



## **Edmund Rice Education Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Response (2014)**

**Incorporating the EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (2014-17)**



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of the land of our schools. We are inspired and nurtured by their wisdom, spirituality and experience. We commit ourselves to actively work alongside them for reconciliation and justice.

We pay our respects to the Elders; past, present and future.

As we take our next step we remember the first footsteps taken on this sacred land.

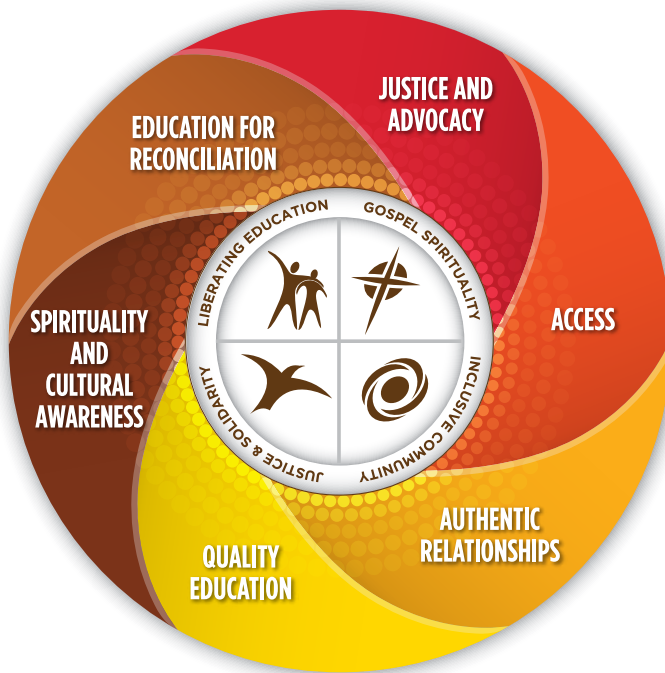
## Preamble

**In 2008, Edmund Rice Education Australia developed the EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy as its first policy, reflecting its commitment to “working with and walking alongside” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the educational endeavour. This policy resulted from broad consultation across Australia and was launched in May 2009 at St Dominic’s College, Penrith.**

Since 2009, the EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy has guided and informed EREA in the development of initiatives, programs and goals for promoting Catholic schools in the Edmund Rice tradition as a genuine option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. A review of enrolments across EREA schools has shown a consistent increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments. These figures coupled with anecdotal information provided in Annual School Reports about cross-cultural awareness training opportunities for staff, partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Elders and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, indicate that EREA has invested much to breathe life into the Policy. Much has been achieved since its release.

The Policy review conducted in 2013 sought feedback on how EREA was working with the existing Policy, with a view to reshaping it to reflect the current reality and with the particular intention of affirming and giving energy to the future work of schools. The review also acknowledged that there have been significant changes impacting on EREA in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education since 2009. Notably, the Policy pre-dated EREA’s Policy Framework (2011) and more recently, the revised Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition (2011) containing our four Touchstones which clearly inform EREA’s continued commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.





The review identified six priority domains where EREA has been and can continue to demonstrate this commitment. These are:

- **Access**
- **Quality Education**
- **Authentic Relationships**
- **Spirituality and Cultural Awareness**
- **Education for Reconciliation**
- **Justice and Advocacy**

The six statements of commitment should encourage, guide and support EREA and its schools to clearly articulate individual strategies around these common domains. They support an understanding that the Policy is one for all staff and all students as much as it is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Policy acknowledges the potential to further Reconciliation through what we teach and model, how we understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritualities, histories and cultures; and how we engage in genuine relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



# Definitions

## Identity

There are complexities associated with the identity or background of an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander in some areas or regions in Australia. EREA and its schools must, therefore, be aware of the diversity within their communities and the complexities in their relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Throughout this document, an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander is understood to be a person who:

- is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent,
- identifies as an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander, and
- is accepted as such by the community in which they live.

