



RFS

Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

November 2023 – April 2025



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN





Sandstone pagodas Castle Rocks walking track, Great Dividing Range, Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve lie within lands traditionally occupied by Aboriginal people of the Wiradjuri, Gamileroi and Wonnarua language groups.

Nick Cubbin/DPE.

Acknowledgement of Country

The RFS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across NSW and Australia. We are privileged to work across all corners of this State, and we thank them for their expert care, over thousands of generations, of this beautiful Country.

We acknowledge the extreme hardships and exclusion experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples since the colonisation of Australia by European settlers.

We are committed to learning how to engage and connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a respectful, caring and healing manner, and to work together in service to community and protection of lands.

We support young people and the future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We pay our respects to all Elders, past and present, and recognise their connection to the Country of their ancestors.





'Fire & Water' by Daniel Roberts, a proud Bundjalung man from Cabbage Tree Island.

About the Artist

The imagery used throughout this document was produced by artist Daniel Roberts, a proud Bundjalung man from Cabbage Tree Island on the NSW Far North Coast. The artwork tells the story of Aboriginal communities using a fire and water cycle to protect our bushland and our waterways.

This work was part of a RFS creative spaces project that developed and implemented a community-led program focusing on fire safety for Aboriginal residents in northeast NSW.

The program used a variety of engagement techniques including artistic expression to communicate the community's relationship with fire in the landscape and fire safety messages.

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Message from our Commissioner

On behalf of the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and our 72,000-plus members, I am proud to present our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

The RFS acknowledges the abiding kinship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with Country and that the land on which we operate is, always has been and always will be Aboriginal land.

We also recognise the continuing disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today and pledge that we will act with respect, sincerity, and a commitment to reconciliation. Developed under the Reconciliation Australia RAP framework, this plan seeks to embed a stronger understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures in fire management across Country.

As a firefighting service working to protect the people and environment of NSW from the threat of fire and other natural disasters, our activities are closely tied to the land.

We have much to learn by building stronger ties with communities with ancient cultures of living carefully on and protecting the land. We recognise the benefits to be gained from the reinstatement and continuation of these practices in today's changing environment.

Our commitment to greater inclusion must be seen in our actions; in meaningful, practical and real support for the people we represent and serve. We will build on our work to enhance the safety and resilience of communities in regional and remote areas of high bush fire risk and to support more diverse volunteering and career opportunities.

Thank you to our RAP Working Group and Indigenous consultancy firm Stonecrab for their work in developing this RAP as an important waypoint on our path to change and reconciliation.

I am privileged to lead the RFS on this journey and look forward to working with our members and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across NSW.

Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM

Statement from CEO of Reconciliation Australia

Inaugural Reflect RAP

Reconciliation Australia welcomes New South Wales Rural Fire Service (RFS) to the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program with the formal endorsement of its inaugural Reflect RAP.

RFS joins a network of more than 2,500 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have made a formal commitment to reconciliation through the RAP program.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement. The program's potential for impact is greater than ever, with close to 3 million people now working or studying in an organisation with a RAP.

The four RAP types — Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate — allow RAP partners to continuously develop and strengthen reconciliation commitments in new ways. This Reflect RAP will lay the foundations, priming the workplace for future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives.

The RAP program's strength is its framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities, allowing an organisation to strategically set its reconciliation commitments in line with its own business objectives, for the most effective outcomes.

These outcomes contribute towards the five dimensions of reconciliation: race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity; unity; and historical acceptance.

It is critical to not only uphold all five dimensions of reconciliation, but also increase awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and leadership across all sectors of Australian society.

This Reflect RAP enables RFS to deepen its understanding of its sphere of influence and the unique contribution it can make to lead progress across the five dimensions. Getting these first steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives, and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations RFS, welcome to the RAP program, and I look forward to following your reconciliation journey in the years to come.

**Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia**



About the RFS

The RFS is established under the *Rural Fires Act 1997* and is responsible for preventing and suppressing fires in rural fire districts, as well as being the lead agency for bush firefighting across the state. The agency also operates under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*.

For over 100 years the RFS has been a significant part of the history and landscape of NSW and is widely acknowledged as the largest volunteer fire service in the world.

The RFS has more than 72,000 members, with 1,088 (1.5%) volunteers and 49 (3.8%) staff members identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. With 2,000 brigades spread across 110 Local Government Areas and 43 districts (which make up approximately 95% of NSW), our shared vision is to provide a world standard of excellence in the provision of a volunteer-based community fire and emergency service.

