Council’s Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) has been developed through the commitment and dedication of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Council staff and Reconciliation Australia.
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Cessnock City Council acknowledges that within its local government area boundaries are the Traditional Lands of the Wonnarua people, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people. We acknowledge these Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and operations are located, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now live within the Cessnock Local Government Area.

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document contains images and names of deceased people. Images displayed in this plan may not be reproduced or redisplayed without permission from the image owner and Cessnock City Council.
Foreword from the Mayor

Cessnock City is an area of great social, cultural and spiritual importance to the people of the Wonnarua Nation and neighbouring Nations of Awabakal and Darkinjung. In the 2011 Census it was recorded that 4.8 per cent of the Cessnock City population identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander—a number well above the national average.

For a number of years we have shown our commitment to building relationships with the Aboriginal community. For many years we have celebrated NAIDOC Week, and each year community participation and engagement in the week grows. Our 2015 calendar ran the largest number of events to date, attracting over 1400 participants. In 2015 we marked National Reconciliation Day, inviting local Elders to an afternoon tea in the Council Chambers. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee was re-established in 2013 and has been actively engaged in working with council on a range of projects, including this RAP.

I believe that through the actions in this plan, and future plans, we will develop a culture that builds positive, productive relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, free from racism and discrimination.

Council will improve the cultural awareness and understanding of staff within the organisation and create genuine opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access and succeed as valued employees and community partners with Council.

This RAP provides the framework for us to make a difference—as a Council and as individuals. By actively embracing opportunities to work with, employ and partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our organisation will be richer as will our wider community. The outcome will be a better future for us all.

I would like to sincerely thank the staff and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee who have worked to initiate, develop and champion this plan. In particular, I would like to mention the work of the late Uncle Les Elvin in supporting, encouraging and enabling reconciliation in our community.

I am so proud to endorse our RAP—the first in a series of plans—as reflection of our commitment to create meaningful, effective change within our organisation and the community.

Councillor Bob Pynsent
MAYOR OF THE CITY OF CESSNOCK
The major part of the Cessnock Local Government Area lies within the boundaries of the traditional land of the Wonnarua people, who are the custodians of this land.

In the year 2013 the Mayor of Cessnock City, Councillor Bob Pynsent and councillors advertised that Cessnock City Council was seeking an expression of interest from our community to form an Aboriginal Advisory Committee with the intentions to acknowledge and respect local Aboriginal history, cultural heritage and peoples.

The Aboriginal Advisory Committee was formed and soon began addressing a number of long time issues with high success.

The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been a challenge in the local community and was made a priority on our agenda.

The Aboriginal Advisory Committee soon recommended to the Council to develop a RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan) based on a template developed by Reconciliation Australia to ensure that the Council’s reconciliation commitments were translated into meaningful and measurable actions.

The proposed RAP should develop a culturally supportive environment, and provide career pathways and avenues for professional development within the Council to support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Uncle Les Elvin
LOCAL WONNARUA ELDER

Sadly, Uncle Les Elvin passed away before this plan was finalised. Cessnock City Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee would like to acknowledge the invaluable contribution and guidance of Uncle Les in the development of this plan, and in working for reconciliation in our community.
Our Vision for Reconciliation

Two paths, walking together
About the Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan

The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is about organisations from every sector turning good intentions into real actions and rising to the challenge of reconciling Australia. A RAP is a business plan that uses a holistic approach to create meaningful relationships, enhanced respect and promote sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The RAP program includes four types of RAPs, each offering a different level of engagement and support.

In developing a Reflect RAP, Cessnock City Council commits to completing the following actions over the next 12 months to ensure we are well positioned to implement effective and mutually beneficial initiatives as part of future Reconciliation Action Plans. Our future RAPs will identify actions for Relationships, Respect and Opportunities specific to our business and our sphere of influence.

This Reflect RAP will allow our organisation to focus on building relationships both internally and externally, and raise awareness with our stakeholders to ensure there is shared understanding and ownership of our RAP within our organisation. Development of our future RAPs will involve consultation with staff across our organisation including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or stakeholders to achieve our vision for reconciliation.

