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Background

The Victorian Local Government Aboriginal Engagement and Reconciliation Survey is an online survey that was sent to all Victorian local governments in May 2012, and closed in July 2012. Over 95% of Councils responded to the Survey, which comprised 125 questions related to policy and practice across key function areas of local government.

Who developed the Survey?
The survey was developed by Reconciliation Victoria in partnership with the Victorian Local Governance Association, the Municipal Association of Victoria, Local Government Professionals and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council, with support from the Victorian State Government.

How did it come about?
This Survey was a recommendation of the Reconciliation in Local Government Project Action Research Report (Reconciliation Victoria, 2011) which identified the need to increase local government access to relevant information. This recommendation was endorsed as a priority by the Steering Committee of the Local Government Aboriginal Partnerships Project – an initiative established by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Local Government, the Hon. Jeanette Powell, in October 2011. Membership of the Steering Committee includes the three Victorian local government peak bodies, Reconciliation Victoria, a number of Victorian local governments and representatives of Aboriginal organisations.

What are the aims of the Survey?
The Survey aims to:
- Capture a snapshot of current local government activity
- Identify good practice to share across the sector
- Analyse key trends and changes over the past decade with comparable data from the Local Government Indigenous Communities Survey conducted by the MAV Interagency Indigenous Coordination Committee for Local Government in 2001 (responses published as Toomangi Report in 2002)
- Analyse findings and trends to support sector learning and reflective practice
- Provide evidence-base to support advocacy for enhanced focus and investment

Introduction

What is the Survey about?
The survey asks Victorian local governments how they promote reconciliation and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in planning, decision-making, programs and services across all areas of their organisation. It provides invaluable information about what local governments are currently doing, and comparable data from the 2001 Survey has enabled analysis of some significant trends and changes in certain action areas over the past decade.

There were seven sections in the survey, which addressed:
- Protocols and community participation in planning and decision-making
- Employment and corporate culture
- Arts and cultural development
- Planning and Cultural Heritage
- Service provision
- Economic development
- Overall challenges, opportunities and examples of innovation

How many Councils participated?
77 out of the 79 Victorian local governments participated in the survey. In a small number of cases, respondents did not complete all seven sections. The total number of responses for each section are provided and used as the basis for calculated percentages. As questions were grouped according to function areas, completion of the survey generally required staff from several departments to participate. Councils invested significantly in this survey. All the data drawn on in this report has been signed off for analysis and publication by the CEOs of participating local governments.

How were the results analysed?
Reconciliation Victoria worked with a team of people to collate, analyse and present the extensive data that was produced from the survey. In addition to the survey results, the following data was used in the analysis:
- The results of the 2001 survey, published in the Toomnangi Report
- 2011 Census Data
- List of eight Victorian ‘regions’ defined by the Department of Human Services as at June 2012
- List of Victorian local governments classified as metropolitan, regional city or rural councils on Department of Planning and Community Development website as at June 2012

Analysis of the data has sought to identify trends and patterns as to whether Aboriginal engagement and Reconciliation activities differ according to region, council location (metro, regional, rural) and

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5 Rural and Metropolitan Councils are distinguished at: http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/localgovernment/find-your-local-council We refer to the following councils as regional city councils: Ballarat City Council, Greater Bendigo City Council, Greater Geelong City Council, Horsham Rural City Council, Latrobe City Council, Mildura Rural City Council, Greater Shepparton City Council, Wangaratta Rural City Council, Warrnambool City Council, Wodonga City Council
Aboriginal population density, and whether there have been changes over time where 2001 data is comparable. There has also been some investigation into what other factors affect levels of activity, such as the presence of local champions – a factor which the Reconciliation in Local Government Action Research Report and the Toomnangi Report identified as important. The analysis also seeks to highlight areas where there is significant current activity.

