

Innovate July 2021 – July 2023 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Cultural Warning

*With respect, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,
be aware that this document may contain images and
names of people who are deceased.*

Plan endorsed at Rous County Council meeting 21/04/2021
[Res 14/21], RAPAG meeting 24/05/2021 and
Reconciliation Australia, Endorsement, September 2021.



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN

INNOVATE



ROUS
COUNTY COUNCIL

About the Artist

Rous County Council acknowledges Sheldon Harrington Snr (1961-2015) as the artist for the images used in this document. Sheldon Harrington Snr is of Widjabul descendent and an artist. Sheldon played a key role in the development and execution of joint on-ground projects that protect and enhance natural and cultural values in water supply catchment areas (Water Walks and Reconnecting to Country), in association with Rous County Council, the Widjabul people, and the local communities. Through his work with Rous County Council, Sheldon integrated sustainability principles with local Aboriginal culture and best management practice for catchment lands, fulfilling a responsibility to contribute culturally appropriate material and content including lore, location-based information (not including sensitive site information) and other key messages.

Sheldon Harrington Snr was a key contributor to the partnership established between Rous County Council and the Widjabul people, which was established primarily to improve cultural awareness and to stress the importance of land and water to Country and people. The contract between Widjabul Elders and Rous County Council primarily deals with the need for all of us to look after land and water as people. This working relationship is about Rous County Council acknowledging the ancestry, heritage, Country, identity, and language of the people from this Country. Rous County Council acknowledges Sheldon as a proud Bundjalung man who contributed greatly to our joint community education and reconciliation projects. We are working together for future generations to make Australia a better place.



Our Vision for Reconciliation

Rous County Council's vision for a united nation ensures that we stand together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and that any work we (as a country) do is built on respect and understanding, with a willingness to learn from each other. To do this we must listen and learn about the true past of Australia: the pain, the strength, the sadness, the innovation, the loss, and the incredible resilience of an amazingly rich and diverse culture of the traditional peoples of this continent.

As an organisation that works with water and land, we acknowledge and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sustainability practices in land and culture and know that we must work together with the Traditional Custodians of current and future catchment and the natural resource areas managed by Rous County Council.

Bundjalung people have lived in the region for many thousands of years in a sustainable relationship with the natural environment. The water catchment areas managed by Rous County Council are a part of the natural landscape that forms the identity, culture, spirituality, and resource base for the Widjabul/Wiyabal people of the Bundjalung nation. Despite the significant changes of the past 200 years, the Widjabul/Wiyabal people still maintain a responsibility and deep relationship with the land and water. Rous County Council acknowledges this relationship and deeply values their traditional laws, knowledge and lessons about places and sustainability. Reconciliation aims to restore ecological, cultural, and social values that are unique to our region.

Rous County Council conducts all business activities in accordance with its values of **Integrity**, **Commitment**, **Trust**, **Social Responsibility** and **Accountability**. As an organisation, Rous County Council believes in the value of strong community engagement and is proud to have a respected and productive relationship with the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Rous County Council catchments sit. In 2002, through a collaborative partnership between Rous County Council and Traditional Custodians, two environmental sustainability projects, *Reconnecting to Country* and *Water Walk*, were delivered.



Our business

Rous County Council (Rous) is a multi-purpose county council delivering bulk water, weed biosecurity and flood mitigation services. Rous also operates Richmond Water Laboratories located in Lismore, which provides professional sampling, testing and analysis of water quality to NSW councils, private entities, and the public. Our constituent councils are Lismore, Ballina, Byron, and Richmond Valley.

Bulk water: Rous is the regional water supply authority and provides bulk water from its principal supply source at Rocky Creek Dam, which services around 100,000 people.

Weed biosecurity: Rous is the local control authority for weed biosecurity. Its operations cover an area of more than a million hectares, covering the areas of Lismore, Ballina, Byron, Richmond Valley, Kyogle and Tweed Shire councils under service level agreements.

Our councillors:

Cr Keith Williams (Chair)	Ballina Shire Council nominee
Cr Sharon Cadwallader (Deputy Chair)	Ballina Shire Council nominee
Cr Basil Cameron	Byron Shire Council nominee
Cr Simon Richardson	Byron Shire Council nominee
Cr Darlene Cook	Lismore City Council nominee
Cr Vanessa Ekins	Lismore City Council nominee
Cr Sandra Humphrys	Richmond Valley Council nominee
Cr Robert Mustow	Richmond Valley Council nominee

Our staff:

Rous currently employs 90 staff, of which two identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

RAPAG contact:

Guy Bezrouchko 02 6623 3800 guy.bezrouchko@rous.nsw.gov.au www.rous.nsw.gov.au

Rous County Council: Innovate 2021-2023

Overview

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is lead from all levels within Rous, from councillors to management and staff who champion, participate, and believe strongly in all aspects of Reconciliation. Continuing from the previous Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), Rous aims to work alongside the Aboriginal communities on whose Country they operate, and with Respect, move towards a more inclusive, mutually understood future.