*"Being Aboriginal has nothing to do with the colour of your skin or the shape of your nose. It is a Spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that may be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand."*

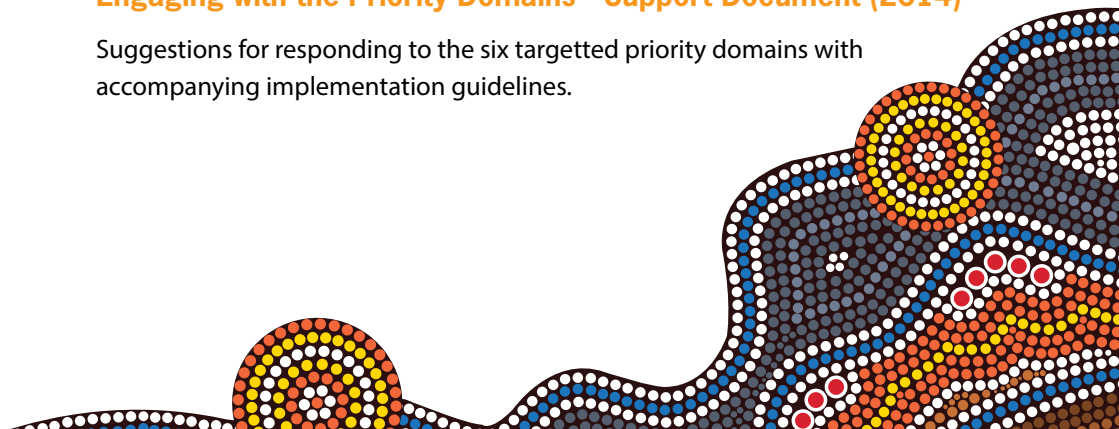
Linda Burney, President of the AECG Inc, 1994

## EREA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (2014)

A statement articulating EREA's continuing commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. This supersedes the EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (2009).

## Engaging with the Priority Domains - Support Document (2014)

Suggestions for responding to the six targetted priority domains with accompanying implementation guidelines.



# To bring the aspiration expressed in the Islander Education Policy to life,

## ACCESS

We are committed to encouraging and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and staff to access and participate in Catholic education.

## AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

We are committed to building collaborative, authentic and partnerships with Torres Strait Islander local communities, recognising their role in supporting students.

## EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

We are committed to furthering Reconciliation through conscious and deliberate curriculum and extra-curricular initiatives.

## JUSTICE ADVOCACY

We are committed to walking alongside Torres Strait Islander people for justice and promoting their voices.

# **he EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait , EREA makes a commitment to:**

## **NTIC SHIPS**

to developing  
tic relationships  
n Aboriginal and  
er families and  
pecting their  
udent learning.

## **QUALITY EDUCATION**

We are committed to providing a quality and culturally enriching education for all students, underpinned by high expectations, where each is supported to realise their potential and where equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is a clear goal.

## **SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURAL AWARENESS**

We are committed to recognising, supporting, valuing and promoting understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritualities, cultures, histories and contemporary issues.

## **CE AND OCACY**

d to working with and  
Aboriginal and Torres  
peoples, advocating  
oting Reconciliation.

# EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (2014-2017)

Approved by the EREA Board: 29 April, 2014

**Rationale:** Edmund Rice Education Australia values, respects and formally acknowledges the unique place and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional owners of the land. EREA seeks to clearly articulate its commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples:

- to provide a liberating education for all students;
- to be an advocate for the building of an Australian society that is fair, just and equitable; and
- to remain faithful to Catholic Social Teaching and the Edmund Rice National Statement of Reconciliation.

