Cultural Development Network Cultures

Local Councils, the Arts & Reconciliation

How Local Councils in Victoria Are Contributing to Reconciliation Through Their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Policies.

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April 2015

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Suggested citation: Asscher, E. (2015). Local Councils, the Arts & Reconciliation: How Local Councils in Victoria Are Contributing to Reconciliation Through Their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Policies. Melbourne: Cultural development Network. http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/publications/research-reports/

Emma Asscher would like to acknowledge the assistance, support and encouragement of the staff of the Cultural Development Network: Dr Kim Dunphy, Ms Lyndall Metzke, Ms Leda Yazgin and Mr John Smithies, and the support and the encouragement of Dr Lea Campbell of Melbourne University. Emma would like to extend particular thanks to Dr Kim Dunphy for supervising this research project and for her invaluable feedback and her unfailing encouragement.

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Executive Summary

This study explores the ways that local councils in Victoria are contributing to reconciliation in their communities by using the arts as a vehicle. It focuses on the policies of local councils that underlie their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities.

Policy documents of the 79 councils in Victoria were examined to identify which councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies of six councils in Victoria were explored closely.

'The arts' in this study are understood as the artforms of visual arts and crafts, theatre and dance, music, and literature. 'Policies' are understood to include policies, strategies, plans, and frameworks of councils.

Reconciliation

Achieving reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians was an idea that arose in the early 1990s. In 1991 the Australian government established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation "to promote a process of reconciliation". By the year 2000 the reconciliation movement had become highly politicised (Grattan M, 2000, 6). The Council for Reconciliation—a body established by a Labor government—delivered its final report at this time (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000). Some of its recommendations have been taken up by both major parties, others have not.

In its National Reconciliation Documents it identified important steps for governments to undertake including:



¹ s.5 of the Council For Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991

- practical measures to improve opportunities and health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- symbolic actions acknowledging the shared history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and the injustices perpetrated during this period;
- actions that acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres
 Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination
 (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 109).

The Howard Liberal Government chose to focus only on 'practical reconciliation' measures to address health and opportunity outcomes (Howard 2000, 91). Subsequent Labor and Liberal politicians have adopted a range of views of the concept of reconciliation.

Local councils have developed their local reconciliation policies within this national political framework of liquid and disputed understandings of what it means to achieve reconciliation. Australian and Victorian local government associations have provided guidance to councils over the past couple of decades. They have produced reconciliation policy positions, undertaken reconciliation initiatives and produced and supported reconciliation studies.

The extent to which councils in Victoria have become involved in the reconciliation movement varies considerably.

Cultural development planning

In using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies to contribute to reconciliation councils are engaging in a process of cultural development planning and "the production of meaning" (Bianchini 2013, 382). The arts may be "the paramount symbolic language through which shifting meanings are presented" (Hawkes 2001, 23).

Research Methods

Data was gathered from internet searches of the websites of all 79 councils in Victoria. The policies of six councils were selected as case studies. The councils chosen as case studies have a range of population sizes and are in a diverse range of rural and metropolitan locations.

In selecting the six councils the aim was not to select the six best examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. Rather, the aim was to select six councils that have some form of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policy and that when viewed as a group represent a broad range of councils. The councils are from different geographical regions of Victoria; and



include city and shire councils, councils with small and large population sizes, and rural, regional and metropolitan councils. The study focuses on comparing the approaches of the councils that make up this sample. The councils selected were: Gannawarra Shire Council, Moyne Shire Council, East Gippsland Shire Council, Ballarat City Council, Port Phillip City Council and Hume City Council.

The theory of change approach was used to analyse the case studies (Weiss 1998, 55; Dunphy 2013, 13; Collins & Clark 2013, 1). The approach involved extracting from policy documents relating to the arts and reconciliation: the long-term goal and medium-term objectives, the underlying assumptions and values, and the actions chosen to achieve the objectives. The judgment of the author of this study was exercised where policy documents did not explicitly state goals, objectives or values.

Learnings & Conclusion

- A significant number of councils in Victoria prioritise the issue of reconciliation: demonstrated
 by their adoption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait
 Islander arts policies. Currently 44 per cent of
 councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres
 Strait Islander arts policies.
- There was no direct relationship observed

between councils' population size and relative access to resources in terms of whether or not they have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policy. Small and large councils were equally likely to have them

- No correlation was observed between the size of the council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and the scale of the council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies.
- Councils are prioritising collaborations in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies.
- Councils are utilising council and community assets in the activities suggested in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies have prominence when councils cross-reference these policies in more than one council strategy or plan.
- Councils can adopt their own interpretation of the concept of reconciliation and effectively contribute to the broader reconciliation movement.
- Councils that view the arts as a vehicle for cultural change adopt creative and ambitious Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies.



Introduction

Local councils have been involved in the reconciliation movement since the 1990s (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39-43). Local councils can "encourage greater unity, knowledge and respect for the first occupants of our land—through [their] strong community links and local representation" according to the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) (2014).¹

This study seeks to understand the ways that local councils in Victoria are contributing to reconciliation in their communities by using the arts as a vehicle. It focuses on the policies of local councils that underlie their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities. The report describes specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities only to illustrate policies in action. Therefore, given the specific focus on policies, the great breadth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities being undertaken and supported by local councils is not captured by this

report.

The arts and cultural plans, reconciliation action plans and similar documents of councils in Victoria were examined to identify which councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies of six councils in Victoria were explored closely to gain an understanding of how councils are using their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies to contribute to reconciliation.

This study seeks to acknowledge the current contributions of councils; and be a resource for councils interested in adopting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies, or expanding their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts initiatives.

¹ MAV is an association established by the *Municipal Association Act 1907* (Vic) and governed by a council made up of representatives from each of the 79 councils in Victoria (s.2 of the Act).

Terminology

Policy

The terms 'policy' and 'policies' are used in a broad sense to include policies, strategies and positions that are found in council strategy, plan, framework and policy documents.

The arts

This study adopts a broad definition of the arts in line with the understanding of the Australia Council for the Arts that defines the arts by listing a set of artform categories. These categories are: visual arts and crafts, theatre and dance, music, and literature (Australia Council for the Arts 2014, 46-69)²

the Arts 2014, 58). Literature includes: novels, short stories, creative non-fiction, graphic novels, poetry and plays (Australia Council for the Arts 2014, 66-69).