How are the results available?
This Overview Report provides a summary of the key findings from the Survey. A report with the collation of statewide responses to each question can be downloaded from the RecVic website.7 Each Council is to receive a report of their own responses with comparisons to data statewide. Detailed analysis and examples of innovation and good practice drawn from survey will be available via a new website currently under development - a ‘one-stop-shop’ for local governments to access and share information, advice and good practice on Aboriginal engagement and Reconciliation.

Context

What is local government’s role in relation to Aboriginal communities and Reconciliation?

“As the level of government closest to communities, local government is well placed to lead and influence positive changes at the local level.”7

While the diversity between local governments leads to diverse approaches, there are some common reference points for understanding local government roles in this area.

• The responsibility to provide effective services to all constituents;
• Legislative responsibilities in relation to Native Title and Aboriginal Heritage;
• The commitment to Closing the Gap through reducing Indigenous disadvantage;
• Upholding and protecting human rights; and
• Promoting reconciliation.8

The Report also provides an analysis of the history and current context in relation to Victorian local governments and Aboriginal communities, which is useful background to this Survey. While it will not be repeated here, there have been some important developments over the past decade that must be noted, as they may help to explain some of the significant findings of this survey compared to the 2001 data presented in the Toomnangi Report.

6 Download collation of responses at:www.reconciliationvic.org.au
8 Op.cit. p.32
What do Aboriginal population demographics tell us?
The Victorian Indigenous community is growing at a rapid-rate according to the 2011 Census data the population is now 37,990 (0.74% of the overall population) compared to 21,533 (0.46% of the overall population) in 2002. This is a youthful population compared with an ageing broader population, which presents Victorian local governments with an opportunity in terms of workforce planning and development. The Census data provides a wealth of valuable information for Victorian local governments that cannot be covered here, though a couple of the interesting results include:

- 24% of Indigenous Victorians live in the North & West Metropolitan Region, followed by the Southern Metropolitan and Loddon Mallee regions, each with 15%.
- Actual figures in the 10 municipalities with the greatest number of Indigenous residents range from 1125 (Whittlesea) up to 2083 (Greater Shepparton).

What is the policy context?
In the past decade several important policies of the Victorian State Government have had significant impacts on the relationship between local governments and Aboriginal communities:

- The introduction of the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* in 2006 established Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) and regulations requiring local governments to work with RAPs to enhance protection and management of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.
- The *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* was also enacted in 2006, which has arguably led to increased awareness and initiatives to ensure protection and promotion of human rights at the local level.
- The establishment of *Local Indigenous Networks* (LINs) began in 2007 with support from the Victorian State Government, to support communities to identify local needs and priorities and provide a voice for Indigenous people. There are now 39 LINs operating across Victoria, and many local governments actively engage with their LIN.
- The introduction of the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act* in 2010 enables Victorian Traditional Owner groups to negotiate out-of-court settlement of native title directly with the Victorian Government. The Gunaikurnai people of the Gippsland region are the first group to successfully negotiate a settlement under this Act, which has led to implications and opportunities for local governments to strengthen engagement with Traditional Owners.

What Reconciliation commitments have been made?
Over the past decade many councils have demonstrated their commitment to Reconciliation by signing statements of commitment, adopting policies and entering into agreements with Aboriginal groups and communities. Some councils have progresed to subsequent commitments and agreements, able to build on a foundation of trust and relationships formed with local Aboriginal people over a number of years. Others have adopted such plans and commitments more recently. The *Reconciliation in Local Government Action Research Report* gives an overview of these and assesses the challenges and opportunities of Reconciliation Action Plans for Victorian local governments.
Summary of key findings

**Flying the Flag:** Many more councils fly the Aboriginal flag permanently in 2012 (47) than in 2001 (9). Including those that fly the flag on special occasions, 66 councils now fly the Aboriginal flag. 25 councils fly the Torres Strait Islander flag either permanently (18) or on special occasions (7).

**Acknowledging Country:** 61 councils have a protocol on Acknowledgement of Country. This is a huge increase since 2001, when 24 councils reported recognising traditional owners at formal functions, of which 8 had a formal policy on acknowledgement.

