



Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

That support be given to the aims of Aboriginal Employment Development Policy to:

- a) Increase opportunities for Aboriginal people in the mainstream labour market to achieve equity with other Australians in the rates and levels of permanent employment; and
- b) Generate employment through greatly enhanced assistance for community development and the expansion of employment reaches an acceptable level, governments should be prepared to set targets for recruitment into the public sector at somewhat higher target figures than would reflect the proportionate representation of Aboriginal people in the population.¹

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| Background² | The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody highlighted the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP), introduced in 1986, as a broad set of employment and training initiatives aimed at reducing employment and income inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. It recognised that greater access to private and public sector employment could improve economic independence and lessen reliance on welfare. The Commission also stressed that economic development policies should be flexible and locally driven, supporting the AEDP’s overall approach rather than focusing narrowly on rigid statistical equality targets. |
| Intent | Increase opportunities for Aboriginal employment in mainstream labour market and the public sector. |
| Responsibility | The Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments. |
| Key contact | Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR). |
| Key action taken | |
| 2005 Review³ | <p>Recommendation 300 was considered a Commonwealth responsibility, however some departments provided information in line with the recommendation’s intent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of an Indigenous Employment Coordinator position to increase Aboriginal participation in Jobs for Victoria suite of employment programs. • Work with Lake Tyers community and local employment service providers to provide employment and training programs on-site at Lake Tyers, and in the open labour market in the surrounding districts (Lake Entrance, Bairnsdale etc.) |

¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991) vol 5, 135-136 ('RCIADIC').

² Ibid vol 4, 365-367 [34.1.19-34.1.25].

³ 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, 156, 162 ('2005 Review').

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Development Officers in all regions of the state worked with local agencies including Aboriginal organisations, to develop initiatives that matched the employment needs of local job-seekers – including Aboriginal people. • Information provided on careers in business for Aboriginal people through Job Fairs run by the Department of Justice. |
| <p>2018 Review⁴</p> | <p>Deloitte concluded that Recommendation 300 was fully implemented through policy initiatives and Aboriginal employment targets under the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy. The report noted various initiatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Victorian Aboriginal Public Sector Employment and Career Action Plan 2010-15 introduced employment targets and several action areas including the development of pathways between education and employment, creating inclusive workplaces, and supporting employers to recruit and retain Aboriginal workers. • The Victorian Government set a 2% employment target for Aboriginal representation within the Victorian Public Service by 2022. The target exceeded the Aboriginal proportion of the population (0.8%). • In 2013, the Victorian Government implemented the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy which sought to build economic opportunity and prosperity for Aboriginal people through contributing to job and business aspirations, creating more job opportunities, and growing Aboriginal enterprise and investment. |
| <p>Since then</p> | <p>DJSIR were asked about implementation of this recommendation and provided this response:</p> <p>Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions⁵</p> <p><u>Sporting Trusts - Reconciliation Action Plans</u></p> <p>Five state sporting trust entities have established Reconciliation Action Plans. Through these plans, the trusts are committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal people and seek to listen, learn and develop relationships with and opportunities for Aboriginal people and organisations.</p> <p><u>Free TAFE and Skills First</u></p> <p>DJSIR funds the Free-TAFE program, allowing learners to access more than 80 Free TAFE qualifications and short courses without the cost of tuition fees, even if they already hold a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification or degree. In addition to the Free TAFE courses the Victorian Government has provided since 2019, the Australian Government announced 5,200 new Fee-Free TAFE places will be available to Victorians from January 2025, including up to 1,300 pre-apprenticeship places.</p> |

⁴ 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) 621, 623 ('2018 Review').

⁵ Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (Vic), 'Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Review of Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody' (Response to AJC Request) 17-19.

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

DJSIR also funds training providers to deliver subsidised courses, and skill sets under the Skills First program. This allows eligible students to pay less for their training on over 530 accredited courses, over 30 foundation skills programs and over 85 skill sets.

Skills First and Aboriginal Access Fee Waiver

In November 2023, the Minister for Skills and TAFE approved a new tuition fee waiver for Aboriginal learners, the Skills First Aboriginal Access fee waiver. Under this initiative, tuition fees are not charged to Skills First students who self-identify as being of Aboriginal descent. From 1 January 2024, the new fee waiver replaced the Indigenous Completions Initiative concession.