² Visual arts and crafts include: "[c]rafts like ceramics, jewellery making, sewing or woodcraft", "[p]hotography as an artistic endeavour", "painting, drawing or street art", "[d]igital or video art", "[s]culpture or installation art" (Australia Council for the Arts 2014, 46). Theatre and dance include: "[t]raditional or contemporary theatre", "[s]ocial dance like ballroom or street", "[c]ontemporary dance", "[c]ircus or physical theatre", "[b]allet or classical dance", "[m]ulticultural dance/theatre", "[e]xperimental theatre" (Australia Council for the Arts 2014, 53). Music includes: instrumental music, singing, songwriting and music composition (Australia Council for

Reconciliation



Local government, because of their on-the-ground presence, their potential for local leadership and their role as managers of social and physical infrastructure, are of critical importance to nation-wide reconciliation."

(Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39)

Achieving reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians was an idea that gained political prominence in the early 1990s. It saw the establishment in 1991 of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, through an act of the Commonwealth Parliament: the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*. This entity ceased operating on 1 January 2001, just after it delivered its final report and recommendations. At this time it "established an independent foundation, Reconciliation Australia" to "carry on" the reconciliation process (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000,104).

Since the early 1990s local governments have been identified as having an important role in the reconciliation movement. "The main functions" of the Council

for Reconciliation included "provid[ing] a forum for discussion... of policies to be adopted by Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments to promote reconciliation" (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991). In its final report it recognised that "[l]ocal government is one of Council's most valued partners in achieving reconciliation" (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000,39).

Over the last couple of decades 'reconciliation' has been understood differently by the two major political parties and by various politicians. The reconciliation movement became highly politicised (Grattan M, 2000, 6). Some recommendations of the Council for Reconciliation have been taken up by both major parties, but others have not.



Over the past couple of decades local government associations and local councils have developed their reconciliation policies within a national political framework of liquid and disputed understandings of what it means to achieve reconciliation. Had the Council for Reconciliation recommendations been adopted by both major political parties, local government associations and local councils would have had a detailed framework for formulating their own reconciliation policies.

The recommendations of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation included that "local governments pass formal motions of support for the *Australian Declaration for Reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for Reconciliation*... and determine how their key recommendations can best be implemented in their jurisdictions" (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 105).

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation described reconciliation as involving:

- recognition of the "unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the original owners and custodians of lands and waters";
- recognition that "this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent";

- having "the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves";
- understanding our shared histories ('our shared history' is a term used for the history of Australia since 1788 and is used today by a broad range of organisations including Museum Victoria and the Australian Human Rights Commission);
- equality of opportunity;
- an end to injustice;
- · the overcoming of disadvantage; and
- the "right to self-determination" for Aboriginal people "within the life of the nation" (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 109).

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation recommendations of 2000 failed to gain the unequivocal support of the government of the day. Reconciliation Australia, that in 2001 replaced the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, adopted a broad vision—"for everyone to wake to a reconciled, just and equitable Australia"—that accommodates a range of understandings of reconciliation (Reconciliation Australia 2014, 2).



Changing interpretations of 'reconciliation'

Key politicians have offered a range of interpretations of the concept of reconciliation since the early 1990s until today:

"[S]urely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians—the people to whom the most injustice has been done... [T]he starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing... It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.... It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine its opposite. And we can have justice... so we can turn the goals of reconciliation into reality" ('Redfern Speech' of 1992 in Keating 2000, 61-63).

"The government has always stressed that practical measures to address the profound economic and social disadvantage of many indigenous Australians are at the heart of a successful reconciliation process" (Howard 2000, 91).

"A second objective of reconciliation is a realistic acknowledgement of the inter-related histories of the various elements of Australian society. The purpose of such an acknowledgement is not to apportion blame and guilt for past wrongs, but to build support for a practical program of action that will remove the enduring legacies of disadvantage" (Howard 2000, 90).

"[T]here comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace the future...That is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation's soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia" (Rudd in Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

"Australia is a blessed country. Our climate, our land, our people, our institutions rightly make us the envy of the earth; except for one thing—we have never fully made peace with the first Australians. This is the stain on our soul that Prime Minister Keating so movingly evoked at Redfern 21 years ago" (Abbott in Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

"Practical and symbolic reconciliation are opposite sides of the same coin so the next Coalition government will pursue both" (Abbott, 2013).



Local government associations and support for reconciliation

Australian and Victorian local government associations have produced reconciliation policy positions, undertaken reconciliation initiatives and produced and supported reconciliation studies. Key actions over the past two and half decades include:

- The 1992 signing by the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) (as part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)) of the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Peoples* (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39).
- The appointment in 1992 of an ALGA Aboriginal Affairs Policy Officer (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39).
- The employment by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) in 1993 of an Aboriginal Policy Officer to "promote improved relations between Local Government and Indigenous Australians and to implement the COAG National Commitment to Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" (Municipal Association of Victoria 1998, 12)
- The adoption in 1996 by the National General Assembly of Local Government (NGALG) of "a

- statement on community tolerance" in which it supported the vision of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation for reconciliation (Australian Local Government Association 1999, 2).
- The 1997 NGALG "motion recognising the validity of native title" and "express[ing]... deep and sincere regret at the hurt and distress caused by policies which forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families and homes" Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39).
- The establishment in 1998 of the MAV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Local Government Network for the participation of "all interested Councils and Indigenous organisations" (Municipal Association of Victoria 1998, 15)
- The publication in 1998 by MAV of Wurreker— Local Government Indigenous Partnerships Resource Guide to assist councils in Victoria to develop "working relationships and projects" with Aboriginal communities (Municipal Association of Victoria 1998, 8)
- The statement of commitment developed by ALGA in 2000 to "maintaining a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values". This commitment was adopted by some councils in Victoria. The commitment



includes:

- acknowledgement and recognition of "the loss and grief held by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders caused by alienation from traditional lands, loss of loves and freedom, and the forced removal of children";
- support for "the vision expressed by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation of a 'united Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and provides justice and equity for us all"; and
- support for "the need to improve non-Indigenous understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues..." (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, 39).
- The establishment in 2000 of the MAV Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government (IICCLG) involving MAV, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, four government departments, Parks Victoria, VicRoads and MAV Victorian Local Government Indigenous Network.
- The publication in 2002 by the MAV IICCLG of the report *Toomnangi: Indigenous Communities and Local Government—a Victorian Study* report. This report documents the results of a survey of councils in Victoria providing "a Statewide picture of the in-

- volvement of Victorian local government specifically in Indigenous matters in late 2001" (Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 4)
- The funding in 2010 of a Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) and Reconciliation Australia research project. The project focused on the process undertaken by three councils in Victoria in developing reconciliation action plans. The project resulted in the publication in 2011 by Reconciliation Victoria of Reconciliation in Local Government Project Action Research Report: Key Issues Challenges and Opportunities for Victorian Local Government Advancing Reconciliation Through Developing Reconciliation Action Plans. (A reconciliation action plan "is a tool, developed by Reconciliation Australia in 2006, to help organisations promote reconciliation and contribute to closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (Reconciliation Victoria 2011, 6).
- The establishment in 2011 of the Local Government—Aboriginal Partnership Project involving MAV, VLGA, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Reconciliation Victoria and state and federal government. The project initiated a survey of council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activities that was published



in 2012 and has developed resources for councils including access to online resources through the "Maggolee" website (Municipal Association of Victoria 2015)

• The publication in 2012 by Reconciliation Victoria of the *Victorian Local Government Aboriginal Engagement & Reconciliation Survey 2012*, a survey "developed by Reconciliation Victoria in partnership with VLGA, MAV, Local Government Professionals and the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council" (Reconciliation Victoria 2012, 3). The survey documents the reconciliation activities of local councils in Victoria, identifies "good practice" and compares the findings of the *Toomnangi Report* survey of a decade earlier.

