



Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

303. Study successful economic development schemes

That State and Commonwealth Governments study the experience of the Aboriginal Economic Employment Officer program operated by the Western Australian Department of Employment and Training and other similar schemes which enhance local Aboriginal involvement in stimulating economic activity.¹

Background²	<p>The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) commended the Western Australian Department of Employment and Training’s Aboriginal Economic and Employment Development Officer program for its innovative training techniques and recommended the study of similar initiatives.</p> <p>This program aimed to train Aboriginal people at the community level to ‘identify and respond to their specific employment and training needs’. The operation of the program involved consultation and identification by the community of its economic needs, the development of goals and long-term plans, and the employment of a suitable officer from the community who operated as a broker between the community and other agencies.</p> <p>Projects initiated under the program included purchase of local businesses by Aboriginal people, development of training courses in trade skills and small business management, and development of long-term strategic plans.</p>
Intent	Study successful schemes that enhance Aboriginal involvement in economic activity.
Responsibility	The Commonwealth and all state and territory governments.
Key contact	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR).
Key action taken	
2005 Review³	The Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development assessed this recommendation as partially implemented , noting development of a Victorian Aboriginal economic policy, Building the Economic Base Strategy, was informed by regional consultation with Aboriginal communities.
2018 Review⁴	<p>Commonwealth Government</p> <p>Deloitte found Recommendation 303 was fully implemented by the Commonwealth Government through two reports that studied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander</p>

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

² Ibid vol 4, 376 [34.1.53-34.1.54].

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, 164 ('2005 Review').

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) 628-630 ('2018 Review').

303. Study successful economic development schemes

employment initiatives. The ‘Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Issues Paper No. 3: Increasing Indigenous employment rates’ published in 2012, reviewed how effective government policies had been in increasing Aboriginal employment.

The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy aimed to strengthen Aboriginal businesses nationwide, with a strong focus on supporting Aboriginal women in business and building partnerships between governments, the corporate sector, and Aboriginal businesses.

Victorian Government

Deloitte concluded that Recommendation 303 was **partially implemented** in Victoria. Economic participation was a key action area under the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework with several initiatives developed to encourage Aboriginal participation in employment and economic development:

- Tharamba Bugheen, the Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy 2017-2021, aimed to support and encourage the development of Aboriginal businesses.
- The Social Procurement Framework encouraged procurement outcomes to support Aboriginal employment and included a government procurement target of 1% of goods and services purchased from Aboriginal businesses.

The Victorian Government determined that Western Australia’s program was no longer current and therefore, did not provide a study of the program described in the RCIADIC.

Since then

The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) did not provide a response to Recommendation 303.

Evidence of impact

Authorising documents

Yuma Yirramboi: Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy⁵

DJSIR worked in partnership with Aboriginal businesses, peak bodies, Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, industry experts and academics, communities, and all tiers of government to develop the Strategy.

This Strategy sets out a long-term, coordinated, and sustained approach to increasing the wealth and prosperity of Aboriginal people in Victoria. It maps a path for supporting Traditional Owners, Aboriginal entrepreneurs and businesses, community organisations and individuals to realise their individual and collective economic and employment aspirations. Notably, the strategy has the following relevant objectives:

- Provide support and connect Aboriginal Victorians with opportunities through career and mentor programs.
- Redesign employment readiness programs that provide enabling environments.
- Develop succession plans that provide meaningful career pathways, increasing skills and qualifications.
- Increase opportunities for board management and company directorships.

⁵ Yuma Yirramboi Council, Skills Department of Jobs, Industry and Regions, *Yuma Yirramboi: Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Strategy* (Strategy, 27 June 2022) xi, 3, 23 ('Yuma Yirramboi').

303. Study successful economic development schemes

Outputs	None identified.
Outcomes	<p>Yoorrook for Transformation⁶</p> <p>Aboriginal people experience barriers to employment, are employed in lower paying jobs and industries, and have lower wages than non- Aboriginal people.</p> <p><u>Self-determination</u></p> <p>Self-determination is central to addressing economic injustice in Victoria. 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.</p> <p>Aboriginal people told Yoorrook that the Victorian Government must change legislative and policy settings and commit resources to support Victorian Aboriginal people’s economic independence and prosperity.</p>
Community views	<p>Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations⁷</p> <p><i>For many Aboriginal people, wealth is not just about material accumulation but is also perceived in nonmonetary terms – embracing notions of social, natural and cultural capital – such as collective well-being and care of relationships between family, community and Country. Aboriginal economies are based on distribution, reciprocity and exchange that support the livelihood and sustenance of all citizens and the health of Country. Aboriginal people also place great emphasis on cultural abundance such as buildings, sites, artworks and artefacts (tangible) as well as beliefs and traditions (intangible).</i></p> <p>First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria⁸</p> <p><i>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.</i></p>

Related recommendations

Yoorrook for Transformation⁹	<p>Recommendation 91</p> <p>The Victorian Government must:</p> <p>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.</p>
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⁶ Yoorrook Justice Commission, *Yoorrook for Transformation: Third Interim Report* (Summary Report, 2025) 26-27, 35-36 ('Yoorrook for Transformation - Summary Report').

⁷ Ibid 50.

⁸ Ibid 28.

⁹ Ibid 81.

303. Study successful economic development schemes

- 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.
- 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) Ensure the private sector develops recruitment, development, mentoring and retention strategies for Aboriginal people and support the private sector in developing such strategies.

2005 Review

Recommendation 5

That the Department for Victorian Communities examine the various schemes for the enhancement of local Indigenous involvement in stimulating economic activity, and provide a report to the Aboriginal Justice Forum.

That the Victorian Government continue to implement and monitor recommendations 302-303 through any monitoring process established as a consequence of this Review.

Assessment summary¹⁰

We considered Recommendation 303 no longer relevant to Victoria because the Aboriginal Economic Employment Officer program run by the Western Australian Government is no longer in operation. In addition, Victoria’s economic development context differs to that of Western Australia.

¹⁰ 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)*').

Bibliography

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