



Public Interest Advocacy Centre

Reconciliation Action Plan

November 2016 - November 2018



Gadigal Country

MICHAEL LYONS

Cover: Gadigal Country

Michael Lyons is a Wiradjuri man from Narrandera in Western New South Wales. He learned much of his art skills from his father and grandfather. His paintings display a fusion of Aboriginal artistic styles, influenced by his father, as well as styles from central Australia and the Top End.

His paintings portray his connection to Wiradjuri country and culture, his traditional food groups, and his journeys away from country into the city.

In 2013 Michael was invited with his father and brothers to showcase Aboriginal culture at the 85th annual Niort Tourism Festival in Western France, to discuss and demonstrate Wiradjuri culture. The presentation included artwork, bush tucker, storytelling, artefacts and playing the didgeridoo.

PIAC

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The Public Interest Advocacy Centre office is located on the land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation. PIAC provides services across New South Wales and Australia, and we acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we work as the first people of this country.

Our vision for reconciliation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Australians. We acknowledge their important place in our nation's history and future.

Our vision for reconciliation is to create a society that is fair, equal and just for all Australians.

This must involve recognising the unique and significant role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have in defining our identity as a nation and taking acting steps to address systemic injustice.

PIAC's objectives and experience mean that PIAC is well placed to contribute in a practical way to reconciliation in the community. As an organisation, we have a responsibility to the community to work proactively towards reconciliation.

PIAC aims to:

- Identify systemic injustice against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Advocate for the elimination of those wrongs and redress for those affected
- Strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage in public policymaking and advocacy

PIAC considers that reconciliation is critical to Australia's future as a cohesive nation and as such it is important to all Australians. It involves improving relationships by developing understanding of how history has shaped our relationship with each other and the importance of respecting each other's cultures.

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Our business

PIAC is an independent, non-profit organisation committed to social justice and addressing disadvantage. We use the law to achieve practical outcomes that protect individual dignity and the basic rights of vulnerable people. We help people by providing legal assistance, policy advice and training.

PIAC works with people who have least access to economic, social and legal resources and opportunities. This includes people experiencing homelessness; children in detention; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; people who have suffered discrimination; and those who struggle to access essential services. We are based in Sydney but work across NSW and sometimes nationally. PIAC also draws on our specialised knowledge of particular client communities, gained through practical legal work, to recognise trends or patterns that indicate systemic issues, and works with government, business, the community sector and other partners to achieve lasting change.

PIAC's Indigenous Justice Program (IJP) was developed in partnership with private law firm Allens in 2001. The IJP aims to strengthen PIAC's links with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, identify public interest issues which impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and conduct public interest advocacy, litigation and policy work on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Since our establishment in 1982, PIAC has grown from a staff of four to a staff of 26 as well as secondees, professional placements, and interns. At the time of finalising our RAP, we have one Indigenous Graduate Secondee (by arrangement with the Australian Government Solicitor) and one Aboriginal legal intern/cadet. We actively encourage applications from suitably qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and this RAP forms part of our commitment to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within PIAC.

Our RAP and our reconciliation journey

PIAC has worked over many years to provide access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to highlight systemic issues that particularly affect First Australian communities, while progressing social change. Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, PIAC is also committed to consulting, working with and empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve access to justice.

PIAC played a pivotal role in securing the return of wages, allowances and pensions held in trust by the NSW Government for Aboriginal people, who were denied access to these funds. Following advocacy by PIAC, in 2004, the Government established the Aboriginal Trust Fund Repayment Scheme. PIAC and a number of law firms have helped Aboriginal people access money owed to them under this scheme.

PIAC also advocated strongly for the predominantly Aboriginal workers of James Hardie's Baryulgil mine, who were exposed to asbestos dust from mining and crushing operations. Through our Indigenous Justice Project we continue to conduct public interest advocacy, litigation and policy work on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

Our Homeless Persons' Legal Services regularly supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients at clinics held at welfare agencies across Sydney and the Hunter. PIAC aims to work in partnership with organisations including Gamarada, the Wayside Chapel, the Shed and Lake Macquarie Council Indigenous Unit to provide an excellent and culturally sensitive legal service.

Through our policy work, PIAC strives to highlight the issues that contribute to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system and support justice reinvestment.