**Aboriginal representation:** Two councils reported having a Councillor that identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In 2001 there were no known Indigenous Councillors. There has not been a significant increase in the involvement of Aboriginal people in planning and decision-making, with 35% (27) reporting Aboriginal input into decision-making in 2012 compared to 23% that reported having Indigenous involvement in internal committees in 2001.

**Aboriginal Employment:** Survey results suggest an increase in Indigenous employment over the past decade - there are at least 76 known Indigenous employees in the sector now compared with 37 in 2001. 27 councils indicated they actively encourage Indigenous employment, however only 6 reported having a specific Aboriginal Employment Policy or similar in place. This still represents an increase in activity in this area over the past decade, with almost three quarters (74%) of councils reporting they had no initiatives to promote Indigenous employment in 2001.

**Cross-cultural training:** 32 councils reported that they provide Aboriginal cross-cultural training to employees and/or Councillors, compared to 18 in 2001.

**Strategic commitments:** Over half of Victorian local governments (42) now have specific Indigenous commitments or initiatives as part of their organisational plans, including within Council Plans (32) and separately through Reconciliation plans or similar. This represents a significant increase since 2001 when 28 Councils reported incorporation of Indigenous initiatives into business or strategic plans.

**Supporting Indigenous arts:** 60 councils reported initiatives to support local Indigenous arts including commissioning artworks and performances, supporting exhibitions and displaying artworks in council buildings and public places.

**Celebrating culture:** 61 councils celebrate Indigenous culture through events such as NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week and including Aboriginal content in local festivals and events.

**Promoting Aboriginal history:** 65 councils promote local Aboriginal history including through cultural tours, publications, in libraries and on their websites.

**Cultural Heritage protection:** There appears to be an increase in the number of councils actively protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage sites in the past decade, with 53 Councils reporting having worked to protect local significant sites in 2012. The questions asked in the 2001 Survey, while not directly comparable, found that 9 Councils had archaeological assessment initiatives. A number of councils reported challenges in relation to cultural heritage management including where there are two or more Traditional Owner groups, or where there is no designated Registered Aboriginal Party or clearly recognised Traditional Owner group.

**Service provision:** 34 councils have specific programs or initiatives for Indigenous children or families, with childcare, pre-school and kindergarten programs the most common. 27 councils reported engaging Indigenous young people in council programs or consultative processes.

**Procurement:** 47 councils (64%) have procured goods or services from Indigenous businesses.

**Indigenous Tourism:** 21 councils reported involvement in Indigenous tourism initiatives in their area.
Results

Section 1
Protocols and community participation in planning and decision-making

We asked councils about their protocols in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also asked a number of questions about how councils engage Aboriginal people in planning and decision-making. Key action areas in this section were:

- Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Protocols for Acknowledgement of Country
- Use of Aboriginal language to name local places or initiatives
- Involvement of an Aboriginal Advisory Group or similar in decision-making processes
- Relationships with Traditional Owners, Local Indigenous Networks, other Aboriginal organisations and local reconciliation groups
- Provision of candidate information specifically to Aboriginal communities

77 Councils responded to this section

### Chart 1: Positive responses to Section 1 questions (n=77)

- 66 councils (86%) fly the flag compared to 25 in 2001.
- 61 councils (79%) have a protocol on Acknowledgement of Country compared to eight in 2001.
- 62 Councils (81%) engage with Traditional Owners in a wide variety of ways.
- 42 councils (56%) engage with Local Indigenous Networks (LINs), including 23 that undertake joint projects with LINs.
- 43 councils engage with local reconciliation groups compared to 11 in 2001.
Flag facts

- All councils in metropolitan and regional areas and 68% of councils in rural areas fly either the Aboriginal or both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.
- Frankston, Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Ranges lower their Aboriginal flags to half-mast on the passing of Elders from the community.
- Whittlesea lowers all flags to half-mast on National Sorry Day (26 May).
- Mildura and Pyrenees fly the Aboriginal flag on ‘Australia Day’ / ‘Survival Day’ (26 Jan).