This initiative removes tuition fees for eligible individuals enrolled in Skills First funded courses and aims to improve inclusivity and outcomes for Aboriginal learners in the VET sector and enhance Aboriginal self-determination in education. The fee-waiver encompasses over 600 courses from Certificate I to Advanced Diploma on the Training Needs List.

The Training Needs List includes courses supporting Indigenous culture and language through three foundation courses and ten courses ranging from Certificate II to Advanced Diploma focusing on health care and the arts sector.

Indigenous Loading

Under Skills First, the Indigenous Loading refers to additional funding provided to TAFEs to support and enhance outcomes for Aboriginal students. This loading is part of broader government efforts to improve access, participation, and success for Indigenous students in education and training.

Evidence of impact

Authorising documents

Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions⁶

Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines

The Victorian Government's Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines outline standard processes for appointing people to state entity boards. Mandatory consultation on the appointment of Aboriginal people is required. State entity boards are required to report on their diversity as part of whole of Victorian Government targets. This data is publicly reported via the Victorian Public Sector Commission. Overall, the number of Victorian Public Service employees who identified as Aboriginal rose from 1.1% to 1.33%. For board members this figure was 2% for the period of June 2018 to June 2022.

Experience Victoria 2033

Experience Victoria 2033 is Victoria's 10-year strategy to shape the future of the visitor economy and create jobs. It emphasises the importance of Aboriginal Tourism, highlighting Aboriginal-led products and experiences as a priority. The First Peoples Tourism Plan, currently under development, will celebrate Victoria's unique Aboriginal culture and support wealth creation and opportunities for economic parity for Victoria's Aboriginal

⁶ Ibid.

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

people through tourism. Together, these strategic documents emphasise the importance of supporting and enabling self-determined opportunities in the tourism industry, which may lead to indirect employment outcomes in the medium-long term.

Yuma Yirramboi: Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy⁷

The status of Aboriginal employment in Victoria highlights the significant growth required to achieve parity in employment outcomes. Aboriginal people should have a genuine choice of employment pathways, and government has a key role in promoting opportunity either via direct employment within the public sector or across the private and community sectors using policy, targets and other incentives.

The Strategy intends to generate jobs and careers to reach employment parity, with the aim of generating more jobs and meaningful careers (working with public, private and community sectors).

There are four initiatives (5.1-5.4) under the strategy:

- Champion jobs growth and collaboration across all sectors to advance opportunities for pay parity and career progression.
- Use available levers to activate the private sector to increase employment of Aboriginal people.
- Sustain and grow the Aboriginal workforce across all sectors including the public sector.
- Set an expectation of cultural safety and actively eliminating racism.

Outputs

Evidence provided to the Yoorrook Justice Commission⁸

In June 2024, the Secretary of DJSIR gave evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission. When questioned about how DJSIR supports vocational education and training for Aboriginal young people, particularly those involved in the child welfare system, he explained that under the Marrung Strategy and Wurreker Plan, brokers engaged by the Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy act as a link between Aboriginal communities and TAFEs to support access and participation. He also noted that:

The work of the Koori Liaison Officers and Koori Student Support Officers are critical in making sure that when an Aboriginal student starts a training course that they have been given every equitable chance to complete that training.

⁷ Yuma Yirramboi Council, Skills Department of Jobs, Industry and Regions, *Yuma Yirramboi: Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy* (Strategy, 27 June 2022) 7, 25 ('Yuma Yirramboi').

⁸ Transcript of Proceedings, *Transcript of Day 7, Hearing Block 7 – Public Hearings* (WUR.HB07.0007.0001, Yoorrook Justice Commission, Professor Eleanor Bourke (Chair), Ms Sue-Anne Hunter (Commissioner), Mr Travis Lovett (Commissioner), Distinguished Professor Maggie Walter (Commissioner), The Hon Anthony North KC (Commissioner), 13 June 2024) 101-2, 106-7 ('*Transcript of Day 7, Hearing Block 7 – Public Hearings*').

