

AGENDA 14.3

Report: Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS AND KEY RESULTS AGAINST PLAN

- Public release of the LCA Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- The implementation and achievement of the deliverables against actions of the RAP

SUCSESSES

The development and implementation of the LCA RAP is supporting the four key objectives in the Synod resolution (2018:0210) to:

- assist ongoing relationship building through listening to Aboriginal people in the LCA;
- support non-Aboriginal people in the LCA to gain insight into what is important to Aboriginal people;
- provide a culturally appropriate mechanism by which our Church together with (inclusive of) Aboriginal people and communities within the LCA can address questions of recognition and representation; and
- develop appropriate ways to encourage and enable Aboriginal people to serve and lead in all aspects of Church life in the LCA.

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

- The multi-dimensional nature of working across different cultural perspectives in a geographically diverse environment provided complex challenges that needed to be navigated.
- Accommodating the planned work program required flexibility in strategic thinking and application due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

RISKS

1. Inability to curate a fit for purpose working group
2. Stakeholder groups not supporting the RAP
3. Insufficient consideration of a long-term succession plan post RAP
4. Inability to identify and develop Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander individuals for leadership roles in the LCA
5. Current financial environment and the impact on the LCA budget

MEMBERS

Patricia Davis, Nigel Long, (chair 2019-2021), Neville Otto (chair 2018), Shona Reid, Marilyn Wall

BACKGROUND

The 50.500 initiative of the LCA Bishop to recognise the 50th anniversary of the LCA (2016) and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation (2017) included a major focus on “hearing the indigenous voice” both in the lead up to the 2018 Synod and beyond. The outcome was the proposal to the Synod in 2018 to develop and implement an LCA RAP.

The Synod in 2018 resolved (2018:0210) the following.

That the Convention of General Synod requests General Church Council to develop and implement a Reconciliation Action Plan that will:

- assist ongoing relationship building through listening to Aboriginal people in the LCA;
- support non-Aboriginal people in the LCA to gain insight into what is important to Aboriginal people;
- provide a culturally appropriate mechanism by which our Church together with (inclusive of) Aboriginal people and communities within the LCA can address questions of recognition and representation; and
- develop appropriate ways to encourage and enable Aboriginal people to serve and lead in all aspects of Church life in the LCA.

The Convention of General Synod authorises General Church Council to commit resources to facilitate the work required to prepare and deliver the plan.

The Convention of General Synod requests General Church Council to provide a report on the implementation of the plan to the 2021 Convention of Synod.

As a result of the 2018 Synod endorsement, the RAP Project Team progressed the development and implementation of a Reconciliation Action Plan on behalf of the General Church Board.

MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

- Development and endorsement (June 2020) of the LCA Churchwide Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) (Refer to endorsed [RAP document](http://www.rap.lca.org.au): www.rap.lca.org.au)
- Implementation and achievement of identified RAP Actions and Deliverables to be achieved by RAP endorsement date June 2021 (For further details refer to the [RAP progress tables](http://www.rap.lca.org.au/our-progress/relationships): www.rap.lca.org.au/our-progress/relationships)

PROGRESS AGAINST PLAN

The identified actions and deliverables in the Reconciliation Action Plan address the objectives of the 2018 Synod resolution.

1. Assist ongoing relationship building through listening to Aboriginal people in the LCA;

Recognising that there already existed a long and deep relationship with Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander peoples with the Church, spanning over more than a 150-year period, a number of activities were commenced to explore this further. These included;

- engagement with Community through regular visits to observe (learn) and participate in both community and ministry activities across the three Lutheran First Nations communities
- exploration, discovery of what past history tells of key Lutheran engagement and ministry with Aboriginal peoples, particularly the development of the missions during early settlement and colonisation
- hearing and sharing what is currently happening in Aboriginal ministry, from both Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander peoples and those who work with them in their communities.