Aboriginal languages

- 33 councils have used local Aboriginal languages to name landmarks and events including festivals, streets, community centres, reserves and rooms within Council buildings.

A seat at the table

- 26 councils (34%) engage Aboriginal people in planning and decision-making, compared to 23% of councils that reported having Indigenous involvement in committees in 2001.
- Aboriginal Advisory Committees were the most common structures for this engagement.
- Two councils reported having a Councillor that identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. In 2001 there were no known Indigenous Councillors.

Reconciliation – it’s everybody’s business

- 43 councils engage with local Reconciliation groups, in particular for joint projects and events (eg. National Reconciliation Week).
- 24 councils reported that their staff attend local reconciliation group meetings.
- 23 councils provide funding for their local reconciliation groups and 17 provide subsidised use of Council facilities.
- A number of councils reported involvement in anti-racism projects within their communities.

What other steps does your Council take to engage non-Aboriginal people in reconciliation?

Analysis of common words or phrases in responses to this question using ‘Wordle’ online program. Thirty eight councils provided responses including events in Reconciliation Week, development of Reconciliation plans, involving non-Indigenous people in Aboriginal Advisory Committees, flying the flag, story time in libraries, public art and training of council staff.
Engaging Traditional Owners

62 out of 76 councils responded ‘Yes’ when asked ‘Does your Council engage with Traditional Owners in your area?’ Here are some interesting examples of this engagement:

- City of Booroondara invites Traditional Owners to perform smoking ceremonies to welcome international students to the City.
- City of Greater Shepparton involves Traditional Owners in the design and operation of arts and culture programs for local Indigenous residents.
- City of Yarra employs a local Elder and has established a process with Traditional Owners about use of Aboriginal language.

Working with other Aboriginal organisations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 5 types of Aboriginal organisations that Councils engage with (# of councils ‘Yes’)</th>
<th>Top 5 Activities (# of councils ‘Yes’)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Artistic groups [50]</td>
<td>Ad hoc issues management [43]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services [42]</td>
<td>Invited to council events [43]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and Recreation groups [28]</td>
<td>Joint projects [35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Agencies [26]</td>
<td>Regular forums or meetings [30]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Services [22]</td>
<td>Organisations provide services to council [26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice Agencies or Services [22]</td>
<td>Partnerships [e.g. MoU] [23]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

62 councils reported that they engage Aboriginal organisations on a range of activities:
Section 2
Employment and Corporate Culture

We asked councils about data collection and policies in relation to Aboriginal employment, and the provision of Aboriginal cultural awareness training within their organisation. We also asked whether their strategic planning documents include Indigenous-specific commitments, and whether they have a reconciliation policy or similar in place. Finally we asked about their funding for Indigenous programs. Key action in this section were:

- Aboriginal employment
- Workforce planning
- Professional development
- Strategic commitments
- Funding

74 Councils responded to this section.

![Chart 4: Positive responses to Section 2 questions (n=74)]

- There are at 76 known Indigenous employees compared to 37 in 2001.
- 15 councils (30%) collect data on the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background of employees.
- Community Development was the area with the largest number of Indigenous employees.
- 29 councils (39%) actively encourage Indigenous employment, through their general employment strategies and/or a specific Indigenous strategy.
- 37 councils provide funding to Indigenous-specific programs compared to 29 in 2001.
- There was no apparent correlation between council size and level of funding - some small councils allocated more funding than many larger councils.
- 42 councils (58%) have specific Indigenous commitments or initiatives as part of their organisational plans, compared to 28 in 2001.
Aboriginal employment

- 25 councils reported employing a total of 76 Indigenous employees across the sector.
- 58 councils (78%) do not collect information on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background of employees, therefore actual number of Indigenous employees is difficult to gauge.
- 46 of the known Indigenous employees (62%) were full-time (excluding cadets and trainees).
- 49 of these employees (66%) were entry-level, 21 were mid-level, and there was one known senior management/executive-level Indigenous employee.
- Community development/social planning was the most common area of Indigenous Employment (57%), followed by Human Services and Infrastructure (both 23%) then Arts and Culture (19%).