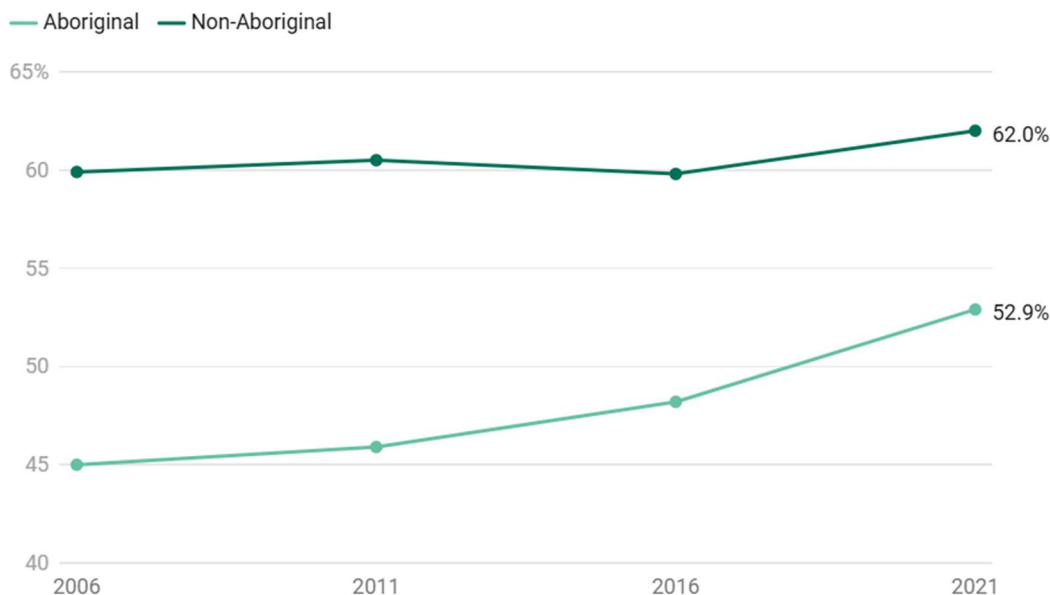
300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework data⁹

Data relevant to this recommendation is published in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework Data Dashboard under Goal 9: Strong Aboriginal workforce participation, in all sectors and at all levels.

Employment to population ratio by Aboriginal status and gender, Victoria, 2006 to 2021

Measure 9.1.1



Workforce participation by Aboriginal status and remoteness, Victoria, 2006 to 2021

9.3.1.d Workforce participation by regional status

Aboriginal

| | Metropolitan | Inner Regional | Outer regional and remote(c) |
|------|--------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| 2006 | 61.63% | 52.63% | 46.72% |
| 2011 | 61.6% | 53.8% | 47.3% |
| 2016 | 64.23% | 56.27% | 50.87% |
| 2021 | 61.85% | 56.64% | 51.06% |

Non-Aboriginal

| | Metropolitan | Inner Regional | Outer regional and remote(c) |
|------|--------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| 2006 | 74.58% | 73.35% | 73.51% |
| 2011 | 75.4% | 74.4% | 73% |
| 2016 | 75.87% | 75.7% | 74.7% |
| 2021 | 66.65% | 60.98% | 58.67% |

⁹ Victorian State Government, 'Goal 9: Strong Aboriginal workforce participation, in all sectors and at all levels', *First Peoples - State Relations* (Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) data dashboard, 1 August 2025)

<<https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au/victorian-aboriginal-affairs-framework-data-dashboard/opportunity-and-prosperity-data/goal-9>> ('Goal 9: Strong Aboriginal workforce participation, in all sectors and at all levels').

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

Outcomes

Yoorrook for Transformation¹⁰

Aboriginal people experience barriers to employment, are employed in lower paying jobs and industries, and have lower wages than non-Aboriginal people. External quantitative datasets show that in Victoria:

- Aboriginal people have lower weekly personal income levels than non-Aboriginal people. In 2021, the median weekly personal income for Aboriginal people was \$619 compared to \$803 for all people in Victoria.
- In 2021, 62% of Aboriginal people in Victoria (aged 25 to 64) were employed, which was significantly lower than the 78.4% of non-Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal people are less likely than non-Aboriginal people to be employed full-time, and less likely to work in occupations and industries with higher earning capacity.
- Aboriginal people experience lower rates of employment than non-Aboriginal people. In 2021, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was 9.6%, compared to 5% for all people in Victoria.