Councils' reconciliation framework

The federal political debate about how the concept of reconciliation should be interpreted has meant that 'motions' and 'commitments' of local government associations and bodies in the 1990s and early 2000 that embrace symbolic reconciliation have uncertain status, although recently, symbolic reconciliation has found broader political support.

Local councils, in formulating their local reconciliation policies, are forced to chose between a range of under-

standings of what reconciliation means and to decide what, if any, role they should play in the reconciliation movement. The extent to which councils in Victoria have become involved in the reconciliation movement varies considerably.

Documenting councils' reconciliation activities

In the report Reconciliation in Local Government Project Action Research Report: Key Issues Challenges and Opportunities for Victorian Local Government Advancing Reconciliation Through Developing Reconciliation Action Plans, Reconciliation Victoria recommends councils use the vehicle of arts and culture to support reconciliation:

"Local governments have significant potential to celebrate Aboriginal culture and strengthen communities through supporting arts and cultural activities... Promoting indigenous arts can create positive economic, social and cultural outcomes for local Aboriginal communities, as well as building recognition, appreciation and harmony within the wider community" (Reconciliation Victoria 2011, 57)

This report notes that many councils are actively supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts initiatives. Some of these activities are captured in two surveys of council's reconciliation activities:



- the 2002 *Toomnangi: Indigenous Communities and Local Government—a Victorian Study* (the Toomnangi Report) (Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria 2002) and
- the 2012 the *Victorian Local Government Aborigi*nal Engagement & Reconciliation Survey 2012 undertaken by Reconciliation Victoria—the state peak body for reconciliation established in 2002 (Reconciliation Victoria 2012).

These surveys capture a broad range of reconciliation activities of local councils, including arts activities. The Toomnangi Report of 2002 looked at the extent of:

- council policies to support Aboriginal initiatives;
- employment of, and participation of, Aboriginal people in councils;
- collaborations, for example it noted the partnership of eight councils to form the Inter Council Aboriginal Consultative Committee;
- "raising awareness of Indigenous issues";
- recognition of traditional owners and Aboriginal communities including through the arts; and
- involvement of Aboriginal representatives in "internal committees" (Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 4).

The report also highlighted the small proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in councils in Victoria. At the time the report was written only seven councils had an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population that was more than one per cent of their total population. According to the report:

"While some councils may feel that Aboriginal reconciliation 'is not an issue' for their municipality based on population numbers alone, there are grounds for councils to acknowledge these national principles [of reconciliation] in determining their priorities and goals for their communities" (Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 5).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Victoria remains small: in 2011, the overall percentage of Victorians identifying as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander was just 0.7 per cent of the population, with 1.5 per cent in regional Victoria and just 0.5 per cent in greater Melbourne (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011; id the population experts 2011).

The Toomnangi Report documents "positive examples of Indigenous policy and program initiatives" and "best practice case studies". One of the best practice case studies documented is Manningham City Council's



support of Aboriginal businesses through its "indigenous cultural heritage and arts program". The council partnered with Aboriginal businesses to present performing and visual arts events and has commissioned a major contemporary Aboriginal artwork for a council building (Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria 2002, 31).

The Victorian Local Government Aboriginal Engagement & Reconciliation Survey 2012 documents the extent to which in 2012 councils:

- flew the Aboriginal flag;
- acknowledged the traditional owners;
- had Aboriginal employment and representation in councils;
- · had cross-cultural training;
- documented and had strategic commitment to Aboriginal initiatives;
- protected, promoted and celebrated Aboriginal culture and heritage;
- provided services;
- supported Aboriginal businesses and Aboriginal tourism; and
- supported Aboriginal arts.

The study found that 60 councils reported they

supported Aboriginal arts by "commissioning artworks and performances, supporting exhibitions, and displaying artworks" (Reconciliation Victoria 2012, 7). Sixty-eight per cent reported that they display Aboriginal artworks in council building, 66 per cent reported that they "support local Indigenous artists through exhibitions" and 48% reported that they "commission works of art or performances from Indigenous artists" (Reconciliation Victoria 2012, 14). The study also identified barriers to greater reconciliation involvement on the part of councils. Three main barriers were identified:

- "lack of staff resources";
- "lack of financial resources"; and
- "lack of connection with local Aboriginal communities" (Reconciliation Victoria 2012, 23).

In contrast to these surveys, this study does not seek to document Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities of councils, but councils' policies in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts.



Cultural development planning



In a cultural planning process, the cultural policy-maker, the artist and/or cultural manager can become the gatekeepers between the sphere of cultural production —the world of ideas and production of meaning—and any area of policy making…"

(Bianchini 2013, 382)

In using the arts to contribute to reconciliation, and in grounding this approach in policies, councils are engaging in a process of cultural development planning. Cultural development planning is a strategic process that involves:

"planning of cultural activities to assist the realisation of a desired future; and

planning *for* a desired future of a culturally rich and vibrant community." (Cultural Development Network 2014)

Jon Hawkes in writing about "[c]ulture's essential role in public planning" has described the arts as "the paramount symbolic language through which shifting meanings are presented" (Hawkes 2001, 23).

For those councils that are committed to the vision of reconciliation, the desired future is one in which reconciliation and a shift in community values has been achieved. If the arts are seen as a symbolic language to present and explore new meanings and a vehicle for change in community values, then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities are an excellent fit with council reconciliation policies and cultural development planning in the reconciliation space.



Research Methods

Data was gathered from internet searches of the websites of all 79 councils in Victoria. Searches were conducted between September to November 2014. Council documents that referred to the concepts of reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts were identified and relevant policies were recorded.