Fighting fires and protecting the community from emergencies is the most visible aspect of the RFS. We also have many responsibilities as the lead agency for bush fire management and mitigation in NSW.

Working closely with other agencies, the RFS responds to a range of emergencies including structure fires, motor vehicle accidents and storms that occur within rural fire districts.

We aim to reduce the likelihood and consequence of fires occurring. This involves comprehensive risk management programs to reduce bush fire hazards and fire ignitions, and the development of regulations for bush fire prone areas.

The strength of the RFS absolutely lies in our people. We share a deep-seated and honoured purpose – *to protect the community and our environment by minimising the impact of fire and other emergencies*.

Together, members of the RFS make a real difference to their communities, especially when times are tough. In recognition of this truth, we are committed to ensuring our members are at the heart of everything we do, by providing a safe and inclusive environment where everyone can be at their best.

Our Vision for Reconciliation

“For over 100 years, the NSW Rural Fire Service has been a significant part of the history and landscape of NSW.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan represents our commitment to ensuring we understand, acknowledge, and consider the true history of exclusion in our state and how this has impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

At the RFS, we are also excited by the opportunity to learn more from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities – to appreciate the unique perspective of Caring for Country and to keep our communities safe.”



Our RAP

The process of developing our RAP began by assembling a Working Group comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members (64%) and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members from across the state. The RAP Working Group includes volunteers and staff across a range of leadership levels; representing each of the Service's seven Areas and enabling each member to advocate for the thoughts, ideas, and interests of their communities.

To facilitate the RAP process, we engaged Stonecrab, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned consultancy that specialises in working with organisations to develop actions, policies and strategic documents related to advancing reconciliation.



Our RAP tells a story of the perspectives of our Working Group. In their own words, the group expressed the importance of inclusion and advocacy to our organisation:

“We are a community-based organisation that represents our community.”

“We have to have total inclusion –it’s a must.”

“At RFS, we value cultural safety in our workplace.”

“RFS could play an advocacy role as well collaborate with various organisations.”

“We are responsible for keeping our communities safe – all communities.”

“There must always be diversity of thought and inclusion.”

“We have an opportunity to continue to educate our staff and volunteers.”

“A RAP is a great platform to change how we operate and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples and communities.”

“Education is the key to building relationships that matter.”

“We have to make sure that the members of the community have an equal opportunity to join the RFS.”

We have engaged with leaders across our organisation who are committed delivering on their assigned actions under this plan. Throughout delivery of the Reflect RAP, the Working Group will continue to meet and act as a steering body to guide delivery and monitor our progress. Under the guidance of our RAP Champion, Commissioner Rob Rogers, we will continue to engage with our members and look forward to both internal and external promotion of our achievements towards reconciliation.

We are grateful to the Working Group and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RFS members who engaged with us throughout this process. Their sentiments helped shape the actions that have come together to ultimately form our own unique Reflect RAP.

Our Commitments

Relationships

In this section of the RAP, we demonstrate how the RFS will cultivate relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and how we will engage with relevant key stakeholders.



| ACTION | DELIVERABLE | TIMELINE | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Establish and strengthen mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations. | Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations within our local area or sphere of influence. | December 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement |
| | Research best practice and principles that support partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations. | December 2024 | Lead: Deputy Commissioner, Preparedness and Capability Support: Community Risk, Communications and Engagement |
| | Develop a support platform for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Step up and Speak up. | September 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 2. Build relationships through celebrating National Reconciliation Week (NRW). | Circulate Reconciliation Australia's NRW resources and reconciliation materials to our members. | May 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement |
| | RAP Working Group members to participate in an external NRW event. | 27 May-3 June 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Office of the Commissioner |
| | Encourage and support members and senior leaders to participate in at least one external event to recognise and celebrate NRW. | 27 May-3 June 2024 | Lead: Commissioner Support: Executive Leadership Team, Office of the Commissioner |
| 3. Promote reconciliation through our sphere of influence. | Communicate our commitment to reconciliation to all members. | November 2023 | Lead: Commissioner Support: Executive Leadership Team, Office of the Commissioner |
| | Identify external stakeholders that our organisation can engage with on our reconciliation journey. | December 2023 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement, Strategy and Programs |
| | Identify RAP and other like-minded organisations that we could approach to collaborate with on our reconciliation journey. | December 2023 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement, Strategy and Programs |
| | Create a series of good news stories to promote to our members celebrating our achievements towards reconciliation and improving relationships between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in NSW. | December 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement, Office of the Commissioner |
| | Create a series of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait art livery/decals for our trucks that include a connection to Country story. | December 2023 | Lead: Deputy Commissioner, Preparedness and Capability Support: Logistics and Equipment, Communications and Engagement |
| | 4. Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies. | Research best practice and policies in areas of race relations and anti-discrimination. | April 2025 |
| | Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions, and future needs. | April 2025 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |

Respect

This Section of the RAP Demonstrates how the RFS will educate our people about reconciliation, how we will acknowledge and celebrate key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates and how we will influence our industry peers and customers.



| ACTION | DELIVERABLE | TIMELINE | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|---|----------------|---|
| 5. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural learning. | Develop a business case for increasing understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights within our organisation. | September 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Conduct a review of cultural learning needs within our organisation. | September 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 6. Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols. | Develop an understanding of the local Traditional Owners or Custodians of the lands and waters within our organisation's operational area. | May 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Communications and Engagement |
| | Increase member's understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country protocols. | July 2024 | Lead: Deputy Commissioner, Field Operations Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 7. Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC Week. | Raise awareness and share information amongst our members about the meaning of NAIDOC Week. | July 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Office of the Commissioner, Communications and Engagement |
| | Introduce our members to NAIDOC Week by promoting external events in our local area. | July 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Office of the Commissioner, Communications and Engagement |
| | RAP Working Group to participate in an external NAIDOC Week event. | July 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Office of the Commissioner |
| | Identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural events that the RFS acknowledge, promote and participate in. | July 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Office of the Commissioner, Strategy and Programs |



Opportunities

In this section of our RAP we will demonstrate how the RFS will provide opportunities for Indigenous peoples and communities through employment, mentoring and procurement.



| ACTION | DELIVERABLE | TIMELINE | RESPONSIBILITY |
|--|--|---------------|---|
| 8. 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, including the potential for Area-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers. | December 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Build understanding of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing to inform future employment and professional development opportunities. | December 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People & Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Investigate an employee speaker initiative called School to Work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | December 2024 | Lead: Deputy Commissioner Field Operations Support: Communications and Engagement, People and Strategy |
| 9. 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. | February 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, Technology, Finance and Legal Support: Finance and Procurement |
| | Investigate Supply Nation membership. | February 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, Technology, Finance and Legal Support: Finance and Procurement |

Governance

In this section of our RAP we will demonstrate our commitment to reconciliation by providing our ongoing support to the process and ensuring the correct resources and systems are in place.



| ACTION | DELIVERABLE | TIMELINE | RESPONSIBILITY |
|---|---|----------------|---|
| 10. Establish and maintain an effective RAP Working Group (RWG) to drive governance of the RAP. | Maintain a RWG to govern RAP implementation. | August 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Draft a Terms of Reference for the RWG. | December 2023 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on the RWG. | August 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 11. Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments. | Define resource needs for RAP implementation. | December 2023 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Engage senior leaders in the delivery of RAP commitments. | November 2023 | Lead: Commissioner Support: Office of the Commissioner |
| | Appoint a senior leader to champion our RAP internally. | November 2023 | Lead: Commissioner Support: Office of the Commissioner |
| | Define appropriate systems and capability to track, measure and report on RAP commitments. | November 2023 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 12. Build accountability and transparency through reporting RAP achievements, challenges and learnings both internally and externally. | Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify that our primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence. | June 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Contact Reconciliation Australia to request our unique link, to access the online RAP Impact Survey. | August 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| | Complete and submit the annual RAP Impact Survey to Reconciliation Australia. | September 2024 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |
| 13. Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP. | Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP. | January 2025 | Lead: Executive Director, People and Strategy Support: Strategy and Programs |





RFS



Pages 6-7: Demonstration of a cultural burn during the Australian Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference in 2018 in Gumbaynggir country (Coffs Harbour). Photo by Sharon Quandt.

Pages 8-9: Fire in Monkeycot Nature Reserve, northwest of Gloucester in Biripi country. Photo by Matthew Prince/DPE.

Page 10: Trainees attending the Indigenous Mitigation Crew Recruitment and Induction program at Brewarrina in 2022. Photo by Noah Lamrock.

For any enquiries relating to the RAP, please contact
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