DJSIR Secretary Tim Ada acknowledged the ongoing economic disparity experienced by Aboriginal people in Victoria:

Aboriginal people in Victoria earn on average a 24% lower median working age income and have a lower employment population ratio than non-Aboriginal people in Victoria. The latest Census data found the median income for working age Aboriginal people in Victoria was approximately \$34,000 per year compared to \$42,000 for non-Aboriginal people in Victoria.

Structural barriers

Aboriginal people continue to face structural barriers to workforce participation, including racism, culturally unsafe workplaces and cultural load in the workplace. As a result, Aboriginal people can experience limited opportunities and barriers to career progression. These realities are shaped by colonial legacies and a lack of cultural competency across public and private employment sectors.

Self-determination

Self-determination is central to addressing economic injustice. This may take different forms, including the establishment and support of Aboriginal businesses, commercial use of land, housing development, home ownership and the creation of a capital fund to enable Aboriginal people's participation in capital markets as investors.

Aboriginal people told Yoorrook that the Victorian Government must change legislative and policy settings and commit resources to support Aboriginal people's economic independence and prosperity. The State has made some efforts to address the systemic economic disadvantages Aboriginal people experience, but many of these efforts have fallen short, underscoring the need for more effective and sustainable solutions.

¹⁰ Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report* (Summary Report, 2025) 26-27, 35-36 ('Yoorrook for Transformation - Summary Report').

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

Community views

First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria¹¹

Economic self-determination empowers and supports Aboriginal people to make decisions about Aboriginal people's financial resources. It encompasses the right to freely pursue economic development, which includes the right to develop, maintain and strengthen a distinct economic institution as well as fully participate in the economic life of the state.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation¹²

Aboriginal people often face barriers to accessing employment opportunities, leading to higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. This does not mean that Aboriginal people are not fit for employment, but shows an ongoing, systemic problem...

Participation in employment provides financial and economic security and assists in opening the door to self-determination. Employment status also has associations with outcomes for health, social and emotional wellbeing, and living standards.

Related recommendations

Yoorrook for Transformation¹³

Recommendation 91

The Victorian Government must:

- a) Revise the implementation timeline and proposed goals of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy, including developing a publicly accessible monitoring and accountability plan for the strategy.
- b) Incentivise major corporations in Victoria's private sector to embed more Aboriginal businesses in supply chains.
- c) Change procurement monitoring and targets from number of contracts to total dollars spent to accurately reflect investment.
- d) Develop, resource and implement an Indigenous Preferred Procurement Program.

Recommendation 92

The Victorian Government must assist recruitment, development, and retention of Aboriginal peoples in the workplace by:

- a) Amending the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* to include an obligation on employers and employees to take steps to ensure cultural safety and capability in Victorian workplaces.
- b) Creating a pipeline of Aboriginal talent for identified industries with skills shortages, including bolstering access to education and vocational training for Aboriginal people to prepare them for high-value employment sectors.

¹¹ Ibid 28.

¹² Ibid 35-36.

¹³ Ibid 81.

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

- c) Monitoring and ensuring proper pay and conditions against defined targets for Aboriginal people in the public sector.
- d) Monitoring and ensuring proper remuneration for the cultural load borne by Aboriginal people in the workplace.
- e) Ensuring the private sector develops recruitment, development, mentoring and retention strategies for Aboriginal people and supporting the private sector in developing such strategies.

Recommendation 93

The Victorian Government must take steps to ensure increased Aboriginal representation on both company and government boards through improved accountability and transparency measures, including requirements to publicly disclose board diversity and report annually on Aboriginal representation.

Assessment summary¹⁴

The intent of Recommendation 300 was to create real and lasting job opportunities for Aboriginal people, both in the mainstream workforce and the public sector.

