

# **TLA's Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 2024-27**



### Acknowledgement of country

Tasmania Legal Aids, Board, executive, managers and staff acknowledge and pay our respect to Palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of this island, Lutruwita/Tasmania, where we live and work.

## Message from the Director

Tasmania Legal Aid is a major provider of legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who represent at least ten percent of our clients who received a new grant of legal aid in 2021/22. For context, in 2022–2023, TLA provided new 5,099 grants of aid to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In the 2021 Census, 30,000 people in Tasmania identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This represents 5.4% of the State's population, up from 4.6% in 2016 and 4.0% in 2011<sup>1</sup>.

Of the 30,000 people who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin:

- 91.9% identified as Aboriginal
- 4.1% identified as Torres Strait Islander
- 4.1% identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

Tasmania's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice, youth justice and child safety systems, and are significantly more likely to experience detention.

In our Strategic Plan 2023–27, we committed to providing high quality, inclusive and accessible legal services to the Tasmanian community, delivered by skilled and well supported staff. We committed to listening and responding to the needs of our clients and building on our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are doing this by developing and implementing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commitment Plan in consultation with our Palawa Advisory Group.

The development of this Plan is the continuation of a journey that TLA formally began in 2021 with our Reflect Reconciliation Plan in a desire to work towards understanding our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their cultures and the importance of truth– telling about our shared history. This plan sets a benchmark for meaningful and genuine engagement, and we commit to listen and adjust based on what we hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This plan acknowledges the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to self-determination and the role that TLA can play as an ally and advocate.

TLA acknowledges the ongoing effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-census/2021>

### Our Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – 2024-2027

We recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original custodians of Lutruwita. For over 65,000 years, Tasmania's Aboriginal people have shared a profound connection to the land, waterways and sky of this island.

We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and the lasting impact this has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As a result of colonisation, Tasmanian Aboriginal people have experienced a history of dispossession, discrimination and disadvantage. The continuing impact of this experience is evident in the disparities between the Tasmanian Aboriginal people and other Tasmanians across a range of social indicators, including their experiences of the justice system.

We want to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Tasmania, by working together to deliver services in a safe, culturally appropriate and equitable way.

This plan guides our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, by improving the quality and accessibility of our services and our workplace. This commitment plan builds on the previous work undertaken in our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan since May 2021. We are proud of what we've achieved so far but also recognise that there is much more we can do.

This commitment plan will guide our continued engagement with and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, clients and stakeholders.

## The journey so far

In May 2021, our Reflect Reconciliation Action plan established the foundation for our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by building relationships and developing opportunities to increase the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Since then, we have worked to build relationships with Aboriginal people and to increase our understanding and responsiveness to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's issues by:

- Getting to know community members and groups
- Establishing a Palawa Advisory Group to advise on our service design and initiatives
- Mentoring Aboriginal law students to gain practical experience of legal service delivery through our Rosie Smith Scholarship collaboration with Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies and the University of Tasmania Law Faculty
- Making our offices and workplaces more culturally welcoming, inclusive and safe for Aboriginal people to visit and work
- Promoting development of cultural awareness and respect
- Increasing participation in cultural events
- Advocating to raise the age of criminal responsibility

Since our commitment to work on building cultural respect began, staff have been overwhelmingly positive about the importance and benefits of increasing their cultural skills, knowledge and capability, attending cultural events, and working collaboratively with Aboriginal organisations and community members. The quote below is taken from our 2022 staff survey.

***"It's great to see a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how we can build our skills and knowledge about their service needs and issues they face individually and collectively."***

This demonstrates that Tasmania Legal Aid's people prioritised their desire to learn how to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ways that are respectful and culturally safe. Additionally, our people place importance in understanding the contemporary Aboriginal community and the impacts of colonisation and dispossession on them. Our people consider that we should be doing more to advocate against the injustices that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face in the legal system. We also identified as key priorities building relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and making our offices culturally welcoming and safe.

### Our Vision

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people are safe, respected and heard.

