

## **ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND HERITAGE COUNCIL**

### **ACTION PLAN TO ADVANCE RECONCILIATION**

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#### **Introduction**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that governments can make a real difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples by addressing social and economic disadvantage, including life expectancy, and improving governance and service delivery arrangements with Indigenous peoples. Drawing on lessons from the mixed success of efforts in the past to address Indigenous disadvantage, the COAG committed itself to an approach based on priority actions in three areas:

1. Investing in community leadership initiatives.
2. Reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to ensure they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young peoples. In particular, governments agreed to look at measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction; and
3. Forging greater links between the business sector and Indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

COAG agreed that Ministerial Councils would develop Action Plans and performance monitoring strategies. The Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC) Action Plan takes into account COAG requirements, in light of the objective and scope of the EPHC and the EPHC Terms of Reference, which include a requirement to “support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s participation in environment and heritage protection.”

This Action Plan illustrates the commitment of the EPHC to reconciliation and to integrating Indigenous peoples’ interests into the management of the environment and heritage.

#### **Objectives of this Action Plan**

To recognise the significance to, interests in and contribution of Indigenous peoples to environment protection and heritage issues. To promote the effective involvement of Indigenous peoples in management and protection of environment and heritage, and in particular their principal involvement in managing their own cultural heritage.

#### **Principles**

The following principles underpin the Action Plan and its implementation:

- Environment protection and heritage are integral to the social, economic and spiritual well-being of Indigenous peoples;
- Indigenous peoples are recognised as the first Australians and have a unique status as key stakeholders, clients and partners in the protection of the

environment and heritage;

- Indigenous peoples are providers of environmental and heritage services and contribute to the achievement of national environmental and heritage objectives;
- Working in effective partnership with Indigenous peoples is an essential part of achieving EPHC objectives and vision; and
- Effective evaluation and monitoring informs EPHC policies and programs.

EPHC acknowledges that Indigenous peoples have significant interests in issues spanning sectoral or portfolio boundaries, such as protection and management of the environment, and management of natural and cultural heritage and natural resources. EPHC is committed to working in partnership with relevant ministerial councils, including the Natural Resources Management Ministerial Council, the Australian Health Ministers' Conference the Cultural Ministers' Council, the ministerial councils responsible for World Heritage sites, as well as MCATSIA, to ensure that Indigenous interests are adequately considered across sectors.

The EPHC believes a national framework that provides strategic principles and direction, with each jurisdiction retaining the flexibility to develop and implement its own strategies based on local needs and circumstances, will result in improved outcomes.

### **Priorities**

To implement the Action Plan the EPHC will:

#### *Share Information and Raise Awareness*

1. Improve its understanding of Indigenous knowledge about, and relationship with, the environment and cultural heritage, and use this knowledge to improve the development of programs.
2. Improve access to environment protection and heritage information by Indigenous communities.

#### *Act in Partnership*

3. Develop best practice consultation procedures for addressing Indigenous peoples' environment and heritage protection issues.
4. Encourage community-based approaches to environmental protection and heritage issues, where appropriate.

#### *Develop Policies and Programs*

5. Develop best practice guidelines for the identification and management of Indigenous heritage (as part of an integrated national heritage policy)
6. Ensure that environment protection policies, programs, and National Environment Protection Measures will be developed and evaluated with reference to the needs of Indigenous peoples. Note that National Environment Protection Measures seek to provide people with *equivalent* protection from air, water, or soil pollution and from noise.

*Measure, Review, Evaluate and Respond*

7. Evaluate the effectiveness of this Action Plan and its implementation annually.
8. Review the Action Plan as needed.

**Actions**

Through its Action Plan, EPHC will carry out specific actions in each of the priority areas enumerated above.

## ACTIONS

### ***1. Share Information and Raise Awareness***

<b>Action</b>	<b>Output and/or Performance Measure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Council and Standing Committee to participate in an information session led by Indigenous people on Indigenous issues relating to environmental protection and cultural heritage.	Session completed	Enhanced understanding by EPHC and Standing Committee members of Indigenous issues.
Ongoing review of EPHC workplan to ensure appropriate input of Indigenous knowledge	EPHC workplan reviewed and amended as required.	EPHC workplan supports the COAG reconciliation framework.
As a first step, develop case studies illustrating effective mechanisms for improving access by Indigenous peoples to environment protection and heritage information.	Case studies developed.	Improved information base for jurisdictions (as a first step to improved communication).