Rous, together with our RAP Advisory Group members, have built a long-standing relationship over some years. We all agree to learn and share together for a better, stronger future in our region.

While the RAP is championed at all levels, the Group Manager Corporate and Commercial, Guy Bezrouchko, holds the designated role of RAP Secretary within Rous.

Reconciliation Action Plan Advisory Group (RAPAG)

Role of the RAPAG

The role of this group is to set the direction for reconciliation between Rous and the wider community. This group meets quarterly in Council Chambers, and once a year on Country. The agenda is set by the Chair and Secretary, however RAPAG members may make additions to the agenda at any time. The group works together in a respectful and passionate manner, and over the years, Rous has seen relationships grow between the community and its service, however, note there is much more to do.

Current members of the RAPAG:

Cr Vanesa Ekins	Chair (Rous)
Aunty Irene Harrington	Traditional Custodian of Council catchment area *
Roy Charles Gordon	Traditional Custodian of Council catchment area on behalf of Aunty June Gordon, Widjabul Elder *
Michael Ryan	Representative of the Bundjalung Elders Council *
CEO	Jali Local Aboriginal Land Council *
CEO	Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Council *

Guy Bezrouchko	Secretary (Rous)
Phillip Rudd	General Manager (Rous)
Emma Walke	Consultant *
Kris Cook	Community *
Mick Roberts	Community *
Anthony Acret	NRM Planning Coordinator (Rous staff)
Helen McNeil	Group Manager People and Performance (Rous staff)
Michael McKenzie	Future Water Strategy Project Manager (Rous staff)
Andrew Logan	Group Manager Planning and Delivery (Rous staff)

* *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander RAPAG member.*

From time to time, Rous invites other people with content-specific knowledge and staff of partnering organisations such as land councils, to the RAPAG meetings.

Our [Innovate 2021-2023 RAP](#) begins to build on the foundations, goals, challenges and wins of the past three years, and aims to consolidate and increase our engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We will focus on our relationships with an intent to increase representatives in the Advisory Group to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from our recently increased areas have visibility and an opportunity to provide input into the work we do. Rous is continuing to encourage staff to become a part of the Advisory Group and learn and share alongside our Elders and community members.

New input will bring new ideas and new ways of doing things in the community.

Our focus areas

1. Respectful Community Involvement underpinned by shared understandings through cultural awareness and learning about our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, lands, history and cultures.

2. Real Work on Land through understanding not only environmental aspects, but also cultural and historical aspects in the areas that Rous operates.

3. Strengthening the Tone of our relationship and building on our past successes through employment, training and commercial opportunities.

We are excited to aim higher and plan for new ideas and new input, which will strengthen Rous' place in the community alongside our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners towards reconciliation.

Key achievements



Relationships

To ensure that the work we are doing shows a strong respect for the history of the land and its people; strong relationships are vital. As an organisation, we want to work with the local Aboriginal peoples in reciprocal knowledge sharing, learning and celebrating national events and campaigns that benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; and forming partnerships built on mutual respect towards reconciliation.

Administration Traineeship Chelsea Hippie



Ngulingah Aboriginal Land Council Working on Country Skills and Knowledge Sharing

As the region's bulk water, weed biosecurity and flood mitigation authority, Rous has a role in managing the region's natural resources and share this responsibility with Ngulingah Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC). In 2019-2020, we had the opportunity to collaborate with Ngulingah by supporting the development of Ngulingah LALC's WHS policies and procedures.

This brought our staff together to form strong relationships and to recognise the synergy between our organisations. We explored how Rous bush regeneration and weed biosecurity officers can collaborate with Ngulingah LALC rangers to share knowledge and ideas for mutual growth. In June 2019, these rangers were invited to present at the Lismore Biosecurity Forum hosted by Rous.

NAIDOC 2019

Rous attends the Lismore NAIDOC day held in the Lismore Showgrounds, traditional lands of the Widjabal/Wyabul peoples in this region. In 2019, we took our Richmond and Brunswick Water Catchment Trailer (a 3D working diorama of the region's water supply and dam system). Rous staff attended to speak with the community about the region's water supply and to experience NAIDOC more generally.