Thirty-five councils were identified as potential case studies. The final sample of six case studies was selected to cover a broad range of locations and contexts. Councils are commonly categorised under the headings of rural, metropolitan and regional city councils. These three categories were used to select case studies. In addition, because population size impacts on councils' resources, councils with a range of population sizes were selected. As a result, the study was able to look at the impact of access to resources on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. The case studies were selected according to the following criteria:

- one rural council with a population under 15,000
- one rural council with a population between 15,000 and 25,000
- one rural council with a population over 25,000

- · one regional city council
- one inner metropolitan city council
- one outer metropolitan city council in growth corridor.

In addition, the three rural councils were selected from vastly different geographical areas—northern Victoria, southwest Victoria, and eastern Victoria.

Name of selected council	Location	Population in 2016
Gannawarra Shire Council	northern Victoria	10,150
Moyne Shire Council	southwest Victoria	16,587
East Gippsland Shire Council	eastern Victoria	44,833
Ballarat City Council	western Victoria	104,552
Port Phillip City Council	inner south metro	107,724
Hume City Council	outer north metro	199,448



Case studies

The case studies that follow provide an insight into the cultural development planning processes of six councils in Victoria in the area of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies and reconciliation. The case studies demonstrate the ways in which these councils constructed Aboriginal ad Torres Strait Islander arts policies to further the councils' respective reconciliation goals—"to assist the realisation" of the councils' visions of reconciliation in their communities (Cultural Development Network 2014).

In analysing the approaches of the councils in these case studies, this study utilises the concept of 'theory of change". The theory of change approach involves unearthing the "ideas and assumptions" that "link the program's inputs to its desired ends" (Weiss 1998, 55). The approach is interested in the specifics of why a program or strategy worked. The theory is a tool to understand how the "change process" is expected to work for "complex community initiatives" (Dunphy 2013, 13).

The approach has a set of components:

"The theory should clearly specify the long-term goal...

[T]he preconditions hypothesised as necessary for the achievement of this long-term goal should be fully articulated...

The various assumptions underlying the theory should be explicit... " (Collins & Clark 2013, 1).

The case studies describe each council's policy and describe key characteristics of the council—the council's location and population size. If there are local Registered Aboriginal Parties that are potential strategic partners these are also noted. ¹

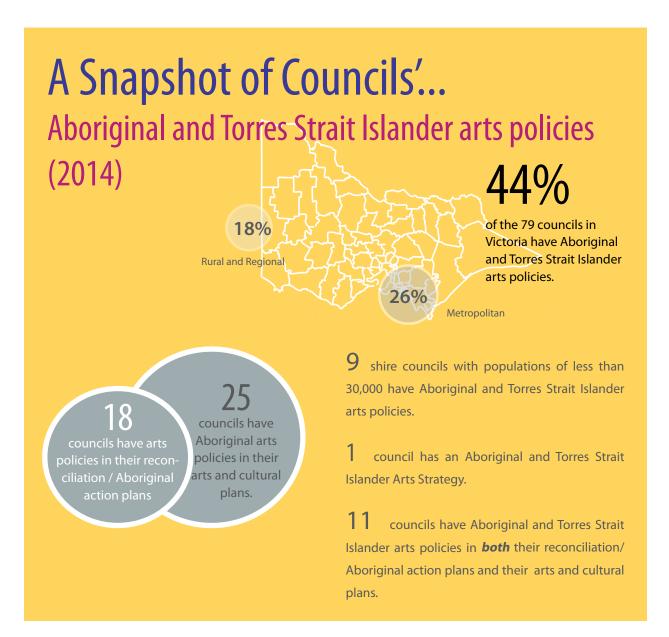
Recent policies that are yet to be formally adopted by councils are considered in preference to councils' older policy documents that have been adopted but will shortly be superseded because this study is forward-looking. Documents that cover a period that has passed (for example, where there is an arts and cultural plan for the period 2008-2012) are considered where a more recent version of the document does not exist.

For each case study, the apparent long-term goal and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts objectives were extracted. The objectives are understood as the outcomes that the councils are seeking to achieve through their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities. Finally, the breadth of the council's activities and how the council intends to achieve its objectives are described. The judgment of the author of this study was exercised because some of the causal links or assumptions are not explicit in the documents and the documents adopt different classifications and labels.



¹ Registered Aboriginal Parties are the bodies recognised by the Victorian government as representing the traditional Aboriginal owners of an area and these bodies have responsibilities under the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.

Overview





reconciliation/Aboriginal action plans	23%	23% of councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies within their Reconciliation/Aboriginal Action Plans or similar documents.
arts and cultural plans	32%	32% of councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies within their arts and cultural plans or similar documents.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts plans	1%	One council in Victoria has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts strategy.
public arts plans	6%	6% of councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies within their public arts plans or similar documents.
other council documents	6%	6% of councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies within other council documents.



Case studies

Gannawarra Shire Council

Classification: rural

Location: northern Victoria

Council office location: Kerang

Population projection 2016: 10,150

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin in 2011 (percentage of population): 1.6%

(Gannawarra 2013, 7)

Area: 3,732 sq km

Local Registered Aboriginal Party/ies¹:

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation
Relevant Gannawarra Shire Council documents:

Arts, Culture and Cultural Heritage Plan 2008-2012 Gannawarra 2025: Taking Up the Challenge

Long-term goal: The community has a strong "sense of place" and "local identity" that takes pride in Aboriginal heritage and history alongside non-Aboriginal history (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 4).

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

• The community values highly the "region's stories" that arise from the history of the local Aboriginal community and their "connection to country" (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 24).

- There is a high level of community awareness of the Aboriginal "role in the history of the region" as understood from the perspective of the local Aboriginal community (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 24).
- Tourism in the shire celebrates the community's Aboriginal heritage (Gannawarra Shire Council 2010, 32).

How the council will achieve its objectives:

The council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies are found in both its *Arts, Culture and Cultural Heritage Plan 2008-2012* and in *Gannawarra 2025: Taking Up the Challenge*. Information that underlie the council's policies includes:

- ♦ the local community has a "strong interest" in the local culture and heritage and "history and heritage, including Indigenous heritage" influence "local identity and sense of place" (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 4);
- ♦ "many families have lived in area for several generations" (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008,
 6);
- ♦ the Aboriginal heritage of the area is "one of the most significant in Victoria"; and
- the local Aboriginal heritage provides an opportunity for developing tourism initiatives



¹ Another relevant Aboriginal organisation is the Kerang Local Aboriginal Network

(Gannawarra Shire Council 2010, 32).

An action identified by council to provide further information to guide future actions is an audit of "cultural infrastructure" in the shire (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 2).