2. Support non-Aboriginal people in the LCA to gain insight into what is important to Aboriginal people;

It is to be noted that this objective is complex and multi-pronged for the Church and will be an ongoing journey. The RAP framework provides a focussed and sequential approach to be applied throughout such a journey. In the initial instance, the focus of the RAP is on the activities of the LCA that are within the responsibility of the churchwide office.

Churchwide Administration and Staff:

- Staff development days – engagement in the initial component of an LCA Cultural Awareness Strategy. This included workshop delivery by a Christian Aboriginal couple after a preparatory engagement by staff in the online program ‘Share Our Pride’ (Reconciliation Australia).
- Worship and devotional opportunities with development of resources incorporating First Nations Christian spirituality, perspectives, laments, prayers and supplications.
- A review of churchwide practice and policies to identify opportunity to provide clear reference statements supporting First Nations peoples inclusivity.
- The development of an historical timeline highlighting significant people/events contributing to the LCA’s ministry with Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities since early 1800s.
- Awareness raised through internal observance and provision of historic background to significant Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander events, milestones eg Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations, Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day.
- Promoting opportunities for engagement in external events (eg, cultural events, workshops, webinars, forums, seminars and the like) that point to further development of cultural awareness, significance, knowledge, and Indigenous perspectives. Significantly, the deliverer or keynote speaker in these events were First Nations people.

Churchwide Departments

- As appropriate, churchwide departments accepted oversight for the deliverables for the Actions of the RAP as relevant to their ministry area of responsibility. (See copy of [RAP pages 11-16.](#))
- Ongoing consultation with individual departments and their board and committees to maintain and support focus within their ministry area

Wider LCA community

- This featured the use of social media (eg LCA Facebook), e-newsletters (eg LCA eNews), websites (eg RAP, FRM) and various publications of the church (eg, *The Lutheran*, *Christ in the Centre*, *Together in Mission*, Lutheran Media and LLL calendars). Such communication enabled the sharing of stories with the wider Australian community around both historic and current ministry with Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander communities. They also sought to provide advice, resources and historic background to events including those of cultural significance to provide a variety of avenues to firstly grow awareness. This is inclusive of stories relating to the LCA Lutheran First Nations communities on the west coast of SA, the communities of Alice Springs and the communities serviced by Finke River Mission in central Australia, and those of Hope Vale and the Wujal Wujal region in far north Queensland.
- The RAP in hard copy format, together with accompanying poster and resources, was provided across Australia to all pastors, congregations, 2018 Synod delegates, Lutheran Education, aged care and community services facilities. All Churchwide boards, committees and reference groups received similar resources as did all

LCANZ districts and their individual council bodies. An encouragement to share this information with their immediate members accompanied these resources.

- To appropriately share these documents within the Lutheran Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander communities, a similar specific strategy was undertaken.
- The LCA [RAP website \(www.rap.lca.org.au\)](http://www.rap.lca.org.au) itself was developed to provide resources and information designed to support the growth of awareness and track the LCA reconciliation journey.

3. provide a culturally appropriate mechanism by which our Church together with (inclusive of) Aboriginal people and communities within the LCA can address questions of recognition and representation

There is quite a journey to be taken in this space. The use of a tool, such as a RAP enables a culturally appropriate framework to work towards addressing questions of recognition and representation. It is a journey undertaken initially in partnership with Reconciliation Australia, the national body for reconciliation, and together with the shared voices of First Nation's and other Australians.

- The Reflect RAP provides a focus for the LCA to reflect on the nature of its relationships with First Nations peoples, past, present, and future.
- Measured against a set of criteria the RAP supports the development of awareness and growth of respectful relationships and the exploration of First Nations opportunities. With greater awareness and respect comes a working together on matters of recognition and representation, as equal partners, First Nations peoples and other Australians alike.
- Notably this involves the process of two-way learning, where each group respectfully listens and learns from each other.