More than 100 people visited the trailer, talking with staff and interreacting with the display; even though it rained! Rous also worked with NAIDOC organisers to supply food and beverages to Elders in the Elders tent during the day. It was a great opportunity for Rous staff to meet and talk with Elders from Lismore and surrounds.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Celebrate and participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW) by providing opportunities to build and maintain relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.	Hold at least one internal event for NRW each year.	May 2022, 2023.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Register our NRW event via Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May 2022, 2023.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Support an external NRW event.	May 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Ensure our RAPAG participates in an external event to recognise and celebrate NRW.	May 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Extend an invitation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to share their reconciliation experiences or stories.	May 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Encourage staff to participate in external events to recognise and celebrate NRW.	May 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Circulate NRW information to staff and invite comment/response.	May 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes.	Continue to implement the current engagement plan to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	Reviewed monthly: 2021 - 2023. Reported quarterly to RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Discuss engagement plan at each RAPAG meeting to ensure the plans in place are still appropriate; change as required.	March 2022, 2023. July 2021, 2022. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022. Review: March 2022, 2023.	Future Water Project Manager.		
	Meet with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to develop guiding principles for future engagement.	March 2022.	Future Water Project Manager.		
	Explore and develop innovative ways to ensure Rous works collaboratively with Aboriginal knowledge-holders with the Rous' Future Water Strategy.	March 2022.	Future Water Project Manager.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP to promote reconciliation across our business and sector.	Implement and review a strategy to communicate our RAP to all internal and external stakeholders.	30 June 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Promote reconciliation through ongoing active engagement with all stakeholders.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022. December 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Ensure the Innovate 2021-2023 RAP is included in Council's Community and Engagement Strategy.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022. December 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies.	Conduct a review of HR policies and procedures to identify existing anti-discrimination provisions and future needs.	Completed by: March 2022.	Human Resources Manager.		
	Develop, implement and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation.	Completed by: March 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to consult on our anti-discrimination policy.	Completed by: March 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism.	March 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
Work with Elders and Custodians of the lands within the four constituent council areas on planning and projects of cultural significance.	Consult with Widjabul/Wiyabal and Bundjalung Elders, local Aboriginal land councils, Aboriginal advisory groups, and relevant Aboriginal organisations on issues of cultural importance.	Reviewed quarterly at RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Include local Aboriginal peoples, Elders and Traditional Custodians in planning and co-designing projects of cultural significance.	Reviewed quarterly at RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2021, 2022. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Future Water Project Manager.		



Respect

Rous' work relates to management of weed biosecurity and the management of the regional water supply. This work takes place on Aboriginal land. Rous acknowledges the importance of this land—traditionally, historically and culturally—to the Aboriginal people of the North Coast of NSW. We also acknowledge the unknown history of these lands, held by the communities on which our operations take place. Our plans may also be affected and have an effect on these lands and peoples. We understand the effects of history and colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and endeavour to ensure that these atrocities are not repeated now or in any future work we undertake.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Engage employees in understanding the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols, such as Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, to ensure there is a shared meaning.	Develop, implement, and communicate a cultural protocol document for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.	December 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Review and if required, build on the current list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country and maintaining respectful partnerships.	June 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Include an Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of important internal and external meetings.	Review quarterly at RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Invite Aboriginal people and Traditional Custodians into our office to explain the significance of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.	March 2022, 2023.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Where possible, invite Traditional Custodians to deliver a Welcome to Country at significant events.	Review quarterly at RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Organise and display an Acknowledgment of Country plaque in our office/s or on our office building.	Review: June 2022, 2023.	HR Manager.		
Celebrate and recognise dates of significance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	Add Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates of significance to Council calendars	13 February 2022, 2023. Anniversary of the Apology.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Promote local community events recognising dates of significance to all staff.	May 2022, 2023: National Sorry Day Reconciliation Week. July 2021, 2022: NAIDOC.	Communication and Engagement Coordinator.		
Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to engage with	Ensure all staff have the option to attend at least one NAIDOC Week event annually.	July 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
their cultures and communities by celebrating NAIDOC Week.	In consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, hold an internal or external NAIDOC Week event. - Provide interactive stall at Lismore NAIDOC. - Hold an event (i.e. movie night for staff during NAIDOC).	July 2021, 2022.	Communication and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Support an external NAIDOC Week community event.	July 2021, 2022.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Contact our local NAIDOC Week Committee to discover events in our community.	June 2022, 2023.	Communications and Engagement Coordinator.		
	Review HR policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.	May 2022, 2023.	HR Manager.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Engage employees in cultural learning opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.	Develop and implement a cultural awareness training strategy for our staff that defines cultural learning needs of employees in all areas of our business and considers various ways cultural learning can be provided (online, face to face workshops, or cultural immersion).	Review: August 2021. March 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Investigate opportunities to work with local Traditional Owners and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultants to develop cultural awareness training.	Review: August 2021. March 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial		
	Provide opportunities for RAPAG members, RAP champions, HR managers and other key leadership staff to participate in cultural training.	March 2022, 2023.	Cultural Awareness Training Officer.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Promote Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride online tool to all staff.	Review quarterly after RAPAG meeting: April 2022. July 2021, 2022. September 2021, 2022. October 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Walk on Country with Elders to learn from this knowledge and better understand the significance of the land.	March 2022, 2023.	Cultural Awareness Training Officer.		