### ***2. Act in Partnership***

<b>Action</b>	<b>Output and/or Performance Measure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Develop and implement best practice consultation procedures to address environment protection and heritage issues relevant to Indigenous peoples.	Enhanced version of current NEPC consultation protocol	Improved consultation
EPHC develops and uses inter-Council mechanisms to ensure partnerships with MCATSIA and other relevant ministerial councils on Indigenous issues	MCATSIA involvement on relevant issues.	Enhanced program design and delivery.
EPHC, where appropriate, develops its relationships with key Indigenous bodies.	Identification of and links with Indigenous organisations where appropriate.	Improved communication with representatives of Indigenous groups.
EPHC will encourage Indigenous representation on Council working groups.	Working group membership details reported by EPHC annually.	EPHC can enhance Indigenous representation and can encourage change as appropriate.
EPHC develop links from its website to agency websites that provide details of relevant activities by agencies.	Links put in place.	Broader access to and understanding of programs.
As a first step, jurisdictions be encouraged to document existing examples of community-based approaches to environmental protection and heritage issues.	Case studies developed.	Broader access to and understanding of programs.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Output and/or Performance Measure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Place documented case studies as outlined in this Action Plan on websites	Case studies placed on websites	Broader access to and understanding of programs.

### ***3. Develop Policies and Programs***

<b>Action</b>	<b>Output and/or Performance Measure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Develop best practice guidelines for the identification and management of Indigenous heritage (as part of the Integrated Heritage Policy)	Best practice guidelines developed.	Improved cultural heritage protection
EPHC to develop a best practice model for policy development. Along with consideration of the 'Filter Criteria', this will require that the EPHC Action Plan is taken into account in policy development.	The EPHC Action Plan forms part of an EPHC checklist for the development of new proposals and projects.	Adequate recognition of Indigenous issues into EPHC business.
Share information on effective case management of economic enterprises based on cultural and Indigenous heritage.	This information is reflected in project development	Improvement in program quality and focus on improved and ecologically sustainable economic self-reliance for Indigenous communities
For programs delivered by EPHC, promote indigenous employment and self-management opportunities [for example, as part of a proposed national strategy to promote heritage tourism in rural and regional Australia]	Greater participation by Indigenous peoples in economic enterprises	Improved and ecologically sustainable economic self-reliance for Indigenous communities
Explore the development of tools to integrate Indigenous cultural heritage protection into resource management and conservation programs and environmental protection, in partnership with NRM Ministerial Council	Development of tools	Enhanced consideration and protection of Indigenous cultural issues
Consult with ministerial councils responsible for World Heritage sites on the potential for inclusion of Indigenous heritage issues in the listing and management of those sites	Potential for inclusion of Indigenous heritage issues in World Heritage sites	Enhanced consideration and protection of Indigenous cultural issues

#### ***4. Measure, Review, Evaluate and Respond***

<b>Action</b>	<b>Output and/or Performance Measure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
EPHC to develop a set of key indicators of Indigenous involvement and participation in national environment protection and heritage activities, based, in the first instance, on MCATSIA and SoE indicators. EPHC will work with NRMCC on this matter.	Key environment protection and heritage indicators developed and agreed.	Indigenous involvement monitored.
EPHC to consider the experiences of jurisdictions and feedback from MCATSIA & ATSIC in implementing the reconciliation framework to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify opportunities to enable increased Indigenous involvement;</li> <li>• identify opportunities for cooperation and streamlining of program development and delivery</li> </ul>	EPHC takes into account implementation experience of jurisdictions and of other Councils.  EPHC provide a summary of activities and highlight best practice.	Progress regarding implementation of the COAG reconciliation framework which is monitored and evaluated.  Programs redesigned to take in suggested improvements.
EPHC reviews the Action Plan as needed.	The Action Plan is reviewed and revised as required.	The Action Plan remains a dynamic and relevant document.
EPHC will report annually to COAG on the outcomes achieved under this Action Plan.	Annual report to COAG completed	Progress can be monitored by COAG and made available to external parties