

Advancing Organisations' Reconciliation Action Plans

The rights of Indigenous people have been recognised and advocated by international organisations such as United Nations. In Australia, where early British colonisation is characterised by forced land dispossession, violence, and racism, several initiatives have been made to respond to restore and protect the rights of First Nations peoples in relation to land and culture. One such initiative is the reconciliation process, which aims at strengthening the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all Australians (Reconciliation Australia, 2022). The adoption of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) program is one of the most important highlights in the reconciliation road map in Australia. Endorsed by Reconciliation Australia, this program is based and measured on five dimensions: historical acceptance; race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity and unity. Over the past decade, public and private organisations have started to put in place Aboriginal engagement policies and action plans to contribute to the national reconciliation movement. However, still only a very small number of organisations in Australia have adopted this program and reported on RAP impacts. This is a critical social issue that the research team at CMVI will address.

What is the current state of reconciliation efforts?

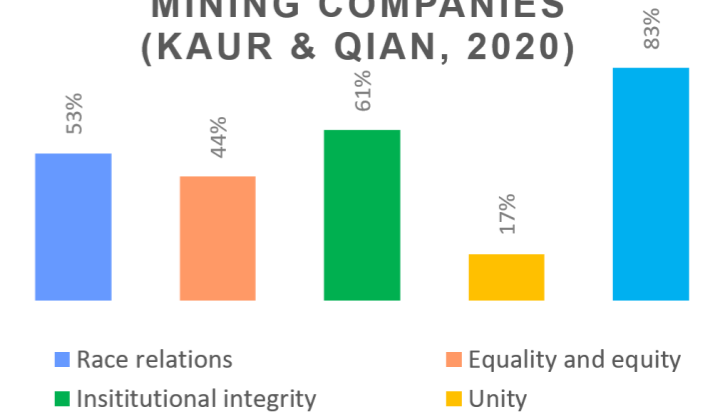
- A low level of interaction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, with only 37% of the general public ever having socialised with First Nations peoples.
- Disparities continue to exist in the key areas of employment, education and health.
- RAPs are driving social change and improving economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, with increasing investment in Aboriginal education, welfare and business.
- A study of Australian mining companies finds that the companies' reconciliation efforts largely include land use agreements, institutional spending and employment. Yet little evidence of activities promoting unity, Indigenous culture and heritage, leadership and race relations has been found.
- Existence of inadequate integration of reconciliation efforts into the broader CSR strategy of the companies, which signals symbolic advancement of reconciliation.

Measures that can promote the implementation of RAPs:

The preliminary findings of a study conducted by the research team to investigate the implementation and reporting process among the RAP adopters in the public sector of South Australia provide the following key practical implications:

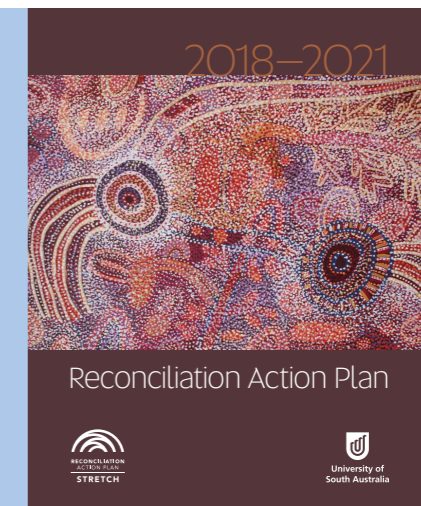
- RAP needs a more stakeholder-informed approach to close the gap between key stakeholder needs and RAP deliverables so as to make the RAP more meaningful and impactful;
- RAP needs to be integrated with core business strategies, policies and procedures, rather than being treated separately as a silo document;
- Reconciliation SA could take a more active role to provide necessary resources and share information to help improve organisations' capacity to establish the connection with aboriginal communities;
- The measurement tools need to go beyond traditional accounting or counting metrics and numbers. More innovative methods incorporating surveys, focus groups and/or storytelling methods may be more useful to measure social impacts;
- Meaningful or impactful reconciliation mechanisms need to include more authentic activities such as connecting to Aboriginal culture, values and history;
- Executive or top management support is needed to understand and strengthen more culturally diverse RAP committees.

REPORTING ON FIVE DIMENSIONS OF RECONCILIATION BY AUSTRALIAN MINING COMPANIES (KAUR & QIAN, 2020)



What next?

The research team is extending the current work to develop a stakeholder-informed, impactful, and measurable approach to advancing organisational RAPs, through which the gap between the needs of key stakeholders (local Aboriginal communities) and RAP deliverables can be identified and closed. The project will focus on Aboriginal community engagement and aligning community expectations and issues with organizational RAP aspirations and actions to enable meaningful changes in communities and achieve economically and socially impactful RAP outcomes.



Research Team

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The Future

How to measure the impact of RAPs on key stakeholders?
 Case study of RAP adopters at various levels in South Australia

Partners

Department of Energy and Mining
 Reconciliation South Australia (RecSA)

