoria, but we work with communities, groups and individuals in many parts of Victoria and Australia.

Currently EJA employs 16 staff members, and has more than 30 volunteers a year, but does not have any identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. EJA intends to collect data on its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and commits to improving outcomes throughout the implementation of this and future Reconciliation Action Plans.

Our RAP

EJA is committed to using the law to protect the environment and to building healthy communities and achieving environmental justice. Resolution of the defining national injustice of the treatment of Australia's First Nations, especially in relation to land, waters and culture, is inseparable from these commitments. As it seeks to achieve its overarching vision, EJA is committed to building stronger relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to providing culturally appropriate services, including through this, our first Reconciliation Action Plan.

In 2015, EJA first collaborated with the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN), a representative body of 24 Indigenous Nations across the lower Murray-Darling Basin, facilitating participation of those Nations in natural resources management.

In May 2016, EJA entered into an agreement to collaborate with MLDRIN under the VLA Beyond Outreach project, with the following objectives:

- to advise and assist MLDRIN and Traditional Owners in engagement with Government and in preparation of legal and policy instruments for water management in Victoria and in the Murray-Darling Basin;
- to provide environmental legal advice to MLDRIN; and
- to provide capacity building on Country with MLDRIN delegates in relevant aspects of water law and management.

EJA continues to advise, assist and collaborate with MLDRIN.

On 25 October 2017, EJA published a response to the Uluru statement from the heart, which can be viewed here: www.envirojustice.org.au/projects/uluru-statement-from-the-heart-a-response-from-eja/

EJA actively seeks to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in its law reform activities, particularly in water law. For example, in 2018 as part of EJA's work on urban rivers, we engaged with Wurundjeri Tribal Council, and our proposals for the protection of Melbourne's western rivers network includes an Indigenous country planning framework.

EJA has a policy of providing staff an alternative day of leave if they wish to work on the Australia Day holiday.

Through the delivery of our first RAP, EJA will also meet its obligations under the National Association for Community Legal Centres National Accreditation Scheme and demonstrate EJA's commitment to working towards, and reporting progress on, compliance and continuous quality improvement.

The aims of EJA's first RAP are to:

- develop a framework for EJA to realise our vision for reconciliation;
- build relationships both internally and externally, and raise awareness with our stakeholders to ensure there is shared understanding and ownership of our RAP within our organisation;
- develop a more culturally safe and inclusive workplace; and
- reduce barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups accessing EJA services and materials.

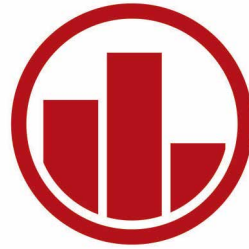
Our RAP has been drafted through a RAP Working Group, which was formed in December 2018, and in consultation with staff.

Our RAP Working Group

- Chiara Lawry, Chair of the Board
- Thea Lange, Chief Operating Officer (COO)
- Bruce Lindsay, Lawyer
- Ariane Wilkinson, Senior Lawyer
- Max Smith, Campaigner

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Relationships

ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	• In consultation with staff and Board, develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence that we could approach to connect with on our reconciliation journey.	Mar 2020	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
	• Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Feb 2020	COO
2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW).	• Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our staff and Board.	May 2020	COO
	• RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event.	27 May- 3 June 2020	COO to co-ordinate RAP Working Group (RWG)
	• Encourage and support staff and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	27 May- 3 June 2020	COO
3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence.	• Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all staff and board.	Monthly, review June 2020	COO
	• Communicate commitment to reconciliation to our membership.	Feb 2020	Chair
	• Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey.	Mar 2020	COO (with RAP WG)
	• Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey.	Mar 2020	RWG Board Member
4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	• Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination.	Feb 2020	COO
	• Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs.	Mar 2020	COO with support of Diversity and Inclusion Working Group