Gannawarra Shire Council celebrates National Reconciliation Week but does not have a position on what it understands the concept to involve. The council does not have a Reconciliation Action Plan or similar document.

Actions that council has identified that are able to further council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts objectives are:

♦ the utilisation of "brand imagery" and "streetscapes" to promote and celebrate local Aboriginal heritage;

♦ the development of events and programs, including in schools, showcasing Aboriginal art and heritage; and

♦ the development of protocols and partnerships with the local Aboriginal community to guide how these initiatives are undertaken (Gannawarra Shire Council 2010, 57-59).

The possible actions that council has identified in its publication *Gannawarra 2025: Taking Up the Challenge* are "indicative projects" or opportunities, rather than actions the council is committed to (Gannawarra Shire Council 2010, 58). The

actions therefore are not at this stage accompanied by measurable targets, nor is there an evaluation or review process documented. In its *Arts, Culture and Heritage Plan 2008-2012* council commits to "mak[ing] a budget allocation for improvements and/or additions to cultural infrastructure" but does not specify an amount or allocation to local Aboriginal arts and culture (Gannawarra Shire Council 2008, 2)

The council celebrates four local artists on its website, including a photograph and a short biography for each artist and images of examples of their artwork. One of these artists is a local Aboriginal artist. The biography includes that the artist grew up on a nearby mission in New South Wales, her connections to the Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri, Yithi Yithi, Nerri Nerri and Waddi Waddi peoples, her art, her local community involvement, and the importance of her culture and rural life to her. The promotion of her art alongside her story encourages the community to engage with, and value, a personal story of a member of the local Aboriginal community and through this develop a broader vision of the stories that make up the cultural heritage of the shire (Gannawarra Shire Council 2014).



Moyne Shire Council

Classification: rural

Location: southwest Victoria

Council office location: Port Fairy

Population projection 2016: 16,587

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin

in 2011 (percentage of population): 1.2% (Moyne

Shire Council 2013, 25)

Area: 5,478 sq km

Registered Aboriginal Party/ies within council

boundaries: 1

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal

Corporation

Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation

Martang Pty Ltd

Relevant Moyne Shire Council policy documents:

Arts and Culture Strategy 2012

Reconciliation Action Plan 2006

Statement of Commitment to the Local Indigenous Communities 2005²

Long-term goal: Reconciliation between Aborigi-

nal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Reconciliation is understood by council to involve:

practical reconciliation measures that address disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal peoples in the areas of: "health, employment, education, and general opportunity";

- ♦ "symbolic reconciliation of the first Australians";
- ◊ "connecting with one another";
- ◊ "justice, recognition and healing";
- ♦ Australians having "a better understanding of the past and how the past affects the lives of Indigenous communities today"; and
- ♦ achieving cooperative partnerships that recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' "interests and aspirations with respect". (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 5)

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

- The community has a high level of knowledge of, and values highly, Aboriginal culture.
- Local racism towards Aboriginal people is eliminated.
- There are high levels of employment and training opportunities for local Aboriginal people (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 13-16)



¹ Another relevant Aboriginal organisation is Framlingham Aboriginal Trust. Framlingham is the site of a former mission and was, with Lake Tyers, the site of the "first Aboriginal land rights victory in Australia" when an area of the Framlingham forest was handed over to the Trust (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2014)

² The Statement of Commitment is contained in the Reconciliation Action Plan.

How the council will achieve its objectives:

The council's Aboriginal arts policies are found in both its *Reconciliation Action Plan 2006* and its later *Arts and Culture Strategy of 2012*.

The council highlights the importance that it ascribes to Aboriginal art and culture in its *Arts and Culture Strategy* by including a specific "Indigenous" section in the strategy (Moyne Shire Council 2012,19). This serves to frame council's actions and emphasises the extent to which council prioritises Aboriginal arts and culture.

The council articulates clearly how it understands the concept of reconciliation (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 5). The council believes that for "Councillors, staff and members of the community" to contribute to reconciliation requires that they respect and understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Council sees being able to meaningfully participate in the community in a way that respects "cultural and heritage values" as a right (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 3).

The council is explicit about assumptions that underlie its approach. The council believes opportunities for Aboriginal people will follow from the non-Aboriginal community having greater respect for, and recognition of, Aboriginal "interests and aspirations" (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 5). The council is interested in shaping local

identity:

"A strong sense of who we are and how we feel about ourselves, our culture and our place in society affects how we behave and how we take responsibility for solving our own problems. Public awareness of reconciliation has increased significantly in the last decade and racist attitudes and behaviour are less tolerated" (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 5)

The council sees contemporary arts as a vehicle for communicating Aboriginal culture and stories. (Moyne Shire Council 2012, 19).

Actions that council is committed to that aim to, or have, furthered council objectives are:

- ♦ Artwork accompanies a signed copy of the council's *Statement of Commitment* and is displayed at all local schools to highlight council's leadership in valuing, respecting and promoting local Aboriginal culture.
- ♦ The council is to be involved in/support an annual Aboriginal cultural event/festival, a cultural week with arts activities, and development of a tourism trail (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 13). These events increase local knowledge of the traditional owners of the land and the degree to which Aboriginal culture is valued. An Aboriginal representative on council's art and culture committee facilitates a respectful and cooperative process



for initiatives (Moyne Shire Council 2012, 19). ³ To tackle racism and increase understanding the council is involved in developing "a memorial to the stolen generations".

♦ The council seeks to contribute to employment opportunities through exploring options for a "shared local or regional cultural officer" (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 14-16).

Moyne Shire Council has considered evaluation in its planning process: it includes measurable targets alongside its plan of action, and it's Reconciliation Action Plan has a built in "review and reporting process" (Moyne Shire Council 2006, 17).



³ In 2014 the council promoted on its website the Framlingham Trust 150th Celebration of the Framlingham Aboriginal Reserve which utilised the arts to highlight culture and history. "Having a broader non-indigenous community around us that is interested in understanding the truth of our joint history is important." Possum Clarke-Ugle, Chairman of the Trust, was quoted as saying in the Community HART Awards: Helping Achieve Reconciliation Together (Victorian Local Governance Association & Reconciliation Victoria 2014, 13)

East Gippsland Shire Council

Classification: rural

Location: eastern Victoria

Council office location: Bairnsdale Population projection 2016: 44,833

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin in 2011 (percentage of population): 3.2% (.id the population experts, 2011)

Area: 20,931 sq km

Registered Aboriginal Party/ies within council boundaries:¹

Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corpora-

Relevant East Gippsland Shire Council policy documents:

Reconciliation Action Plan 2014-2018 (Draft) Arts, Culture and Heritage 2011-2015 Strategic Plan

2013/2017 Council Plan

Long-term goal: Reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Reconciliation is understood by council to involve:

◊ "mutual understanding" improved and

harmonious relationships between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians (East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 1);

♦ partnerships between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians (East Gippsland Shire Council 2013, 2);

♦ representation and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage;

♦ respect for the "special contribution" of Aboriginal peoples;

♦ opportunities for Aboriginal peoples in community events, employment, arts projects and partnerships; and

♦ elimination of racism (East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 3-9).