**Principles:** EREA's involvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education is inspired by the Gospel of Jesus, the charism of Blessed Edmund Rice and the wisdom, spirituality and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

In accord with the *Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition*, we are guided by the following principles:

- a fundamental recognition and acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the traditional owners and custodians of the land;
- a commitment to Reconciliation, justice and action as foundational to policy, action and outcomes;
- a willingness to walk in the pathway of the Gospels, with a mindfulness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritualities;
- a recognition and valuing of the intrinsic worth and contribution of all members of the community through significant sharing and celebration of cultures and spiritualities;



- ongoing, authentic and respectful relationships and holistic approaches which are inclusive of families and local communities, particularly within the EREA community;
- recognition of the diversity of cultures and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; and
- a commitment to the ongoing resourcing and stewardship of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

**Policy Statement:** Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) continues to walk together in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Through collaborative and respectful partnerships, EREA is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment and to offering a quality and culturally enriching education for all young people. EREA is committed to furthering Reconciliation and valuing the wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples by deepening an understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout the curriculum and the cultural life of EREA and its schools. These goals are achieved through targeted action in six priority domains:

- |                           |                                       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Access                  | • Spirituality and Cultural Awareness |
| • Quality Education       | • Education for Reconciliation        |
| • Authentic Relationships | • Justice and Advocacy                |

**Key Responsibilities:** The Executive Director has the responsibility for the implementation of this policy and the development of the guidelines for EREA's response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education.

**Review:** Consideration will be given in 2016 to determine if this policy requires review earlier than 2018.

**Related Information:**

*EREA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Response (2014)*  
*Engaging with the Priority Domains – Support Document (2014)*



# Message Stick Ritual

**(Gifted to the EREA Family at the Inaugural EREA Congress, 2012)**

The Message Stick is a traditional way of communication in Aboriginal culture. A message was inscribed on the stick and passed on so that tribes / clans could receive the same message.

In September 2012, at the Inaugural EREA Congress, this Message Stick Ritual was gifted to the EREA family by Vicki Clark from Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Victoria. Each EREA office and school received a Message Stick and Certificate of Authenticity, along with an explanation of the symbols used and the ritual itself. When we use this ritual, we honour the traditional owners of the lands on which we gather, our own connectedness, identity and mission.



*The mother Message Stick is held at the EREA National office*

The message carried on this Message Stick is *“Engaging in the present and envisioning the Future”*.

## Our Commitment as Custodians of the Message Stick

*Whenever we as EREA members meet to reflect upon our history and stories by learning from the past and exploring the contemporary expression of the charisma of Blessed Edmund Rice, we will:*

- place the Message Stick in the centre of the table and connect the journey tracks that bind us together in spirit;
- acknowledge the Country on which we have gathered; and
- remember the invitation Jesus gave to us all to come to the table,

knowing that this Message Stick is connected through the journey tracks symbolising the working with and walking alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia. These journey tracks connect all the EREA schools, ministries and partners.

EREA gratefully acknowledges the gift of the Message Stick Ritual and we are encouraged to practise it at our gatherings.

***Artist and author: Vicki Clark Mutthi Mutthi***

***Crafted by Trevor Clark***

***Celebrating the Inaugural EREA Congress 2012, on the lands of the Wurundjeri People.***

### Symbols on the Message Stick



*Justice and Solidarity*



*Inclusive Community*



*Liberating Education*



*Gospel Spirituality*

## References

The following documents were used as references in the development of Edmund Rice Education Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Response (2014):

- Charter for Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition (2011)  
<http://www.erea.edu.au/about-us/charter>
- EREA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (2009-2012)  
<http://www.erea.edu.au/about-us/policies>
- Edmund Rice National Statement of Reconciliation  
<http://www.edmundrice.org.au>
- SCSEEC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014  
<http://scseec.edu.au>

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Artwork for EREA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Response (2014) and the support document, *Engaging with the Priority Domains* (2014), is based on the Aboriginal Touchstone symbols created for EREA by Vicki Clark at Aboriginal Catholic Ministries, Victoria. Some images from Matthew McFarlane's *Journey of Self-Discovery*, which appeared in the 2009 EREA Policy document, are also represented.