4. develop appropriate ways to encourage and enable Aboriginal people to serve and lead in all aspects of Church life in the LCA.

The RAP assists with the growth of awareness for the wide Australian community around First Nations peoples. Awareness of First Nations peoples culturally, spiritually and their presence within the LCA ministry spaces across Australia, places the church in a more informed position to consult with and listen to Aboriginal people themselves as to how they would like to serve and lead in the different aspects of Church life. It would also be appropriate to seek their input as to how they would like to be 'encouraged and enabled' in this endeavour.

SUCSESSES

1. 2018 – 2021: The continuation of the 'listening' in 'hearing the Indigenous voice' consultations affirmed:
 - the strong commitment to their Lutheran faith particularly of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Lutheran community strong holds.
 - a valuing by Aboriginal peoples for opportunities to serve others in Christian ministry and the responsibility to take on ministry leadership amongst their own peoples.
 - a valuing of occasions where there is genuine and meaningful opportunity to be included in decision-making which impact them as First Nations peoples, particularly as it pertains to ministry.
 - an active and growing participation by Aboriginal women in hearing, learning and discussing scripture and ministry, including in more formal setting eg, Bible colleges.

2. June 2020: Endorsement and launch of the LCA Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
 - In August 2020 circulation and distribution of more than 2,500 hard copies of the RAP booklet, poster and associated resources, to all Pastors, Congregations, 2018 Synod delegates, Lutheran education schools and pre-schools, Lutheran aged and community service facilities, leadership in LCA Boards, committees, and reference groups, as well as all LCA districts and their respective councils.
3. 2018 – 2021: Churchwide administration staff and churchwide departments of the LCA as the initial focus group of the Reflect RAP have been engaged in progressing the work of the RAP.

At the time of completing this report, progress of the deliverables has been significant and in line with our commitment to the RAP. For specific detail, refer to the RAP progress tables (www.rap.lca.org.au/our-progress-relationships).

LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES

1. One of the unforeseen challenges to this project was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - The face-to-face connection with First Nations people and ongoing work in developing relationships in communities was delayed for months due to the lockdowns and the high 'at risk' category of Aboriginal people.
 - The rollout and distribution of the RAP document and resources occurred in a period where most churches and other entities were coming out of lockdown and returning to the requirements of a now regulated face-to-face worship. Anecdotally, there was much fatigue within the leadership of organisations and understandably the focus was on meeting the spiritual and worship needs of their congregations.
2. The Aboriginal Advisory Group set up to advise the bishop, particularly in the development and planning of the RAP concept itself and presentation proposal, had difficulty in finding mutually available time to meet face to face. Electronic meetings were set up, although, with the one exception this proved equally as challenging as late moment commitments impacted the availability of some. Additionally, there was the withdrawal of one member of the group due to a potential conflict of interest. Communications with the group, however, was maintained via email.

RISKS

1. **Inability to curate a fit-for-purpose Working Group.** Whilst not essential for the Reflect RAP, it is important to connect with First Nations peoples and include their perspective on matters pertaining to the actions and deliverables of the RAP. The challenge in establishing the working group is that the LCA has members from many Aboriginal nations across Australia and culturally an individual is only able to speak for and on behalf of their own community.

Likelihood of occurrence: There was a strong likelihood that curation of a fit-for-purpose working groups would be challenging to develop. Drawing individuals from across the church, cultural, geographical and cost/benefit factors all contributed to this.

Action taken to mitigate risk: Efforts were made to physically meet with key First Nation people from as many different Lutheran communities across Australia as possible. A number of visits to communities were made over the last five years. It was important to meet in their community environment amongst their people. This assisted in developing the

beginning of a relationship and opportunity to grow conversations each time we met.

2. **Lack of support for the RAP.** This is a risk to engagement when those who do not support such initiatives, are in leadership positions and 'gate-keepers' of information shared with their communities.

