

7.3 Preparation for Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy

Abstract

Reconciliation refers to bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. It is about helping all Australians understand the past and how the past affects the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. It is also about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and aims to achieve equality in life expectancy, education, employment and other areas of disadvantage.

In Australia, the reconciliation process formally began in 1991 as a result of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Since then, there has been a growing level of awareness and commitment from the community, organisations and all levels of government to the reconciliation process. There has also been a commitment to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it is recognised when they have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved.

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to prepare a draft standalone Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy to be presented to Council in late 2021 for consideration. The strategy would provide Council with a vision for reconciliation in the municipality and set out a clear roadmap and framework for implementing reconciliation initiatives in the community. The strategy would include the actions Council already undertakes and build on these to include new actions.

The strategy would be developed based on research and consultation with the broad Boroondara community and relevant organisations such as Aboriginal Victoria, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals.

Officers' recommendation

That Council resolve a draft standalone Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy be presented to Council in late 2021 for consideration.

Responsible director: Carolyn McClean, Director Community Support

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to prepare a draft standalone Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy to be presented to Council in late 2021 for consideration.

2. Policy implications and relevance to community plan and council plan

The Boroondara Community Plan is structured around the following seven priority themes:

- Your Community, Services and Facilities
- Your Parks and Green Spaces
- The Environment
- Neighbourhood Character and Heritage
- Getting Around Boroondara
- Your Local Shops and Businesses
- Civic Leadership and Governance

Recognising and celebrating our City's Indigenous culture and heritage is particularly relevant to the following two priority themes of the Boroondara Community Plan:

- Theme One - Your Community, Services and Facilities
 - Strategy 1.3 Deliver, facilitate, and advocate for services and programs that promote health, wellbeing, safety and a sense of community.
 - Strategy 1.8 Facilitate and produce diverse arts and cultural programs to provide entertainment and increase participation in community life for residents and tourists.
- Theme Seven - Civic Leadership and Governance
 - Strategy 7.1 Improve advocacy efforts, including building relationships with Federal and State elected representatives.

It also supports the community's vision outlined in the Boroondara Community Plan for 'A vibrant and inclusive city, meeting the needs and aspirations of its community.'

3. Background

Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to bringing together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. It is about helping all Australians understand the past and how the past affects the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. It is also about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and aims to achieve equality in life expectancy, education, employment and other areas of disadvantage.

Reconciliation involves symbolic recognition of the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such as flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and giving an Acknowledgement of Country at key events.

It also involves practical measures to address the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health, employment, education and general opportunity. The symbolic and practical aspects of reconciliation are bound together.

In Australia, the reconciliation process formally began in 1991 as a result of the Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Australian Government formed the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, establishing a 10 year timeframe to advance a national process for Reconciliation.

Since then, there has been a growing level of awareness and commitment from the community, organisations and all levels of government to the reconciliation process. There has also been an increased understanding that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved. This concept is referred to as self-determination and as outlined below has resulted in a commitment from the Australian, state and territory governments and the Australia Local Government Association to work in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve health, social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Closing the Gap Agreement

In July 2020, the National Closing the Gap Agreement (the Agreement) came into effect and replaced the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Indigenous Reform Agreement, known as Closing the Gap.

The Agreement aims to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve equality in life outcomes. It sets out four priority reforms and 16 targets across the following areas: education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and languages.

The Agreement is between the Australian, state and territory governments, the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations. The Agreement was developed in genuine partnership between the Australian Governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations.

Australian Local Government Association

The Australian Local Government Association is the principal organisation representing the 537 councils across Australia. As a signatory to the National Closing the Gap Agreement, the Australian Local Government Association is required to develop an Implementation Plan, which will:

- ensure local governments understand the Agreement and its commitments, and encourage its adoption by local governments
- assist the state and territory governments to work with local governments in the implementation of the Agreement
- support strengthened, shared decision-making at the local level, with local governments to be part of partnerships with the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Australian Local Government Association's Implementation Plan is due in June 2021. It is also required to report on its progress on the Agreement and Implementation Plan through annual public reports. The Implementation Plan will help inform Council about how it could contribute at a local level to the National Closing the Gap Agreement.

Victorian Government

Aboriginal Victoria is the Victorian Government department that protects Aboriginal cultural heritage, promotes the advancement of Treaty and self-determination, and delivers programs to strengthen Aboriginal communities. It has responsibility for overseeing implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023, which is the Victorian Government's overarching framework to address inequity and deliver stronger outcomes for and with Aboriginal Victorians.

Aboriginal Victoria also has responsibility for the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, which is currently under review and aims to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage in Victoria. The *Act* recognises Aboriginal people as the primary guardians and keepers of their cultural heritage. The *Act* allows different organisations, groups and bodies to connect and better enforce and preserve policies regarding Aboriginal heritage. It does this in a number of ways including through:

- establishing the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council, which provides a state-wide voice for Aboriginal people and advises the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on cultural heritage management
- establishing the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register, which records details about Aboriginal places, objects and knowledge
- Cultural Heritage Management Plans and Cultural Heritage Permit processes to manage activities that may impact Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* also establishes Registered Aboriginal Parties as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage. Registered Aboriginal Parties status (also known as Traditional Owners groups) is determined through the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council via an application and assessment process. The Registered Aboriginal Parties have important legislated roles and functions in managing and protecting the Aboriginal cultural heritage of their recognised lands.

In Victoria, there are 11 Registered Aboriginal Parties covering approximately 74% of Victoria, including the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation which are recognised as the Traditional Owners of the northern part of Boroondara. The Traditional Owner status of the remaining areas in Victoria, including the southern part of Boroondara, are undetermined. In these areas, Aboriginal Victoria provides processes and support for Traditional Owner groups to negotiate agreements and progress towards formal recognition.