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

- Members of the local Aboriginal community experience high levels of social inclusion and opportunities for economic participation;
- The community has a high level of respect for Aboriginal culture; and
- The community has a high level of appreciation of the contribution of local Aboriginal people to the local community (East Gippsland Shire Council 2013, 40; East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 3-9).



Other relevant Aboriginal organisations are:
 Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative
 East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation
 Lakes Entrance Aboriginal Health Association
 Local Indigenous Network
 Local Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee

How the council will achieve its objectives:

An assumption that underlies the objectives of the East Gippsland Shire Council Aboriginal arts policies is that "cultural change" within the council itself and the local community can be achieved through "increased mutual understanding and effective partnerships" (East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 1).

East Gippsland has strong Aboriginal organisations with whom the council is able to partner. The council identifies the East Gippsland Aboriginal Arts Corporation as a potential strategic partner (East Gippsland Shire Council 2011, 32).

Both the process of building partnerships and the art product are seen as important in increasing mutual understanding and celebrating Aboriginal culture. Funds are allocated to develop history and heritage markers for Aboriginal heritage sites (East Gippsland Shire Council 2011, 16, 28).

The draft *Reconciliation Action Plan* builds on the initiatives of the *Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategic Plan* and includes further and more ambitious arts activities that continue to have a focus on the process—and are always undertaken in partnership with local Aboriginal organisations. The proposed actions include:

◊ delivery of a major public art project;
 ◊ using local Aboriginal artwork on council documents;

♦ holding Aboriginal art exhibitions, including an annual exhibition in NAIDOC week in partnership with the East Gippsland Art Gallery and at the Brabuwooloong Gallery at the council's Forge Theatre and Art Hub; ♦ at least one touring Aboriginal performance piece to be staged at the Forge Theatre.; and ♦ sponsorship and support for events that celebrate Aboriginal achievements (East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 9-10).

There are ancillary actions that are focused on creating and supporting opportunities for members of the local Aboriginal community. These include:

- ♦ creating a directory of Aboriginal artists and events; and
- ♦ sourcing council gifts from local Aboriginal businesses (East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 6,12).

The approach of the East Gippsland Shire Council over several years has remained consistent with its assumption that cultural change is achieved through generating mutual understanding and developing and maintaining effective partnerships. The policy documents include measurable targets and the draft *Reconciliation Action Plan* includes a review and reporting process East Gippsland Shire Council 2014, 13).



Ballarat City Council

Classification: regional

Location: western Victoria

Council office location: Ballarat

Population projection 2016: 104,552

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin in 2011 (percentage of population): 1.2% (.id the

population experts, 2011)

Area: 740 sq km

Registered Aboriginal Party/ies within council boundaries:

Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation
Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation
Relevant Ballarat City Council policy documents:

Reconciliation Action Plan 2014-2017 (Draft)
Public Art Master Plan 2011

Long-term goal: Reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Reconciliation is understood by council to involve:

- ♦ respect for Aboriginal peoples, and their history and culture (Ballarat City Council 2014,10)
- ◊ appropriate acknowledgement, of Aboriginal peoples;
- ♦ "understanding of our shared past, and how this affects the lives of Aboriginal peoples today" (Ballarat City Council 2014,26)

- ♦ social inclusion for Aboriginal peoples;
- ◊ "closing the gap in disadvantage";
- ♦ "equal opportunities" and equality for Aboriginal peoples (Ballarat City Council 2014, 10).

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

- Reconciliation and the local Aboriginal community are celebrated and acknowledged;
- Members of the local Aboriginal community have high levels of opportunity to "express their aspirations" and help "shape their built environment" (Ballarat City Council 2011, 10,62)
- The city's vibrant cultural life is promoted;
- The community has a strong level of cohesion and connectedness;
- Cultural expression in the city is promoted;
- Members of the local Aboriginal community have high levels of opportunity; and
- The community has high levels of "understanding of our shared past, and how this affects the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today" (Ballarat City Council 2014, 26).

How the council will achieve its objectives:

The City of Ballarat's Aboriginal arts policies



include an assumption that the cultural richness and the appeal of the City of Ballarat is enhanced through Aboriginal arts. So, not only do policies seek to further the reconciliation movement, they also seek to benefit the City of Ballarat and its residents. The City of Ballarat emphasises visibility, promotion and celebration of contemporary significant and emerging Aboriginal arts:

♦ at least two "significant" "new and visible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks commissioned and installed";

♦ promote Aboriginal performing arts and hold at least one annual performance at Her Majesty's Theatre, Ballarat's historic and high profile theatre;

♦ at least two annual exhibitions of local emerging artists;

 the creation of an Aboriginal themed play area and Aboriginal public art installations; and

♦ Aboriginal art displayed at council locations including libraries, the Town Hall and Art Gallery (Ballarat City Council 2014, 19-22).

The City of Ballarat recognises public art as a powerful vehicle for furthering reconciliation. The council states: "[p]ublic art can contribute to a visible cultural diversity, celebration and acknowledgement of Reconciliation and local Indigenous groups and provide opportunities for people to participate in creating artworks that

will express their aspirations and contribute to shaping their built environment... The concept of 'Grand Designs' may reach beyond notions of monuments to nationhood... It may explore... grand narratives of history [and] ancient Indigenous histories... (Ballarat City Council 2014, 26).

The council's policies include actions with measurable targets. The draft Reconciliation Action Plan has a built in review and reporting process that includes monitoring of the implementation of the plan by the Koorie Engagement Action Group that advises council and by an internal council working group, as well as through annual reporting and a final review in 2018 (Ballarat City Council 2014, 28).