Our Vision for Reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation is for Cessnock City Council to build unity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia’s First Peoples and respect their connections to lands, waters, places and cultures.

In particular, Cessnock City Council recognises the people of the Wonnarua Nation and the neighbouring Nations of Darkinjung and Awabakal.

We will work to support the national objectives of closing the social, economic and health gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australia community and achieving reconciliation in Australia.

We will ensure reconciliation is alive in our organisation by increasing our understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and current issues, by being accountable, and taking responsibility for change.

By walking together along our two paths, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other community members will work with Council to build a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
Cessnock City Council delivers local government services to the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA). These services include: community events; libraries; performing arts centre; community planning; recreation and community facilities; cemeteries; waste services; construction and maintenance of roads, footpaths, cycleways, bridges, drainage and civil infrastructure; road safety programs and facilities; parking enforcement; animal management; strategic land use planning; natural environmental planning and management; development planning and assessment; building compliance and safety; public health inspections; regulation enforcement programs; environmental pollution monitoring & enforcement; on-site sewage management system inspections, and emergency management.

The LGA comprises an area of 1,966 square kilometres in the Hunter Valley Region of NSW. The LGA is predominantly situated on the lands of the Wonnarua Nation, and within its boundaries are many significant Aboriginal sites. Wonnarua means “land of hills and plains”.

European settlement since the 1830s has seen the establishment of pastoral lands, the coal mining industry, the viticulture industry and more recently, tourism.

The LGA is home to many localities and places with Aboriginal names and histories. Mount Yengo, located in Yengo National Park, is of particular significance to Aboriginal peoples. It is the place from where Baiame jumped to return to the spirit world after he had created the lakes, rivers, mountains and caves in the area. When Baiame jumped towards the sky, he flattened the top of Mount Yengo, and that flat top can still be seen today.

Mount Yengo and its surrounds are home to many important sites of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural association. The Wollombi Valley is also home to many other significant sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Towns, villages and localities in the LGA bearing Aboriginal names include Kurri Kurri (meaning “the beginning” or “the first”), Wollombi (“meeting place” or “meeting of the waters”), Congewai, Nulkaba, Laguna and Kalingo.

The current population of the Cessnock LGA is 54,979 (ABS Estimated Resident Population 3218.0, 2014). In the 2011 Census, of the then 50,840 resident population, 2,457 people identified as being an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person (ABS Census of Population and Housing 2011). This represents 4.8% of the total population, which is higher than the Australian and NSW state populations of 2.5% and the NSW regional population of 4.7%.

As at August 2014, Cessnock City Council employed 326 staff (286 full time equivalent staff). Cessnock City Council Equal Employment Opportunity data indicates that 6 employees (2.6% of staff, based on 81% of employees responding to an Equal Employment Opportunity questionnaire) identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.
“To encourage the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, heritage and culture.”
In April 2014, Cessnock City Council (Council), following a recommendation from its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, resolved to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Council believes that adoption and implementation of a RAP will provide a framework to guide its developing relationship with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in particular those people who live within the Cessnock LGA.

It will provide opportunities for Council to demonstrate its commitment to reconciliation at a local level, develop strategies and actions that improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, and raise awareness within the organisation and the wider community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the issues that are of concern to those residents.

Our RAP has been developed by Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, whose members comprise Aboriginal community representatives and councillors, advised by Council staff including the Community and Cultural Engagement Manager and the Human Resources Manager.

The development of a RAP was initially proposed by the Committee and its subsequent recommendation was adopted by Council. Two of the Committee’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives and the Community and Cultural Engagement Manager attended a Reconciliation Australia workshop on developing a RAP, and in collaboration with the Committee drafted the Plan.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives engaged their respective networks during the period of preparing the draft Plan. Ten people were involved in the development of Council’s RAP, which includes the Community and Cultural Engagement Manager, the Human Resources Manager, the Economic Development Manager and seven members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee.