Aboriginal Liaison Officers

- 19 councils (26%) reported that they employ an Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) or similar role, and of these nine were employed full-time.
- 11 of these ALO positions were Indigenous identified positions.

Aboriginal cross-cultural training

- 32 councils (43%) provide Aboriginal cross-cultural training to employees and/or councillors.
- This training is compulsory in only two councils.
- Around two thirds of councils that provide this training engage Aboriginal trainers or involve local Aboriginal community members in the delivery of the training.

Strategy documents

- 42 councils (57%) include Indigenous-specific strategies, commitments or initiatives in one or more key documents such as Council Plans and Municipal Public Health Plans.
- 38 councils (51%) have a Reconciliation plan, Inclusion Plan or similar in place, of which three are Reconciliation Action Plans registered with Reconciliation Australia.

Funding

- 37 councils (50%) allocate funds to Indigenous programs and projects, reporting just over $1.96 million of specific Indigenous funding in 2010/11.
- 51% of this funding was allocated from internal budgets with the remainder coming from a range of State and Federal funding programs.
- Overall allocations have increased considerably since 2001 - the highest individual council allocation in 2000/01 was $70,000, while in 2010/11 five councils allocated over $200,000.
Section 3
Aboriginal History, Arts and Culture

We asked councils about the ways that they provide support for Indigenous arts, and how they promote recognition and celebration of Aboriginal culture in their local communities. We also asked about their role in acknowledging and promoting local Aboriginal history. Key actions in this section were:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture
- Local Aboriginal history
- Honouring local Aboriginal people through place names
- Celebrating culture

73 councils responded to this section.

Chart 6: Positive responses to Section 3 questions [n=73]

- 60 councils (82%) have initiatives to support local Indigenous arts and culture.
- 40 councils (55%) have facilitated the naming of local sites and landmarks in recognition of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.
- 45 councils (62%) reported that local Aboriginal history of their area had been documented.
- 65 councils (89%) promote local Aboriginal history.
Arts and culture
- 50 councils (68%) display Indigenous artworks in council buildings and public places, compared to 11 councils in 2001.
- 48 councils (66%) support local Indigenous artists through exhibitions.
- 35 councils (48%) commission works of art or performances from Indigenous artists.

Aboriginal language names
- 40 councils (55%) have used Aboriginal language to name local natural or built features including hills, rivers, roads and public buildings.
- 14 councils have used Aboriginal language to name council buildings or rooms.

Celebrating culture
- 61 councils (84%) indicated that they hold or sponsor events celebrating Indigenous culture, including during NAIDOC Week (46 councils) and Reconciliation Week (44 councils).

Local Aboriginal history
- 65 councils reported promoting Aboriginal history.
- 45 councils indicated that local Aboriginal history of their area has been documented.

Chart 7: Ways in which Councils promote Indigenous history (n=66)
Section 4
Planning and Cultural Heritage

We asked councils a number of questions about their role in protecting and promoting Aboriginal cultural heritage, and their relationship with Traditional Owners (TO) and Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) with regard to this function. We also asked about the participation of Aboriginal people in land-use planning and management. Key actions in this section were:

- Council awareness of significant sites
- Working with Traditional Owners to protect and promote of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage
- Participation of Aboriginal people in land-use planning and management

74 councils responded to this section.

Chart 8: Positive responses to Section 4 questions (n=74)

- 67 councils (91%) reported significant Aboriginal sites in their municipality.
- 53 councils (67%) reported working to protect local significant sites.
- 90% of regional city councils have worked to protect local significant sites.
- 13 councils (18%) engage Aboriginal people in the committees of management of parks and reserves.