Local Governments

Local governments have a key role to play in improving the health, social and economic outcomes of all members of its community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In recognition of this important role, local governments have demonstrated their commitment to reconciliation by undertaking a range of actions such as flying the Aboriginal flag or celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through events.

Local governments have also shown their commitment to the reconciliation process by adopting a reconciliation policy, strategy or a Reconciliation Action Plan. Desktop benchmarking of the 79 councils in Victoria found 40 had, or are developing, a policy, strategy or a Reconciliation Action Plan.

City of Boroondara

In the City of Boroondara, 314 residents identified as Indigenous Australians in the 2016 Census, with 293 identifying as Aboriginal and 21 identifying as either Torres Strait Islander or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This was an increase of 91 residents identifying as Indigenous Australian since the 2011 Census.

There are 10 Aboriginal archaeological sites within Boroondara, and two are Aboriginal historic places that are registered with Aboriginal Victoria.

As noted earlier, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation is formally recognised through the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* as the Registered Aboriginal Party (Traditional Owners) for the northern area in Boroondara. The northern area includes the bulk of land in Boroondara that is north of Studley Park Road, Cotham Road and Whitehorse Road. The single exception is a block in Balwyn bounded by Whitehorse Road, Union Road, Yarrbat Avenue and Kireep Road. The Traditional Owners of the southern traditional area have not been determined.

Council has previously recognised Indigenous culture and heritage with the adoption of the *Recognising Indigenous Culture and Heritage Policy 2009-13*, the *Reconciliation Policy and Action Plan 2004-2007* and the *Reconciliation Action Plan 2000*.

Although Council does not have a current policy, it continues to undertake a range of reconciliation actions as outlined below:

- consulting with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung to develop a personalised Acknowledgement of Country for the Mayor to give at Council's Citizenship Ceremony on Australia Day 2021
- holding regular meetings between Council officers and representatives from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to plan joint projects and activities
- holding an annual event to mark National Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June) or NAIDOC Week (first full week in July)
- flying the Aboriginal flag at the Camberwell Civic Centre and Kew Library during National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week
- programming Indigenous content and performers at both the Town Hall Gallery and the Kew Court House
- partnering with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung to hold Indigenous storytime sessions for children at libraries
- planting, maintaining and providing signage about Indigenous flora in Wurundjeri Garden and Chandler Park
- developing an internal protocol to provide staff with guidance about giving an Acknowledgement of Country at internal and external meetings and events
- installing a plaque outside the Council Chamber acknowledging the Traditional Owners of Boroondara
- displaying a painting by a well-known Indigenous artist, Lin Onus, in the foyer at the Camberwell Civic Centre

- partnering with the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and other Indigenous groups to deliver projects and activities such as the Wurundjeri Heritage Trail at Chandler Park
- convening an internal working group of staff from across the organisation to plan activities to recognise National Reconciliation Week or NAIDOC Week
- fulfilling Council's statutory obligations in relation to cultural heritage management under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* and *Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018*, by advising developers when an activity is proposed on a sensitive site, an approved Cultural Heritage Management Plan must be submitted prior to a planning permit being considered
- identifying actions in Council's internal Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020-22 to support recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including placement in early 2021 for Indigenous traineeship positions in the Arts and Cultural and Libraries Teams.

Council also demonstrates its commitment to reconciliation by inviting representatives from the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation to perform a Welcome to Country at reconciliation events in the northern part of the City where they are formally recognised as the Traditional Owners.

4. Outline of key issues/options

As noted above, there is increasing awareness in Australia of the importance of reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. There has also been a commitment from all levels of Australian Governments to improve a range of outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While Council already undertakes a number of actions to recognise the City's Indigenous culture and heritage, it does not have a public facing document outlining Council's commitment to the reconciliation process.

It is therefore proposed Council prepare a Draft Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy to be presented to Council in late 2021. The strategy would provide Council with a vision for reconciliation in the municipality and set out a clear roadmap and framework for implementing reconciliation initiatives in the community. The strategy could include a four year vision, the actions Council already undertakes and additional activities it will strive to achieve.

The strategy would be developed based on research and consultation including:

- benchmarking against other local governments with reconciliation strategies, policies or Reconciliation Action Plans
- examining relevant Australian, Victorian and regional policies and initiatives
- gathering information about the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and history, as well as information about activities already happening locally to contribute to the reconciliation process
- consultation with the broad Boroondara community including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- consultation with relevant organisations including the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Aboriginal Heritage Corporation and Aboriginal Victoria and key local organisations such as the Boroondara Reconciliation Network.

5. Consultation/communication

To inform the preparation of the draft Boroondara Reconciliation Strategy, Council would develop a detailed communications and engagement plan.

As noted above, Council would also work in partnership with organisations such as Aboriginal Victoria, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, the Boroondara Reconciliation Network and would consult local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Individuals.

6. Financial and resource implications

Developing a draft reconciliation strategy can be completed within the Community Planning and Development operational budget.

7. Governance issues

The officers responsible for this report have no general or material conflicts of interest requiring disclosure.

The implications of this report have been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, particularly those rights associated with respect, equality and dignity.

8. Social and environmental issues

Advancing reconciliation contributes to greater understanding, trust and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community. It also contributes to an inclusive community where all community members feel valued.

9. Conclusion

There is significant interest and support locally and nationally for all levels of government to make a public commitment towards reconciliation and an option to develop a draft reconciliation strategy has been proposed for Council's approval. Adopting a reconciliation strategy will demonstrate Council's commitment to this issue and further strengthen relationships with the local Indigenous community, as well as promoting understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader community in Boroondara.

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