Opportunities

In line with respect and relationships, our plan ensures that Rous embeds strategies within its Strategic Plan to ensure opportunities for employment, capacity building and knowledge-sharing are sought at all levels, within all programs. The opportunities listed in our plan are evidence of the work we are doing with the knowledge-holders and community toward reconciliation.

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
Investigate opportunities to improve and increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes within our workplace.	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment and Retention Strategy.	30 June 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Engage with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on employment strategies, including professional development.	March 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Advertise all vacancies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.	Reviewed quarterly: March 2022, 2023 August 2021, 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Review HR and recruitment procedures and policies to ensure there are no barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and future applicants participating in our workplace.	Review: June 2022, 2023.	HR Manager.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional development strategy.	March 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation on recruitment and selection panels.	June 2022, 2023.	HR Manager.		
	Include in all job advertisements, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are encouraged to apply.'	Review: July 2021.	HR Manager.		
	Engage with external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or consultants to advise on recruitment, employment and retention strategies, including professional development.	Review: July 2021.	HR Manager.		
Investigate opportunities to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity within our organisation.	Review and update procurement policies and procedures to identify barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to supply our organisation with goods and services.	Review: June 2022, 2023.	Procurement and Properties Coordinator.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Develop and communicate to staff a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses that can be used to procure goods and services.	July 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Develop one commercial relationship with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned business.	July 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Investigate Supply Nation membership.	Review: December 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
Continue to develop and implement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways.	Provide one traineeship within the RAP period.	Traineeship: January 2022.	HR Manager.		
	Develop at least one School-based traineeship within the RAP period.	School-based traineeship: July 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Develop a recruitment strategy to ensure, where practicable, continuing employment opportunities for trainee positions, or pathways into other opportunities within Rous.	August 2021, 2022.	HR Manager.		
Investigate opportunities to increase pro bono activities.	Work with local Aboriginal land councils (LALCs) to identify areas of collaboration.	Identify opportunities: February 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Deliver at least three pro bono activities within the period with LALCs.	July 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		



Governance tracking, progress and reporting

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
RAPAG actively monitors RAP development and implementation of actions, tracking progress and reporting.	RAPAG oversees the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.	July 2021.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are represented on the RAPAG.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Review Terms of Reference for the RAPAG.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Continue to engage with key community stakeholders to join the RAPAG.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Meet at least four times per year to drive and monitor RAP implementation.	March 2022, 2023. June 2022, 2023. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
Report RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings to Reconciliation Australia.	Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia annually.	September 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Investigate participating in the Workplace RAP Barometer.	May 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		

Action	Deliverable	Timeline	Responsibility	Status	Comment
	Continue to work with systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities.	September 2021, 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
Report RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings internally and externally.	Publicly report our RAP achievements, challenges, and learnings.	July 2022, 2023.	General Manager.		
	Use various outlets to report and promote Rous RAP achievements and challenges including: - RAPAG meetings - Rous Council meetings - Newsletters - Local 'grapevine' emails such as Lismore City Council - News stories, Koori Mail, etc.	Review quarterly at RAPAG meeting: March 2022, 2023. June 2022. August 2021, 2022. November 2021, 2022.	Communication and Engagement Coordinator.		
Review, refresh and update RAP.	Review, refresh, and update RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.	December 2022.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		
	Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal feedback and endorsement.	January 2023.	Group Manager Corporate and Commercial.		