In 2015, PIAC ensured that an Acknowledgment of Country was displayed on its website, external communications and in all publications. An Acknowledgment of Country sign created by Aboriginal artist Michael Lyons is prominently displayed in the PIAC offices.

In 2014, PIAC decided to develop a RAP to bring together our existing initiatives at the same time as driving the organisation to find and pursue further opportunities to enhance respectful relationships and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This move was unanimously supported by our staff and board.

PIAC's RAP working group was established in 2014, and includes our CEO, who is also our RAP champion, Senior Solicitors in our Indigenous Justice Program and our general practice, Senior Policy Officer from the Homeless Persons' Legal Service, Media and Communications Manager,

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Senior Training Officer, and Senior Policy Officer in the Energy + Water Consumer Advocacy Program. External members that contributed to the development of PIAC's RAP include key Aboriginal Stakeholders in PIAC services: Monique Wiseman, the Senior Aboriginal Program Manager at Wayside Chapel, Rick Welsh, Manager at The Shed, Uncle Manuel Ebsworth, and Tiffany McComsey from Kinsella Boys' Home as well as Katie Kiss, who served on the Board from 2014 - 2015.

A final draft of PIAC's RAP was completed in late 2016, with many of its proposed actions already underway. Pending approval by Reconciliation Australia, PIAC commenced implementing its commitments under the RAP to ensure progress towards its goals.

PIAC's RAP outlines our practical vision for reconciliation and empowers every staff member to play a role. We recognise that our RAP must be relevant to the work of all staff and partners and reflect our core values as an organisation. The process of bringing our RAP to life must be a consistent and continuous part of our work. We look forward to reviewing and refining our RAP over time.

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Relationships			
PIAC recognises that enhancing relationships between staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and communities, complements the objectives of our organisation and enhances the quality and the value of PIAC's work.			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Deliverable
1. RAP Working Group (RWG). Working Group established to oversee development, implementation, progress and reporting on PIAC's Innovate RAP.	Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)	November 2016, 2017, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PIAC's RWG will consist of at least four people, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander members and internal staff from across PIAC's program areas.
		November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal RWG to identify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to be invited to advise on PIAC RAP throughout the development, endorsement and launch.
	Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)	February, May, August, November annually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RWG to meet at least four times per year to monitor and report on RAP implementation.
2. Celebrate National Reconciliation Week. Create/promote opportunities for PIAC employees to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities during NRW.	Gemma Pearce (Media and Communications Manager)	27 May - 3 June 2017, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise at least one NRW event each year. All NRW events to be registered on the Reconciliation Australia website.
	Camilla Pandolfini (Senior Solicitor)	27 May - 3 June 2017, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PIAC staff to attend other National Reconciliation Week key stakeholder events (eg. Community Legal Centre breakfast or Aboriginal Legal Service picnic).
3. Build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.			
PIAC maintains strong relationships with new and existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in various communities.	CEO, Deputy CEO, Principal Solicitor, Managing Solicitor HPLS, Team Leader EWCAP	November 2016. Review at each RWG meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PIAC's processes for new and departing staff will include handover and introductions with key contacts in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

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<p>We work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and stakeholders to identify and address public interest issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.</p>	<p>Anna Dawson (IJP Senior Solicitor)</p>	<p>November 2016 Review November 2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PIAC's work reflects the priorities identified by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners. • PIAC's work relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is developed and delivered through engagement and/or partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.
<p>4. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander membership of PIAC Board .</p>	<p>Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)</p>	<p>November 2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure PIAC has at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Director.
<p>5. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander membership of Streetcare homeless consumer advisory service.</p>	<p>Lou Schetzer (Senior Policy officer, HPLS)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure PIAC has at least one Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander member of Streetcare.