Protection of significant sites

- Of the 53 councils that have worked to protect local significant sites, 36 have worked with Traditional Owners or Registered Aboriginal Parties to protect pre-contact sites and 12 have taken actions to protect post-contact sites.
- 19 councils (26%) had undertaken rehabilitation works to protect culturally sensitive areas.
Promotion of Aboriginal Heritage

- 41 councils (57%) have worked with Registered Aboriginal Parties or Traditional Owners to build greater community awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Activities included:
  - Information about local Aboriginal history/cultural heritage in council publications (20 councils)
  - Cultural heritage trails (10 councils)
  - Cultural heritage activities in Reconciliation Week (19 councils) and Heritage Week (7)
  - Cultural heritage markers at significant sites (10)

Cultural heritage protection Mt William

Macedon Ranges Shire and the former Shire of Romsey have been instrumental in the protection of the Mt William Wurundjeri Greenstone Axe Quarry north of Lancefield. In the early 1970s the former Shire of Romsey acquired the Mt William property and ensured its registration under the relevant heritage legislation. Some years following council amalgamations in 1994 the Macedon Ranges Shire Council gifted the land title to the Wurundjeri as a gesture of reconciliation. Since then the Council has maintained its relationship with the Traditional Owners, who subsequently gained Registered Aboriginal Party status, to help maintain the Mt William Quarry. Council recently provided funds for an Honouring and Returning Ceremony to be held at Mt William.

Protocols

- 26 councils (36%) have protocols to ensure Traditional Owners are engaged in planning processes, including provisions to assess all council capital works projects, formal partnership agreements and protocols for managing museum collections.
- Several of these processes were established before the introduction of Registered Aboriginal Parties.

Challenges

- Significant commentary was provided by councils in this section of the survey. Analysis of this commentary indicates that councils (and perhaps Traditional Owners) are still adapting to the cultural heritage legislation introduced in 2006, which is currently under review.
- Some councils commented on pre-existing relationships, research or projects underway at the time the legislation was introduced, which were impacted with the new arrangements.
- The need to simplify issues around Cultural Heritage Management Plans was also raised.
- Many councils commented that there existed a challenge where there are two or more Traditional Owner groups within a municipality, or where there is no designated RAP or clearly recognised Traditional Owner group.
- Some councils are also aware that Traditional Owners lack sufficient resources for their work in this area.
Section 5
Service provision

We asked councils what specific programs or initiatives they had across the areas of children’s services, library services, recreation services and aged care services. We also asked councils whether they collect data about the use of these services. Questions about Indigenous youth participation in council programs were included at the request of the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Committee (VIYAC). Key actions in this section were:

• Data collection on service usage
• Library services
• Aged care services
• Children’s services
• Recreation services
• Indigenous youth engagement

76 Councils responded to this section.

Chart 9: Positive responses to Section 5 questions (n=76)

- 86% of councils collect data on Indigenous service usage.
- 57 councils (75%) have Indigenous-specific programs or resources in their libraries.
- 27 councils (36%) engage Indigenous young people in programs or consultative processes.
- 34 councils (45%) have Indigenous specific childrens services.
Library services
- Of the 75% of councils with Indigenous-specific library programs or collections, most reported running a number of different initiatives including:
  - Indigenous story-telling time;
  - A specific Indigenous children’s collection;
  - Information about local Aboriginal history and heritage; and
  - Indigenous exhibitions.

Children’s services
- 34 councils (47%) have specific programs or initiatives for Indigenous children or families including:
  - Childcare programs (16 Councils);
  - Pre-school and kindergarten programs (17 Councils); and
  - School holiday programs (7 Councils).

Recreation
- 27 councils (34%) have Indigenous-specific recreation initiatives and 11 councils target promotion of recreation programs to the Indigenous community.

Aged care
- 21 councils (28%) have Indigenous-specific services aged care or programs:
  - 15 councils have Indigenous-specific Home and Community Care (HACC);
  - 4 councils have an Indigenous Senior Citizens program;
  - 9 councils support a local Elder’s group.