Respect

ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning.	• Create and share a presentation for staff exploring the ways in which increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation will enrich our workplace and contribute to the work we do (include a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to environmental sustainability and land management)	Mar 2020	COO
	• Conduct a review of further cultural learning needs within our organisation.	Feb 2020	COO with staff
	• Seek to identify at least an annual opportunity for EJA staff and Board members to participate in cultural immersion with Traditional Owners	Mar 2020	Rivers Lawyer
	• Share these cultural immersion experiences through the EJA blog	Jun 2020	Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to select a staff member
	• Provide training for staff on cultural awareness	Nov 2020	CEO
6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols at EJA.	• Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area.	Mar 2020	COO
	• Increase staff's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols.	Feb 2020	CEO
	• Continue to include an Acknowledgement of Country at all EJA events and consider adding an Acknowledgement of Country where EJA is participating in a public forum, and a Welcome to Country in appropriate circumstances	Review in June 2020	CEO
	• Consider the use of a standard email signature across the organisation acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land we operate on	Feb 2020	CEO

ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness and share information among our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. 	June 2020	COO in consultation with RWG
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce our staff to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area. 	June 2020	COO in consultation with RWG
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. 	First week in July 2020	COO to co-ordinate RWG
8. Establish procedures for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult to identify and reduce barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and groups accessing EJA services and materials. 	Aug 2020	Principal Lawyer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up mechanism for staff to securely record information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification of our clients. 	Aug 2020	Principal Lawyer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide guidance to staff at point of intake for best practice in asking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification. 	Aug 2020	Principal Lawyer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training for staff on interview and communication techniques, and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. 	Oct 2020	CEO
9. Investigate opportunities to address cultural safety in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage an external consultant to complete a cultural safety assessment. 	Mar 2020	CEO
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artwork and display our office. 	Mar 2020	CEO
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purchase and display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in our office. 	Mar 2020	Office Manager
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research best-practice and principles that support cultural safety in the workplace. 	Mar 2020	COO with Diversity and Inclusion Working Group
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review Policies and Procedures to align policies with recommended employment guidelines to create a welcoming employment environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. 	Apr 2020 for policy gaps Ongoing – review each policy as it is due	COO with Diversity and Inclusion Working Group

Opportunities

ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
10. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development.	• Develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within our organisation.	Mar 2020	CEO with support of COO
	• Advertise employment and volunteer opportunities at EJA to encourage applications by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media and networks such as the Koori Mail.	Feb 2020 ongoing	CEO (liaise with Office Manager)
	• Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities.	Feb 2020	COO
11. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity to support improved economic and social outcomes.	• Develop a business case for procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.	Feb 2020	COO
	• Encourage procurement from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses, for example, gifts for speakers.	Mar 2020	Office Manager
	• Investigate Supply Nation membership.	Feb 2020	COO with support of Office Manager
12. Support equal and equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	• Identify opportunities for EJA to contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.	June 2020	Principal Lawyer with RWG
	• Identify potential placement opportunities for law students through Aurora, or professionals through Jawun or similar organisations.	Nov 2020	COO with support of RWG
	• Liaise with Universities within our volunteer program to identify enhanced pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students.	Mar 2020	Office Manager

Governance

ACTION	DELIVERABLE	TIMELINE	RESPONSIBILITY
13. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP.	• Maintain a RWG to govern RAP implementation.	Feb 2020	COO
	• Review and update Terms of Reference for the RWG.	Feb 2020	COO supported by RWG
	• Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG.	Mar 2020	Chair and RWG
	• Invite new staff members onto RAP working group at least annually.	Mar 2020	COO
14. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments.	• Continue to define resource needs for RAP implementation and include allocation in EJA budget.	Apr 2020	COO
	• Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments.	Feb 2020	CEO
	• Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments.	Feb 2020	COO
15. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally.	• Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.	30 September 2020	COO
	• Share RAP progress with staff.	30 September 2020	COO
16. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	• Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	Oct 2020	COO

