



## Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

### 222. National Police Research Unit study

*That the National Police Research Unit make a particular study of efforts currently being made by Police Services to improve relations between police and Aboriginal people with a view to disseminating relevant information to Police Services and Aboriginal communities and organisations, as to appropriate initiatives which might be adopted.<sup>1</sup>*

<b>Background<sup>2</sup></b>	The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) recognised that Aboriginal communities wanted relationships with police to improve. The Commissioners examined several initiatives, including Community Justice Panels and Police Liaison Officers, with the potential to improve these relationships. They felt that a broader study of these kinds of initiatives could support improved relationships between police and Aboriginal communities across jurisdictions.
<b>Intent</b>	Provide information on initiatives which might improve relationships between police and Aboriginal communities.
<b>Responsibility</b>	Commonwealth Government.
<b>Key contacts</b>	Victoria Police.
<b>Key action taken</b>	
<b>2005 Review<sup>3</sup></b>	Victoria Police assessed Recommendation 222 as <b>not implemented</b> and anticipated they would be approached by the National Police Research Unit if such a study was undertaken. No progress was registered because Victoria Police had not been approached to provide this information. If the study was still required, Victoria Police suggested it should be raised at the Senior Officers Group of the Australian Policing Ministerial Council.
<b>2018 Review<sup>4</sup></b>	Deloitte concluded that the Commonwealth Government had <b>fully implemented</b> Recommendation 222 through the National Police Research Unit (now the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency). A report on initiatives to improve relations between police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was noted by the Australian Police Ministers' Council in 1992 and there was evidence of information being disseminated to relevant bodies through the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009-2015.

<sup>1</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991) vol 4, 109 ('RCIADIC').

<sup>2</sup> Ibid vol 4, [29.3.1]-[29.3.21].

<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal Justice Forum (Vic), Department of Justice (Vic), *Victorian Implementation Review of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Review Report, October 2005) vol 1, 388-391 ('2005 Review').

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Report, August 2018) 444-5 ('2018 Review').

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### Since then

#### **Justice Policy Partnership<sup>5</sup>**

The Justice Policy Partnership was established in 2021 under Priority Reform One - Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making - of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Focused on providing a national joined up approach to reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people and adults in the criminal justice system, the Justice Policy Partnership is co-chaired by the Attorney-General's Department and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.

The Justice Policy Partnership has members representing the Commonwealth Government, state and territory governments, Aboriginal organisations, and Aboriginal justice experts.

Early work of the Justice Policy Partnership required government representatives to review and report on partnerships between their police services and Aboriginal communities. This included assessing whether those partnerships reflected the strong partnership elements contained in the National Agreement.

Information was shared among representatives from each jurisdiction and their state-based networks to highlight effective approaches for strengthening partnerships between police and Aboriginal communities.

#### **Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency<sup>6</sup>**

The Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency holds annual conferences which bring together people across jurisdictions to share information on innovative approaches to policing. The 2023 conference agenda highlighted successful initiatives that had enhanced relationships between police and First Nations communities, including Te Pae Oranga and Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke - Iwi, community and agency partnerships, and Yuendumu and the Aboriginal Liaison Officer expansion.

### Evidence of impact

#### **Authorising documents**

#### **National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework<sup>7</sup>**

The National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009-2015 recognised the ongoing need to improve relations between police services and Aboriginal communities.

The Good Practice Appendix profiled projects and programs which could address the goals of the Framework. Prepared by a working group of the Standing Council on Law and Justice, the Appendix featured initiatives which had been formally evaluated and found to be successful (Good Practice) and initiatives which were showing indications of success or had been partially

<sup>5</sup> Attorney-General's Department (Cth), 'Justice Policy Partnership', *Attorney-General's Department* (Web Page, June 2025) <<https://www.ag.gov.au/legal-system/closing-the-gap/justice-policy-partnership#:~:text=The%20Australian%20Government%20has%20provided%20%2418.3%20million%20of,sitting%20fees%20and%20travel%20costs%20for%20non-government%20members.>> ('Justice Policy Partnership').

<sup>6</sup> Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency, 'Police partnerships strengthen our communities at PC23', *ANZPAA* (Blog, June 2024) <<https://www.anzpaa.org.au/products/blog/police-partnerships-strengthen-our-communities-at-pc23>> ('Police partnerships strengthen our communities at PC23').

<sup>7</sup> Standing Council on Law and Justice Working Group on Indigenous Justice, 'National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework Good Practice Appendix' (Appendix No 4930, Australian Government Attorney-General's Department, 2012) <<https://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/mp/files/resources/files/2012-good-practice-appendix-final.v1.pdf>>.