Youth services
- 11 councils (14%) conduct programs specifically targeted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- 45 councils have a youth consultative process in place that allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to have input into council decision-making, which includes general youth committees with an open invitation for young Indigenous people to attend.
- 27 councils reported engaging Indigenous young people in council programs or consultative processes.
Children’s services Bubup Willam

The City of Whittlesea, in partnership with the Aboriginal community, opened Bubup Willam for Early Learning Centre in February 2012 - the first Aboriginal-controlled organisation in Whittlesea. The centre is licensed for 66 Aboriginal children and is already at capacity. The centre has a unique design, blending cultural elements that support strong Aboriginal identity and a quality learning environment. This design is the new benchmark for early years’ facilities across Whittlesea. The joint project has achieved pathways to quality education for Aboriginal children as well as training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people - approximately 10 people have been supported to access tertiary education and are now active employees at the Centre. The project was enabled by innovative partnerships including with State Government Departments that supported doing business differently. The project represents a strong sustainable partnership between Council and the local Aboriginal community.

Young people Learning 2 Lead

Ballarat Council is working with several local organisations to deliver the Learning 2 Lead program, funded by Central Highlands Primary Care Partnership. This program engages a group of 15 young people to develop leadership skills and to connect with culture and identity, whilst strengthening local networks and friendships.

Aged care Lifelong Movers

Greater Dandenong has been running a weekly ‘Lifelong Movers’ group fitness and socialisation program for Elders with partners, including the local Aboriginal Cooperative, for a number of years. The program includes both land and water-based activities, and also provides access to a nurse and occupational therapist.
Section 6
Economic development

We asked councils whether they had procured goods or services from Aboriginal businesses, whether they were aware of the involvement of Aboriginal businesses in local traders’ associations or business awards, and whether there were local Indigenous tourism initiatives in their communities. We also asked whether councils were aware of the Victorian Indigenous Business Directory (VIBD) and Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC). Key actions in this section were:

- Supporting economic development
- Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses
- Indigenous tourism

73 councils responded to this section.

Chart 11: Positive responses to Section 6 questions (n=73)

- 47 councils (64%) have procured goods or services from Indigenous businesses
- 40 councils (55%) are not aware of any local Indigenous businesses in their area
- 80% of councils (59) are aware of the Victorian Indigenous Business Directory
- 21 councils (29%) indicated they are involved in Indigenous tourism initiatives in their area.
Economic Development
- 23 councils (32%) undertake activities to support local Indigenous economic development, including mentoring and support, business incubation, engagement of local artists and capturing data on Indigenous business development.
- While 80% of councils (59) are aware of the Victorian Indigenous Business Directory, only 11 councils (15%) are aware of the Australian Indigenous Minority Council (AIMSC) and no councils are members of AIMSC.

Tourism
- One third of councils support local Indigenous tourism, through the development of local heritage trails, by including Indigenous tourism in local promotions material, provision of funding or by supporting local Indigenous cultural tours.

Supporting Aboriginal economic development
Hume City Council is a member of the Northern Indigenous Employment Working Group that holds an annual award ceremony in which local business are recognised and awarded for the initiatives and strategies they have developed to support the training and employment of Aboriginal people.

Darebin continues to support the Koorie Night Market that was established as a key initiative of the former Darebin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Council. Darebin also supports the Darebin Enterprise Centre Ltd (DECL) and ArtsDECL incubators, which work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community both locally and in other regions in Australia.

Swan Hill Rural City Council’s Visitor Information Centre sells locally produced Aboriginal merchandise. Council also works closely with home-based art businesses looking to upscale to a shopfront presence. A significant proportion of the municipality’s population are of Aboriginal descent and Swan Hill is keen to support self-employment and business opportunities.
Section 7
Challenges and opportunities

This section is about the challenges and opportunities associated with Aboriginal engagement and Reconciliation. We asked councils what major challenges they faced and what types of assistance they may find useful. We also asked councils to provide examples of good practice. Key action areas in this section were:

- Challenges and barriers
- Advice and support
- Innovation

73 councils provided responses to these questions.