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Respect			
PIAC is committed to conducting its work in a manner that respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, lands and histories. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is important to PIAC because we want our work to reflect an acknowledgement of the role which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have had in shaping our country's history. We also want our work to contribute towards establishing a future for Australia that is based on mutual respect and understanding.			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Deliverable
1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.			
Engage employees in understanding the protocols around Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country ceremonies to ensure there is shared meaning behind the ceremonies.	Julia Mansour (Senior Solicitor)	November 2016 Review: March 2018	• Develop and communicate a cultural protocol document on Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country ceremonies.
	Camilla Pandolfini (Senior Solicitor)	Review at each RWG meeting	• Invite a Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country at all significant PIAC events.
	Gemma Pearce (Media and Communications Manager)	Review at each RWG meeting November 2016	• Ensure an Acknowledgement of Country is included in standard meeting agendas and made at the commencement of important internal meetings. • Display an Acknowledgement of Country on PIAC's website and publications.
2. Ensure policies and procedures are culturally appropriate and consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.	Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)	October 2017	• Review current policies and procedures to ensure they are culturally appropriate, inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and sensitive to the values, traditions and customs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
		October 2017	• Where required, update PIAC policies and procedures to align with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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3. Increase understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.			
PIAC to build the cultural competence of staff and the Board by building employees' understanding and increasing their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.	Sarah Ludowici (Senior Training Officer)	March 2017 Review March 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a cultural awareness training strategy, that includes details of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - key elements of the training; - appropriate training presenters; - strategy for undertaking training for existing staff and board members; - strategy for providing training to new staff, board members, placements and secondees.
	Sarah Ludowici (Senior Training Officer)	Review at each RWG meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff to participate in cultural awareness training. • Provide opportunities for board members to undertake cultural awareness training. • PIAC to host cultural learning events for staff and board members to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the life experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
	Roslyn Cook (Managing Solicitor, HPLS)	Review at each RWG meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure cultural awareness training is provided to all staff involved in Homeless Persons' Legal Service clinics, including lawyers from participating law firms.
4. Provide opportunities for PIAC staff to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities through NAIDOC Week.	Gemma Pearce (Media and Communications Manager)	July, annually November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and provide opportunities for all staff to attend at least one NAIDOC Week event in their local community. • Review HR policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.

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Opportunities			
PIAC is committed to exploring opportunities for the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be expressed through our work, as this will enable us to be more effective in identifying issues of concern and systemic problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. PIAC recognises that this will improve the governance and authenticity of PIAC, enhance the inclusiveness and equity of the workplace, as well as provide satisfaction for staff taking positive steps.			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Deliverable
1. Increase work opportunities at PIAC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)	June 2017 Review November 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and retention strategy, including professional development, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and stakeholders. • Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to ensure there are no barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and future applicants participating in our workplace.
	Scott Parker (Administrator)	November 2016, review at each RWG meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise all job vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.
	Julia Mansour (Senior Solicitor)	June 2017, 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain opportunities to enable Aboriginal students to undertake practical legal training or other placement programs at PIAC.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity.	Deirdre Moor (Deputy CEO)	December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a PIAC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement procedure and strategy that incorporates supplier diversity principles. This will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supply list; - a target of maintaining a commercial relationship with three or more Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander business each year. • Communicate a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services, to all staff. • Develop at least one new commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business.
		December 2017	
		June 2018	
3. Partner with tertiary education providers to promote professional learning opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Anna Dawson (IJP senior solicitor)	November 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and develop a list of key contact people within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education units; in particular at University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong, Southern Cross University and other institutions in regional areas which may have a high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student population.

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4. Provide secondment opportunities to facilitate professional development for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lawyers.	Alexis Goodstone (Principal Solicitor)	November 2016, 2017, 2018	• Create secondment opportunities within PIAC, for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lawyers employed by law firms, community legal services, and Aboriginal Legal Services.
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Tracking progress and reporting			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Deliverable
1. Report on achievements, challenges and learnings to measure impact of PIAC's RAP for inclusion in RAP impact measurement report.	Jonathon Hunyor (CEO)	February, May, August, November Annually	• PIAC RWG to report biannually to the PIAC Board on achievements, challenges and learnings.
		October annually	• PIAC to include RAP progress in the annual report.
	RWG representative	Monthly	• PIAC RWG and staff to report on progress and action items under the RAP at monthly staff meetings.
2. Report achievements, challenges and learnings to Reconciliation Australia for inclusion in the Annual Impact Measurement Report.	Gemma Pearce (Media and Communications Manager)	September 2017, 2018	• Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia annually.
3. Produce PIAC's next RAP.	RWG	June 2018	• Conduct consultations for PIAC's next RAP so that it can commence immediately after the expiration of the current RAP.
	RWG	July 2018 October 2018	• Work with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings and challenges of this Innovate RAP. • Submit draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal endorsement.

Contact details

Please contact PIAC's Media and Communications Manager, Gemma Pearce, for all enquiries regarding the PIAC RAP.

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