### Our Values

#### Honesty

- We communicate openly, respectfully and honestly
- We provide clear, accurate and realistic advice
- We are accountable to our clients, our partners and our community

#### Courage

- We speak up, listen to different views, and take on feedback
- We engage with our clients with respect and empathy
- We advocate for our clients, our organisation and for justice
- We are open to new ideas and adaptable to change

#### Engagement

- We are inclusive and promote diversity in everything we do
- We involve our staff, clients and community in the co-design of services, programs and policies
- We are committed to the best outcomes for our clients and community
- We work collaboratively with our partners and clients

## Our Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

We commit to:

1. Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural proficiency.
2. Provide high quality, accessible, culturally appropriate and safe legal services to address legal issues, navigate the legal system and get the best possible legal outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
3. Build a workforce who are allies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and who reflect the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Tasmanian population.
4. Be inclusive, welcoming and a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to visit and work.
5. Promote self-determination by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
6. Support and advocate for better laws and an effective legal system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
7. Communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally appropriate ways.
8. Listen to what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and incorporate recommendations into our services and initiatives.
9. Acknowledge the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and celebrate important cultural events and protocols.
10. Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.

## Governance

This plan will be overseen by TLA's Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Working Group to drive governance and deliverables. It is chaired by the TLA Director and has staff from TLA offices in each region as well as a Board member.

To ensure success of this commitment plan and its actions, TLA will need to resource implementation, engage the management and executive teams, provide systems to measure, evaluate and learn and appoint champions. The members of the Working Group are the champions of TLA's Commitment Plan and are responsible for the implementation of the actions in the Plan.

## Commitments and Actions

TLA's Strategic Plan focus areas for 2023-2027 are People, Communication and Collaboration. These are the actions we will take to deliver our commitment plan.

## TLA's Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 2024–27

### People

Commitment	Actions	Timeline 2024–2027 (to be completed by)	Responsibility
1 Increase understanding, value and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge and rights through cultural proficiency.	1.1 Consult local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisers to inform our Cultural Proficiency Strategy.	June 2025	Director, A/D Civil and Training Officer (CLEI)
	1.2 Develop, implement, and communicate a Cultural Proficiency Strategy document for our people.	December 2025	Director, Associate Directors, CLEI Manager and SPPO
	1.3 Provide opportunities for our people to participate in both formal and structured, and informal cultural proficiency training and activities.	2024–2027	CLEI Manager and Training Officer (CLEI)
	1.4 Build a library of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander related literature in each office for our people and visitors to access.	2024–2027	Policy Officer
	1.5 Conduct annual reviews of cultural proficiency needs within our organisation, and provide recommendations (incl. costings) to the Working Group and Executive.	December 2026–2027	Training Officer (CLEI)
	1.6 Engage with our people and clients about their experience as part of the reviews.	December 2026–2027	CLEI Manager and Training Officer (CLEI)
2 Provide high quality, accessible, culturally appropriate and safe legal services to address legal issues, navigate the legal system and get the best possible legal outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	2.1 Establish pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to access our services, including working with our community service providers (and services of our community service partners), and record on action schedule.	Ongoing	Working Group
	2.2 Produce accessible information about our services, eligibility for accessing services and grants of aid.	2024–2025	Manager CLEI
	2.3 Develop and implement a communication plan to raise awareness of our commitment plan initiatives across our workforce.	December 2024 (with launch)	Manager CLEI
	2.4 Provide opportunities for our people to participate in formal and structured trauma-informed service delivery learning.	2024–2027	Director
	2.5 Educate our people about anti-discrimination policies to support a culture of zero tolerance for racism and discrimination.	2024–2027	Staff and Development Coordinator
	2.6 Connect with the National Legal Aid initiatives to collaborate on legal issues impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and share resources and insights.	2024–2027	Director and TLA Executive