Our RAP is championed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee and Council’s Community and Cultural Engagement Manager. We will establish a RAP Working Group as our first action following the endorsement of our RAP, which will be made up of representatives of each area of Council.
Our Partnerships / Current Activities

Cessnock City Council currently engages with the Barkuma Neighbourhood Centre, Black Creek Aboriginal Corporation, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, along with other interested government and non-government agencies, supporting the delivery of programs celebrating NAIDOC Week.

NAIDOC Week 2015 included a range of activities organised and hosted by the Black Creek Aboriginal Corporation, Barkuma Neighbourhood Centre, Cessnock City Library, Cessnock Youth and Community Outreach Service, Cessnock Regional Art Gallery and the Samaritans Information and Neighbourhood Centre Cessnock.

Council also delivers an Acknowledgment of Country at the beginning of its Council meetings and at civic events.

The implementation of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a key action in working towards Objective 1.1.2 of Council’s 2013 – 2017 Revised Delivery Plan Planning for our people our place our future - Engage with the Indigenous community.

Council’s recently expired Cessnock Local Government Area Social and Cultural Plan 2009 – 2014 Places, spaces and faces also included a number of actions seeking to embrace diversity through greater Council and community engagement with and the participation in activities of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2013, Council re-established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee. The Committee meets and reports to Council on its outcomes on a regular basis. The Committee has a membership of three Councillors and up to eight representatives from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with the intention that the majority of members are from the Wonnarua nation. The community representatives are members who have nominated as individuals, not as representatives of organisations.

The Committee’s purpose, as outlined in its Terms of Reference, is:

1. To provide a forum within the Cessnock LGA where issues of interest to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can be raised.

2. To raise local awareness of issues of interest to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

3. To encourage the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, heritage and cultures.

4. To provide Council with strategic advice and guidance in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

5. To engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with local government.

6. To maintain and enhance positive working relationships between Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Since its re-establishment, the primary focus of the Committee has been to develop a RAP. It has also provided feedback on the development of an appropriate form of words for Council’s Acknowledgement of Country and a Cessnock LGA Aboriginal Heritage Study received by Council.
During the period January to December 2016, Cessnock City Council commits to:

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| Establish a RAP Working Group to monitor and track the implementation of Council’s RAP | Council, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager | February 2016 | • Establish a RAP Working Group to monitor and track implementation of the Plan.  
• Develop a Terms of Reference for the RAP Working Group. |
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| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to provide guidance to the RAP Working Group and oversee RAP implementation | Council and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee | January 2016 | • Distribute the Terms of Reference for Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to employees and make it available on Council’s website.  
• The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to meet with the RAP Working Group at least 4 times a year to provide cultural guidance and monitor progress. |
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| Develop and maintain external relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Community and Cultural Engagement Officer | March 2016 | • Identify and develop a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, businesses and stakeholders within the Cessnock Local Government Area to enable greater engagement between Council and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, and build relationships that will contribute to development of future RAPs.  
• Organise and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, businesses and stakeholders within the Cessnock Local Government Area on Council’s website. |
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| Provide the opportunity for Council staff to build relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community by celebrating National Reconciliation Week | Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Community and Cultural Engagement Officer | 27 May - 3 June 2016 | • In collaboration with the wider community, and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in particular, Council will organise an event to recognise and celebrate NRW annually.  
• Distribute Reconciliation Australia’s NRW factsheet to raise awareness of the significance of this event.  
• Register all Council’s NRW events on Reconciliation Australia’s website to capture support and participation. |
| Raise internal awareness of Council’s RAP | Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager | June 2016 | • Develop and execute a plan to raise awareness across the organisation about Council’s RAP including:  
- communicate RAP updates in the staff newsletter  
- identify internal reconciliation champions and publish their contributions in the staff newsletter  
- deliver a presentation on Council’s RAP commitment to all areas of Council to ensure employees have an understanding of how their department can contribute to Council’s RAP  
- develop a communications strategy to ensure continuous communication to internal and external stakeholders around Council’s commitment to reconciliation and achievements to date. |
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<td>Investigate cultural development opportunities for Council</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Human Resources Manager</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>• Develop and implement a business case for a staff cultural awareness training program with initial delivery to key staff.</td>
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<td>July 2016</td>
<td>• Review Council's staff induction process to include key elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training program introduced by Council.</td>
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<td>December 2016</td>
<td>• Capture baseline data of employee's current knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions to inform future cultural training sessions for Council.</td>
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<td>Celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements by participating in NAIDOC Week activities</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Community and Cultural Engagement Officer</td>
<td>July 2016</td>
<td>• Continue to build relationships with external groups to encourage participation in Council's NAIDOC Week calendar of events, and expand the program of activities.</td>
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<td>• Encourage the participation of Council’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the planning and delivery of NAIDOC Week celebrations.</td>
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<td>• Participate or host one internal NAIDOC Week event and extend an invitation to external organisations/groups that Council has developed relationships with.</td>
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<td>• Promote community NAIDOC Week events in our local area.</td>
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<td>Raise internal understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols</td>
<td>Principal Community Planner, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager, Human Resources Manager</td>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>• Develop a plan to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols for Council staff including understanding the meaning and significance of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, and information on local significant sites, landmarks etc.</td>
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<td>July 2016</td>
<td>• Investigate the opportunity for Council to explore additional ways of appropriately acknowledging Traditional Owners of the local area (such as displaying an acknowledgement upon entering the city, including an acknowledgement in employee signature blocks etc.)</td>
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<td><strong>Consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and retention within Council</strong></td>
<td>Human Resources Manager</td>
<td>March 2016</td>
<td>• Investigate the opportunity to offer career pathways into Council such as implementation of Elsa Dixon school based traineeships in selected areas of Council.</td>
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<td>December 2016</td>
<td>• Capture baseline data on current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to inform future employment.</td>
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<td>December 2016</td>
<td>• Scope and develop a business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment within Cessnock City Council’s Workforce Plan based on baseline data obtained regarding current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.</td>
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<td><strong>Consider supplier diversity for Council</strong></td>
<td>Procurement Manager, Depot and Building Services Manager, Economic Development Manager</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>• Continue to support, promote and network Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses by providing information for business development and expansion, awareness of grant opportunities and provision of information that supports grant applications, for example business and demographic statistics.</td>
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<td>January 2016</td>
<td>• Promote businesses in the LGA including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses via the Cessnock City Council Economic Development electronic newsletter ‘e-News Monitor and Advance Cessnock City website’.</td>
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<td>June 2016</td>
<td>• Continue to host the Les Elvin Kungerra Gallery, to enable local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to showcase and sell their products.</td>
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<td>June 2016</td>
<td>• Continue to provide procurement opportunities to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers of goods and services, in accordance with Council’s Procurement Policy.</td>
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<td>June 2016</td>
<td>• Review Council’s Procurement Policy to ensure there are no barriers for procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.</td>
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<td><strong>Other RAP opportunities</strong></td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Principal Community Planner, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
<td>• Organise and host a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and agencies, providers of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities along with internal and external stakeholders to identify further opportunities to inform the development of Cessnock City Council’s next RAP for 2017 - 2019.</td>
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<td><strong>Build support for Council’s RAP</strong></td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Principal Community Planner, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager</td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>• Council will commit to defining and providing the necessary resources to enable our RAP to be implemented.</td>
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<td>January 2016</td>
<td>• Data will be collected to enable measurement of our progress and successes.</td>
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<td>September 2016</td>
<td>• Council will complete and submit Reconciliation Australia’s RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to capture learnings and achievements of Council's RAP.</td>
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<td>October 2016</td>
<td>• Council’s annual report will include information on the implementation of the Plan.</td>
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<td>December 2016</td>
<td>• An evaluation of the RAP will be conducted in 2016 with the outcome reported to Council.</td>
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<td><strong>Review and refresh RAP</strong></td>
<td>Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee, Principal Community Planner, Community and Cultural Engagement Manager</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
<td>• Draft and refresh a new RAP for Council based on learnings, achievements and challenges experienced in previous RAP.</td>
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<td>November 2016</td>
<td>• Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for feedback and formal endorsement.</td>
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Contact Details:
Community and Cultural Engagement Manager
e | council@cessnock.nsw.gov.au  p 02 4993 4100