Port Phillip City Council

Classification: metropolitan

Location: inner south of Melbourne

Council office location: St Kilda

Population projection 2016: 107,724

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin in 2011 (percentage of population): 0.3% (.id the

population experts, 2011)

Area: 21 sq km

Registered Aboriginal Party/ies within council boundaries:

None¹

Relevant Port Phillip City Council policy documents:

Boonatung Ngargee Yulenj: Place Action Knowledge – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Strategy 2014/2017

Reconciliation Action Plan 2012-2015

Arts and Culture Policy (Nov 2011)

Council Plan 2013-2017

Social Justice Action Plan 2013 – 2016

Long-term goal: Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Reconciliation is understood by council to involve:

- ♦ acknowledgement of, and grief for, the loss experienced by the Aboriginal peoples "of their land, their children, their health and their lives":
- ♦ acknowledgement of the "right of Aboriginal peoples to live according to their own values and customs";
- ♦ respect for Aboriginal "sacred sites and significant places";
- ◊ recognition of the contribution made by Aboriginal peoples;
- mutual respect and harmony;
- ♦ tolerance;
- ♦ a formal instrument of reconciliation;
- ♦ social justice actions to ensure Aboriginal peoples "share on an equitable basis the resources that provide basic human rights such as: food, shelter, material goods, education, health and wellbeing, and access to information" (Port Phillip City Council 2012, 6-7).

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

Aboriginal arts have prominence in the local



^{♦ &}quot;acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the first people of this land and have survived European settlement";

¹ Relevant local Aboriginal organisations are: Boon Wurrung Foundation Urban South Local Indigenous Network

community;

- The community has a high level of awareness of Aboriginal issues;
- The community has a high level of understanding of Aboriginal issues;
- The community values Aboriginal heritage as an integral part of the cultural heritage of the municipality;
- The significance of local Aboriginal stories and places is understood by the community;
- There are high levels of artistic and economic opportunity for Aboriginal artists;
- There are partnerships in place between cultural agencies and Aboriginal artists (Port Phillip City Council 2011, 4, 6).

How the council will achieve its objectives:

The City of Port Phillip has the most extensive set of Aboriginal arts policies of all the councils in Victoria. It is the only council to have a standalone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts strategy.

It has a strong interlinking policy framework. The Council Plan includes a commitment by council to pursue reconciliation and recognises the contribution to the community made by members of the Aboriginal community (Port Phillip City Council 2013a, 27). The Arts and Culture Policy of 2011 includes a section on "Indigenous Arts" and commits to developing "an Indigenous arts framework"—the Boonatung Ngargee Yulenj

arts strategy that was completed in 2014 (Port Phillip City Council 2011, 4). The Arts and Culture Policy also states the council's continued commitment to holding the major annual Yalukit Willam Ngargee festival that takes place on the opening day of the St Kilda Festival. The Reconciliation Action Plan also reinforces the council commitment to an arts strategy that includes an annual arts program of events (Port Phillip City Council 2012, 17). Finally, the Social Justice Plan restates the commitment of council to reconciliation and to the development of an Aboriginal arts strategy (now completed); to implementing the Reconciliation Action Plan; and to developing an Aboriginal economic development strategy (Port Phillip City Council 2013b, 21-22). 2

The Boonatung Ngargee Yulenj: Place Action Knowledge – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Strategy 2014/2017 contains the specific actions to be undertaken to achieve council's objectives. Key actions in the arts strategy include:

♦ To "create and maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visibility" and promote Aboriginal heritage (Port Phillip City Council 2014, 9):



² Complementing this comprehensive interlinking strategy is a set of staff positions:

an Indigenous Arts Officer

an Indigenous Arts Officer Festivals and Events; and an Indigenous Policy Officer.

Both the Indigenous Policy Officer and Indigenous Arts Officer roles are currently filled by Aboriginal employees.

- » through the annual major Yalukit Willam Ngargee Festival that involves music, performance and art and a new smaller spin-off festival to coincide with the "changing of the seasons as informed by the Boon Wurrung calendar";
- » through at least one Aboriginal public art work commissioned annually;
- » by working towards a 10% increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art within the municipality generally, and a 5% increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art acquired for the Council collection;
- » by ensuring council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is on display at least 80% of the time, rotating through council spaces;
- » by increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art exhibitions, including through partnerships with other organisations;
- » by supporting and organising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander live music events (at least one annually)
- » by supporting the production of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander film, including for the St Kilda Film Festival;
- » by incorporating Aboriginal arts into a high profile sporting carnival;
- » by promotion of activities on the council

- website (Port Phillip City Council 2014, 9-13);
- ♦ To maintain best practice when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait artists;
- ♦ To create opportunities:
 - » for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists establish an artist in residency program with access to studio space and in conjunction with local art organisations; » in employment: by transitioning the Indigenous Arts Office Festivals and Events position to be an Aboriginal identified role, by offering more casual support roles for festivals and events; and by providing at least two cadetships;
 - » by offering practical support for local Aboriginal arts businesses;
 - » by offering an annual grant program to support Aboriginal artists to create new works and develop professional skills; and
 - » by supporting cultural tourism (Port Phillip City Council 2014, 15-17).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts strategy contains measurable targets. There is a review and reporting process built in to the *Reconciliation Action Plan* that will capture some of the actions undertaken as part of the Aboriginal arts strategy (Port Phillip City Council 2012, 20-21).



Hume City Council

Classification: metropolitan

Location: outer north of Melbourne

Council office location: Broadmeadows

Population projection 2016: 199,448

People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin

in 2011 (percentage of population): 0.6% (.id the

population experts, 2011)

Area: 504 sq km

Registered Aboriginal Party/ies within council

boundaries:

Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc.

Relevant Hume City Council policy documents:

Reconciliation Action Plan 2013-2017

Social Justice Charter 2007

Arts and Cultural Development Strategy 2009-2013

Long-term goal: Reconciliation between—and the bringing together of—Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Reconciliation is understood by council to involve:

♦ elimination of Aboriginal inequality and disadvantage in the areas of "health, income and living standards";

♦ recognition of the effect of past injustice on ongoing Aboriginal disadvantage; ♦ elimination of prejudice and racism;,

♦ understanding of Aboriginal peoples and their history;

♦ awareness of the shared history, following colonisation, of Aboriginal peoples with the broader community;

♦ meaningful relationships;

♦ sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal people:

♦ a whole of government approach with the involvement of the private sector, non-government organisations, Aboriginal communities and the broader community at large; and ♦ self-determination for Aboriginal peoples (Hume City Council 2013, 1-2).

Objectives of council's Aboriginal arts policies:

- Local Aboriginal community members have strong participation levels in health and wellbeing services;
- The local community is well informed about Aboriginal history and culture (Hume City Council 2013, 8,10).

How the council will achieve its objectives:

The council's Aboriginal arts policies are found in the council's *Reconciliation Action Plan*



2013-2017 and Arts and Cultural Development Strategy 2009-2013. The Reconciliation Action Plan is informed by principles contained in the Social Justice Charter 2007.

The City of Hume's Aboriginal arts policies have both a focus on the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal community, and on informing the broader community about Aboriginal history and culture. The City of Hume has a significant Aboriginal community: it has the fifth largest community of all metropolitan councils (Hume City Council 2013, 4).

