

# NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK

## MORE THAN A WORD : RECONCILIATION TAKES ACTION

### *Our Commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart*

MAY 2021

Dear Colleagues

Last week I had the great privilege to Walk Country with our Principals and Business Managers in Brisbane as part of the opening of their National Conference. Uncle Joe Kirk, a Turrbul Elder and a great friend of EREA, led us through the city and along the Brisbane River. He shared the stories of the vibrant Aboriginal communities who lived in the area for thousands of years and who endured the pain and destruction of colonisation. He also affirmed the great importance that education plays in reconciliation and the pivotal role that schools and educators play in bringing about shared understandings and a commitment to working for a more just Australia. It was a moving experience for us all.

Today is National Sorry Day and marks the fourth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, in which First Nations Peoples, "coming from all points of the southern sky", extended the invitation:

**"walk with us  
in a movement of the Australian people  
for a better future."**

This letter is a response to that invitation, highlighting our commitment as members of Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) to action for reconciliation and to providing a liberating education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people in our early learning services and schools.



**EDMUND RICE EDUCATION  
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#### **Acknowledgement of Country/s**

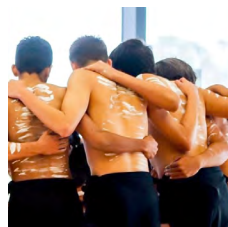
I acknowledge the Aboriginal Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Country/s on which our schools and offices are located. I also acknowledge the Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the Traditional Owners of the Torres Strait Islands.

I pay my respect to Ancestors, Elders, and leaders of the future as well as to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the EREA community. Edmund Rice Education Australia values the spiritual connectedness and relatedness to Country and to all living systems of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowings and recognise and honour their stories, cultures, and achievements as we walk together for mutual liberation and a truth-telling history for all Australians. In this spirit, we are accepting the invitation contained in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to listen to the First Peoples of Australia and work together for reconciliation, justice, equity, and healing.

#### **Our Commitment to Reconciliation**

We commit to reconciliation noting the 2021 report "2021 State of Reconciliation in Australia" that the "reconciliation movement in Australia is at a tipping point, and that we as a nation need to move from a space of 'safe' to 'brave' on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait



Islander peoples.” In attempting to move from this safe place to a brave space, our efforts in recent times have been inclusive of:

- publishing the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in 2019 which outlined a series of strategies and initiatives aimed at advancing reconciliation within our organisation, including the encouragement of all EREA schools to develop their own Narragunnawali RAPs.
- The renewal of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education policy (in 2020) which was the first policy which engaged a process of co-design in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Engaging in the process of moving towards a Stretch RAP. We do so in a spirit of humility open to what we need to unlearn, learn, and re-learn as we again co-design a process with First Nation people as members of our community, Elders and Knowledge Keepers. This Stretch RAP seeks to further embed reconciliation initiatives in our organisational culture.

As you would be aware, our own Strategic Directions Document (2020-2024) highlights reconciliation as one of the nominated paradigm shifts. Beyond our own schools and offices, we seek to extend our sphere of influence, to further the work of reconciliation across Australia.

Reconciliation week reminds us of our obligations and opportunities to offer a liberating education – one that is of quality and that is culturally enriching for all young people. We do so with a spirit of inclusion. Our curriculum demands us to provide an education that prioritises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures and offers opportunities to close the gap in learning outcomes between First Nations young people and their non-Indigenous peers whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can “see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum of each of the learning areas”. These intentions are echoed in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (1.4 and 2.4) highlighting the importance of educators in respecting and understanding the diversity Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander histories cultures and languages and for the ways in which this impacts the cultural identity of young people and the ways in which they learn.

### **Commitment to the Uluru Statement**

Importantly, this letter also serves to articulate our commitment as members of EREA, to the Uluru Statement. This statement emerged from a strong tradition of First Nations advocacy, seeking justice and self-determination. We support a First Nations Voice to Parliament, and we encourage listening to, and dialogue with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to make this a reality.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart also asks for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement making and oversee a process of truth-telling. Makarrata is Yolgnu word that means “a coming together after a struggle”. Our own policy documentation calls on our schools to provide a truth-telling history of Australia, through a liberating education for all students. As part of our commitment to truth-telling, we have developed an immersive truth-telling experience called the Waterhole Exercise, which invites members of our community to consider both the impact of colonisation and dispossession on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as well as their strength, courage, resistance, and resilience.

In examining the Uluru Statement from the Heart, First Nations people seek justice, empowerment, recognition and self-determination. May we carefully listen to them as they offer us a message that speaks to the heart of our work in education. Our Charter reminds us that we must offer an education that liberates, within the context of an inclusive community, where justice and solidarity prevail, and we do all of this because of the inspiration, life and message of Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Gospel.

And so, on this fourth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart I invite each of you to walk together in solidarity, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians, committed to reconciliation and a Liberating Education for all, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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