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) highlighted the Free TAFE program which allows people to access more than 80 free TAFE qualifications and short courses without the cost of tuition fees, and a new Aboriginal Access Fee Waiver so Aboriginal participants do not pay tuition fees under Skills First. DJSIR also supports implementation of Yuma Yirramboi, the Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy.

While these are positive steps, they are relatively new, and it is too early to know whether they are delivering real employment outcomes for Aboriginal people. We want to see clear data over time on how many Aboriginal people are accessing these free TAFE places and apprenticeships and whether they lead to secure jobs and careers.

Evidence provided to Yoorrook showed the Yuma Yirramboi strategy is under-resourced and lacks a clear implementation plan. We support Yoorrook's call for the strategy to be revisited, with clear goals, timelines, a monitoring and accountability plan and public reporting so communities can see whether it is working to support our mob to achieve economic independence.

Moreover, Yoorrook found that Aboriginal people experience significant barriers to employment, are employed in lower paying jobs and industries, and have lower wages than non-Aboriginal people. This has flow on effects in terms of health, wellbeing and other outcomes.

Aboriginal people often face barriers to accessing employment opportunities, leading to higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. This does not mean that Aboriginal people are not fit for employment, but shows an ongoing, systemic problem...Participation in employment provides financial and economic security and assists in opening the door to self-determination. Employment status also has associations with outcomes for health, social and emotional wellbeing, and living standards. (Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, quoted in Yoorrook for Transformation)

¹⁴ Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, Online, 22 August 2025) ('Working Group Meeting (22 August 2025)'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Project Team, Online, 21 October 2025) ('Aboriginal Justice Caucus Meeting (21 October 2025)').

300. Increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people

We are concerned that many training and employment programs offer entry-level roles but do not lead to ongoing roles, career progression, leadership positions, or higher pay.

It is great that they've offered free TAFE placements and other opportunities, but will these be linked to employment opportunities? Often there are entry level roles but few opportunities for career progression, leadership positions and no succession plans. (Chris Harrison, Co-chairperson, Aboriginal Justice Caucus)

In the justice sector, some Aboriginal-specific roles, such as Aboriginal Wellbeing Officers and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, have limited career pathways and limited Aboriginal oversight of how those roles operate. At the same time, designated Aboriginal roles are being reduced, and non-Aboriginal people are being employed in Aboriginal justice roles.

Pay inequity is another major issue. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) often pay less than the public sector for similar work, making it hard to attract and retain staff. Pay parity and proper funding for ACCOs are essential to building a strong Aboriginal workforce across the community sector.

Overall, Recommendation 300 remains a high priority for further work. While training and fee-free education are important, real change will only happen when Aboriginal people have access to secure jobs, fair pay, leadership pathways, and there's strong accountability to ensure commitments are actually delivered.

Assessment of Recommendation 300

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

1

(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

1

(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

3

(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

2

(Score out of 3)

Potential actions for further work

Economic Prosperity (recommendations 91 and 92, Yoorrook for Transformation)

The Victorian Government must:

- revise the implementation timeline and proposed goals of the Yuma Yirramboi Strategy, including developing a publicly accessible monitoring and accountability plan for the strategy
- incentivise major corporations in Victoria's private sector to embed more Aboriginal businesses in supply chains
- change procurement monitoring and targets from number of contracts to total dollars spent to accurately reflect investment
- develop, resource and implement an Indigenous Preferred Procurement Program.

The Victorian Government must also assist recruitment, development, and retention of Aboriginal peoples in the workplace by:

- amending the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* to include an obligation on employers and employees to take steps to ensure cultural safety and capability in Victorian workplaces
- creating a pipeline of Aboriginal talent for identified industries with skills shortages, including bolstering access to education and vocational training for Aboriginal people to prepare them for high-value employment sectors
- monitoring and ensuring proper pay and conditions against defined targets for Aboriginal people in the public sector
- monitoring and ensuring proper remuneration for the cultural load borne by Aboriginal people in the workplace
- ensuring the private sector develops recruitment, development, mentoring and retention strategies for Aboriginal people and supporting the private sector in developing such strategies.

High 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) | | | |
| | Moderate (3-4) | | | |
| | Low (0-2) | | | Rec 300 |

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