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	evaluated (Promising Practice). Initiatives featured in the Appendix were from various states and territories, including several from Victoria that aimed to improve relationships between Aboriginal communities and police.
<b>Outputs</b>	<p><b>Justice Policy Partnership Annual Report 2022<sup>8</sup></b></p> <p>The Annual Report determined that Action 2.1 had been partially implemented. This related to identifying the extent to which existing partnerships in jurisdictions include partnerships between police agencies and Aboriginal people, and whether those partnerships include the strong partnership elements in the National Agreement.</p>
<b>Outcomes</b>	None identified.
<b>Community views</b>	<p><b>John Gorton, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative<sup>9</sup></b></p> <p><i>We can help Victoria Police be part of a new way of thinking – we want to make sure people feel comfortable about going to the police station, whether it is for positive interactions or not.</i></p>

### Related recommendations

<b>2005 Review<sup>10</sup></b>	<p><b>Recommendation 60</b></p> <p>That Victoria Police pursue the need for an over-arching national study and information dissemination strategy within the appropriate national forum on ways of improving relations between police and Indigenous people.</p>
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### Assessment summary<sup>11</sup>

The intent of Recommendation 222 was for the National Police Research Unit to provide information to police services and Aboriginal groups on initiatives which might improve relationships between police and Aboriginal people.

Actions taken align with the intent of Recommendation 222, with reports, research, conferences and other efforts to highlight promising practice in improving relations between police services and Aboriginal communities. However, it remains unclear whether these were shared with Aboriginal communities as initially intended.

Recommendation 222 is no longer relevant as the agency it refers to no longer exists, but the need to build stronger relationships between our communities and police remains.

<sup>8</sup> Justice Policy Partnership, Closing the Gap, *Justice Policy Partnership Annual Report 2022* (Report, 28 February 2023) ('Justice Policy Partnership Annual Report 2022').

<sup>9</sup> Abby Walter, 'United to build stronger relationships between police and Aboriginal community', *The Weekly Advertiser* (online, 6 September 2023) <<https://theweeklyadvertiser.com.au/articles/united-to-build-stronger-relationships-between-police-and-aboriginal-community/>>.

<sup>10</sup> *2005 Review*, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, In Person, 4 November 2022) ('*Working Group Meeting (4 November 2022)*'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, In Person, 2 August 2023) ('*Working Group Meeting (2 August 2023)*'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Vic) (Project Team, In person, 17 May 2023) ('*AJC Meeting (17 May 2023)*').

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Under the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, we have spent over 25 years working with governments and Victoria Police to improve relationships with and responses to our communities.

Building stronger relationships between Aboriginal communities and police depends on trust, respect, and accountability. Victoria Police must engage in genuine partnerships, where Aboriginal leaders, Elders, and organisations have a real say in shaping policies, practices, and local responses. This includes ongoing dialogue, transparency in decision-making, and a commitment to addressing past and present harms.

This work must continue under the next phase of the Agreement.

### Assessment of Recommendation 222

**Is the intent of the recommendation accurately described?**

Yes  No

**Does the action taken align with the intent of the recommendation?**

0 – No action taken

1 – Action taken is of little relevance to the intent of the recommendation

2 – Action taken partially aligns with the intent of the recommendation

3 – Action taken fully aligns with the intent of the recommendation

**2.5**

(Score out of 3)

**Is there evidence of the desired impact or outcome/s?**

0 – No evidence

1 – Evidence of output rather than outcome

2 – Some evidence action contributed to outcome/s

3 – Clear link between action and impact or outcome/s

**2.5**

(Score out of 3)

**How relevant is the recommendation in the current context?**

0 – No relevance – refers to practices, agencies or laws that no longer exist

1 – Low – some relevance, but most aspects of the recommendation no longer apply

2 – Moderate – remains relevant, but some aspects of recommendation no longer apply

3 – High – entirely relevant to current context

**0**

(Score out of 3)

**Does full implementation have the potential to reduce incarceration, increase safety in custody and/or progress Aboriginal self-determination?**

0 – No potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes

1 – Low – potential to improve Aboriginal justice outcomes, but none of the three identified

2 – Moderate – potential to progress one or two of the outcomes identified

3 – High – potential to reduce incarceration AND increase safety in custody AND self-determination

**0.5**

(Score out of 3)

### Potential actions for further work

None identified.

## Low priority for further work

### Relevance and potential impact

		Low (0-2)	Moderate (3-4)	High (5-6)
Extent of action taken and evidence of outcomes	High (5-6)	Rec 222		
	Moderate (3-4)			
	Low (0-2)			

## Bibliography

- Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Vic) (Project Team, In person, 17 May 2023)
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- Walter, Abby, 'United to build stronger relationships between police and Aboriginal community', *The Weekly Advertiser* (online, 6 September 2023) <<https://theweeklyadvertiser.com.au/articles/united-to-build-stronger-relationships-between-police-and-aboriginal-community/>>