![Chart 13: Main challenges faced by councils](image)

![Chart 14: Types of assistance required by Councils (n=73)](image)
• Only four councils (5%) reported lack of political will as a barrier to increasing engagement and Reconciliation.

• The main barriers identified by councils were:
  - Lack of staff resources (74%);
  - Lack of financial resources (62%); and
  - Lack of connection with the local Aboriginal community (44%).

• The main types of assistance councils identified as useful were:
  - Case studies or information from other councils (51 councils - 70%);
  - Data on indigenous demographics (44 councils);
  - Information on protocols (42 councils); and
  - Information on cultural awareness training (42 councils).

• 33 councils (45%) provided information about activities and projects that they considered innovative.

• 16 councils said that a perceived lack of relevance about the issue was a challenge.
• Nine councils identified community attitudes as a challenge.
• 10 councils reported that none of these represented major barriers. Some of these mentioned other challenges such as difficulties in communicating complex issues and competing internal priorities.
• 13 councils reported that the small size of their local Indigenous community made engagement and planning challenging
• There was enthusiasm for all forms of assistance, with over half of councils selecting ‘yes’ to at least six different types of assistance.
• Case studies from other councils (70%) and Indigenous demographics (60%) were the two most useful forms of assistance.
• Just over half (52%) identified a need for contacts within the local Aboriginal community.

What do you think the role of peak associations should be in supporting the sector

Analysis of common words or phrases in responses to this question using ‘Wordle’ online program.
Sixty eight councils provided responses to this question, many reinforcing the roles that peak bodies are already playing. Common responses included providing an information resource / clearinghouse to promote good practice, representation and advocacy with State and Federal government particularly on better coordination of funding and integrated planning, supporting networking and information exchange, assistance to develop and implement reconciliation plans, support for learning and development opportunities including advice on cultural awareness training and supporting partnerships and regional approaches.
Innovation

Thirty five councils provided responses to this question, sharing wonderful stories of innovation and good practice. Here’s just a sample!

“Co-hosting the Deadly in Gippsland with the Sale Local Indigenous Network... Council was proud to receive the national award for Promoting Reconciliation within the Australian Local Government Awards (presented 19 June 2012) for the Deadly in Gippsland conference... The ‘Deep Listening’ approach that was embedded in the conference has much to offer other councils seeking to strengthen Aboriginal partnerships. The commitment of Gippsland councils to work on a regional level in Aboriginal partnerships also demonstrates a sustainable and transferable model.”

[Wellington Shire Council]


[Ballarat City Council]

“Supporting the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] community to develop project ideas and submit them under our community grants program has allowed for innovative projects such as the Mumgu Dhal Aboriginal Health Day.”

[Brimbank City Council]

“We are proud of our Indigenous Advisory Committee, Cultural Indigenous Employment Strategy, our Jindi Woraback (youth mentoring) program, the Burrinja Art Gallery, the meeting place garden at Healesville opened this year, our support of Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Centre, Healesville Indigenous Community Services Association and our new project in Healesville that will be telling the story of our local Indigenous peoples.”

[Yarra Ranges Shire]

“Our engagement with the older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members through the weekly cooking classes/meal sharing has created a closer, more genuine and trusting relationship between Council and the local community members. The Mayor and CEO have also joined in these classes from time to time, and cooked and shared a meal with them. The mayor’s curried sausages were quite popular.”

[Gannawarra Shire Council]

“The process that we undertook to develop our partnership agreement and plan. We think that it was relatively innovative! We also tend to work collaboratively with the local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services, rather than provide a specific service to the ATSI community. This approach is different to the approach taken through this survey. In order to promote real reconciliation we are working WITH the ATSI community and organisations rather delivering services TO or FOR them as a separate part of the community.”

[Glenelg Shire Council]

“Council has a close working relationship with the Barenji Gadjin Land Council and this partnership has resulted in the establishment of a “Welcome Baby to Country” arrangement in which the mayor participates. Land Council representatives now attend citizenship ceremonies and perform a welcome to new citizens.”

[Horsham Rural City Council]