Likelihood of occurrence: Limited sharing of and engagement with the RAP, and its resources at the local level was considered a strong likelihood. This was further exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Action taken to mitigate risk: A communication strategy to utilise existing LCA public communication channels was developed to reach the individuals at a local level and share the work of the RAP. This included communication via a number of LCA e-news, LCA Facebook, hard/electronic copy of LCA publications (including *The Lutheran*, *Christ in the Centre* (FRM), *Together in Mission* (LLL), Lutheran Media annual calendars) and LCA websites eg RAP.

3. **Insufficient consideration for succession planning for the work of the RAP | Reconciliation | Hearing the Indigenous Voice.** Without a long-term strategy that embeds Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander reconciliation, recognition and representation into leadership and the ministry of the church, there is a risk to initiatives such as the RAP and its ongoing work.

There is a risk to relationships and confidence in, and the reputation of the church, both internally and externally.

Likelihood of occurrence: Church history has demonstrated that despite extensive work in the past, initiatives without ongoing focus and broad commitment are soon replaced on the wider LCA agenda. A case in point is the 'We're All People' Report to the 2000 Synod. There is a significant likelihood of this occurring in this situation.

Action to be taken to mitigate risk: To further develop an informed long-term strategy, together with identification of resources for ongoing work to embed the objectives of the RAP to become part of the fabric of the LCA culture.

4. **Lack of identification and development of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander individuals within the leadership of the LCA.** The Indigenous voice is arguably best heard, when it is delivered from the lived experience of First Nations individuals in positions of influence. Whilst such individuals can be identified and can work effectively at the local level in remote communities, there appears to be limited identification of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander individuals for leadership across the wider church.

Likelihood of occurrence: There currently exists the lack of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander representation in leadership positions across the wider Church.

Action to be taken to mitigate risk: Within urban and rural communities, there is a largely untapped resource of highly capable First Nations people in leadership in commercial and corporate positions who have lived experience of navigating the different cultures. The provision of a culturally safe worship and ministry environment will assist in self-identification and consideration being given to leadership on their behalf.

5. **Current financial environment and the impact on the LCA budget** (see Risk 3 above).

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

- Finke River Mission, particularly the support of the board and local ministry support workers in the field who welcomed and supported the work of the RAP program, creating opportunities to connect with Aboriginal leaders and workers on location to listen and hear Aboriginal voices
- Aboriginal Ministry SA – support and connection with their work with the communities on the west coast of SA and in metropolitan Adelaide; visiting and listening to the different Aboriginal voices in community, sharing in important events
- Hopevale and other Far North Queensland Lutheran communities – engagement with local Lutheran communities, sharing of information; engagement with the First Nations peoples and workers in their local environment
- LLL – seed funding for the 50:500 project ‘Hearing the Indigenous Voice’; profiling the project through the LLL *Together In Mission* report; the LLL also has committed to the publication of significant First Nations dates in their annual calendar
- Lutheran Services (LCAQD) – supporting and encouraging the involvement of Patricia Davies on the RAP Development Team and engagement with the Hope Vale community
- Australian Lutheran College – ongoing arrangement in supporting the training of Aboriginal pastors on location in communities
- Lutheran Education Australia
- LCA departments
 - Communications
 - Local Mission
 - Lutheran Media
 - Cross-Cultural Ministry
 - Church Worker Support
 - Professional Standards
- LCA commissions and consultations
 - Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions
 - Commission on Worship
 - Constitution Review consultation

FINANCE/BUDGET

The *Hearing the Indigenous Voice* initiative received an initial \$75,000 through a 50:500 grant in 2016 through which the RAP proposal was developed for General Synod. September 2019 was inclusive of the appointment of a RAP Project Officer.

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

Income	\$129,000	\$99,000	\$69,000
Total	\$129,000	\$99,000	\$69,000
Funded by:			
LCA Budget			
LLL grants		\$99,000	\$69,000
Other sources: NSW District tithe	\$129,000		