There is an underlying assumption in the council's approach that the arts can be an effective vehicle to engage with 'hard-to-reach' communities. The council actions to achieve the objectives include:

♦ Offering culturally respectful arts programs—at least four each year of either an arts and culture, leisure or skill development program; and

♦ Commissioning, supporting or organising of Aboriginal visual arts displays to highlight to the broader community "the presence" of Aboriginal culture¹ (Hume City Council 2009, 25; Hume City Council 2013, 8,10).

Although the Hume *Reconciliation Action Plan* has a strong rights and social justice underpinning, the arts are not embraced by the council as a vehicle for communicating these messages, although the council does see the arts an effective vehicle to engage with marginalised communities.

The Reconciliation Action Plan has a built in review and reporting process that includes the preparation of an annual report and conducting of regular reviews (Hume City Council 2013, 13).



¹ One example of this support is the provision of land by the council to the local TAFE institute for its Aboriginal education centre, the Gunung-Willam-Balluk Learning Centre, and for the accompanying story poles public art and a performance space.

Learnings

Contribution

Currently 44 per cent of councils in Victoria have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. These policies range from single action strategies to multiple strategies contained in suites of cross-referenced documents. Councils are regularly committing to actions over three to four year periods. The collective contribution to reconciliation is significant, with considerable resources and will invested in raising the prominence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts within local communities, particularly through festivals and public art.

Council size

A relatively small population and relative lack of resources does not prevent councils from contributing effectively to reconciliation through arts policies. Nine of the 28 councils with populations of less than 30,000 have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. East Gippsland Shire Council, a medium-sized rural council (with a population of around 45,000) has one of the most comprehensive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies of the six councils selected as case studies. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of East Gippsland is 3.2 per cent of the population, compared with 1.5 per cent for regional Victoria and 0.7 per cent for Victoria as a whole.

Collaborations

Collaborations are being undertaken by councils in delivering their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities. These collaborations stem from councils' understandings that development of respectful relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a way of contributing to reconciliation. Collaborations are also used by councils to maximise outcomes with limited resources. Port Phillip aims to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art exhibitions through partnerships; and Moyne Shire Council—a small council with limited resources—supports events that are initiated by local Aboriginal organisations.

Assets

Councils are making use of community assets and are utilising their knowledge of their communities. Gannawarra identified that its residents have a strong interest in the local heritage and has a strategy focused on cultivating pride in both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal heritage. The Port Phillip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts strategy includes support for an Aboriginal film-maker to access an audience through the St Kilda Film Festival. Ballarat is to hold annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts events at the council's high profile historic theatre. Port Phillip holds its annual Yalikit Willam Ngargee Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander festival on the first day of the St Kilda Festival.

Prominence of policies

Councils have many priorities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies are at risk of being



on the margins of the work of councils.¹ Two effective ways that councils have increased the prominence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies are by establishing cross-referenced suites of documents, and by developing Reconciliation Australia-approved reconciliation action plans that require councils to review progress and report annually to Reconciliation Australia.

Measurable targets

Most of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies in the case studies had some kind of measurable targets identified, with five of the six listing targets. Policies are strengthened and evaluation better facilitated when targets are set and measured to track progress.

Interpretations of reconciliation

This report has noted the politicised nature of the concept of reconciliation. In all but one of the case study examples, reconciliation was the long-term goal of the councils' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies.² Each council has a slightly different understanding of what reconciliation means. It is not necessary for councils to all embrace the same under-

standing of reconciliation in order to have effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. If the council articulates clearly their interpretation of the concept; their interpretation fits within the accepted broad notion of reconciliation; and the policy is logically coherent, it can be effective.

The most controversial aspect to the concept of reconciliation is acknowledgement of the injustices that are embedded in the 'shared history' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians. Some councils shy away from this aspect. For others, while their understanding of reconciliation embraces this more controversial aspect, they do not address it in the actions attached to the policies. Possibly councils assume that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists will explore these challenging issues through their artwork and that it is not necessary for councils to explicitly commission and support arts that are focused on 'our shared history'.

Ambitious policies

The most ambitious and creative approaches in the case study examples are those where the councils view the arts as a vehicle for cultural change. For example, for Ballarat City Council public art can: contribute to reconciliation, "express aspirations", and "explore... grand narratives of history [and] ancient indigenous histories..." (Ballarat City Council 2014, 26). Hume City Council is an interesting contrast. It sees the arts as



¹ This risk is compounded by the small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in Victorian councils. On average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 0.5% of the population of metropolitan councils and 1.5% of the population of rural councils.

 $^{2\ \} While\ Gannawarra\ Shire\ Council\ does\ not\ use\ the\ term\ reconciliation, its\ long-term\ goal\ of\ "a\ community\ that\ takes\ pride\ in\ Aboriginal\ heritage"\ fits\ \ within\ the\ broad\ notion\ of\ reconciliation.$

having a more limited role as a vehicle to engage with 'hard-to-reach' communities. Perhaps because of this view of the arts—despite the council's strong reconciliation policies—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies are a very small part of the Hume reconciliation initiatives.

Conclusion

Councils in Victoria are making significant contributions to reconciliation through their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. Despite the liquid and disputed understandings of the concept, councils are navigating with great dexterity the reconciliation space. Councils have developed their own understandings of the concept of reconciliation and have developed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies that are consistent with these understandings.

Councils are utilising collaborations and partnerships with local Aboriginal communities, and local assets in delivering and strengthening their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts initiatives. There are untapped opportunities for councils to partner with other councils to deliver cost effective, ambitious, and far-reaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts initiatives.

This study demonstrates that councils need not have access to substantial resources to develop effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies. It

also demonstrates that there is great scope for councils to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies that are particularly suited to their communities and the council understanding of the concept of reconciliation

A focus on the 'shared history' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians is the most controversial aspect of the concept of reconciliation. Former Prime Minister Keating said: "if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine the opposite" and "we can have justice" and "can turn the goals of reconciliation into reality" (Keating 2000, 61-63). For those councils that concur, a focus on 'our shared history' (the history of Australia since 1788 that focuses on the interaction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Aboriginal Australians) is a valuable approach for longer-term cultural change and reconciliation in communities, yet councils appear tentative in exploring this space.

From a theory of change perspective, in order for councils to determine whether they are achieving long-term reconciliation goals through their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts policies it is necessary that councils articulate clearly their understandings of what reconciliation is and how it can be achieved. Councils that describe reconciliation to include community recognition and understanding of the injustices embed in 'our shared history', have opportunities to use the arts in particularly creative ways that enable the community to explore a challenging policy space.



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