SPPO = Senior Policy and Projects Officer

Commitment	Actions	Timeline 2024-2027 (to be completed by)	Responsibility
3 Build a workforce who are allies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and who reflect the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Tasmanian population.	3.1 Investigate, through the Department of Justice, opportunities to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (for example, through identified positions).	2024-2027	Staff and Development Coordinator and TLA Executive
	3.2 Explore opportunities for funding for an Aboriginal Engagement Officer and/or other identified positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at Tasmania Legal Aid.	2024-2027	Director
	3.3 Provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working at Tasmania Legal Aid to participate in the National Legal Aid initiatives and other identified cultural networking opportunities.	2024-2027	TLA Executive
	3.4 Create opportunities and support for interested Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at TLA to contribute to actions in this Plan, including having a process to identify areas of interest.	2024-2027	TLA Executive
4 Be inclusive, welcoming and a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to visit and work.	4.1 Make our office spaces more welcoming and safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, including, but not limited to, Aboriginal artwork and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on display in TLA offices.	2026	A/D Family, Policy Officer
	4.2 Promote flexible options for our people to access cultural leave and to choose whether to work on 26 January.	2024-2027	Director
	4.3 Promote and support flexible options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend events of cultural significance including NAIDOC week celebrations, NAIDOC Ball and mutton bird season and Putalina festival.	2024-2027	Director
	4.4 Explore organisational policy for email signature lines to include acknowledgement of truth telling about working and living on stolen land.	June 2025	Legal Help Lawyer
5 Promote self-determination by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	5.1 Advocacy for Koori Court, including Marram-Ngala Ganbu, system in Tasmania (or similar) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.	2024-2027	Director, A/D Crime, SPPO
	5.2 Continue to engage/advocate for specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander courts and community/kin processes.	2024-2027	Director, A/D Crime, SPPO

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### Communication

Commitment	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
6 Support and advocate for better laws and an effective legal system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	6.1 Collaborate with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify important issues and advocate for change within our sphere of influence.	2024–2027	Director, A/D Civil (Palawa Advisory Group), Working Group
	6.2 Advocate to raise the age of criminal responsibility.	2024–2027	Director, A/D Crime, SPPO
	6.3 Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people regarding child and youth safe framework.	December 2024	A/D Family, Policy Officer
	6.4 Promote the establishment of an outreach clinic service for children and youths in detention with culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in detention.	2024–2025	Director, A/D Crime and SPPO
7 Communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in culturally appropriate ways.	7.1 Review 'Engaging with Aboriginal Community and Organisations Guide' (Guide) document.	June 2025	Legal Help Lawyers, Mental Health Lawyer,
	7.2 Implement 'Guide' to assist in creation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy.	December 2025	Associate Directors

### Collaboration

Commitment	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
8 Listen to what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and incorporate recommendations into our services and initiatives.	8.1 Develop a recording system to capture engagement, feedback and activities against the actions in this Plan.	December 2024	CLEI Manager
	8.2 Report annually on our progress against the Plan, to the Palawa Advisory Group members, and if appropriate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.	Annually in January from 2025	Director
	8.3 Develop and implement an engagement plan to meet with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations, including:	March 2025	CLEI Manager (Client Engagement Officer), SPPO, Associate Directors
	8.3.a Meet with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, our Palawa Advisory Group and partners to discuss issues, experiences, and service/system improvements.	Ongoing	Working Group Members

Commitment	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
	8.3.b Expand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on our Commitment Plan Working Group.	Ongoing	Working Group Members
	8.3.c Expand Aboriginal representation on the Palawa Advisory group.		
	8.3.d Explore further opportunities to collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people.		
9 Acknowledge the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and celebrate important cultural events and protocols.	9.1 As part of the Cultural Proficiency Strategy, develop, implement and communicate cultural protocols including protocols for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by observing cultural protocols.</li> <li>Increase our understanding of the purpose and significance behind cultural protocols, including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country.</li> <li>Support/promote/encourage our people to include a meaningful Acknowledgement of Country or other appropriate protocols at the commencement of meetings.</li> </ul>	December 2025	Director, Associate Directors, CLEI Manager, SPPO
	9.2 Invite a local Traditional Custodian (or interested staff member) to provide a Welcome to Country or other appropriate cultural protocol at significant events each year.	Annually	Director
	9.3 Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating important events such as National Aborigines' and Islanders' Day Observance Committee ("NAIDOC") Week.	Annually, and to be recorded in the Commitment Plan action recording system	Working Group Members
	9.4 Promote to and encourage participation by our people in external NAIDOC and cultural events.	Annually, and to be recorded	Director, Associate Directors
	9.5 Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share their knowledge when celebrating important cultural events.	Annually	Director, Associate Directors
	9.6 Advocate in court proceedings and within our sphere of influence, the cultural importance of Mutton Bird season between 27 March – end of April.	Annually	A/D Crime

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Commitment	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
10 Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development.	10.1 Provide training and mentoring to Rosie Smith Law Scholarship recipients.	Annually	A/D Civil
	10.2 Explore other opportunities to employ and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Annually	Staff and Development Coordinator
	10.3 Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and businesses (incl Palawa Business Hub) to provide goods and services where possible and in line with procurement guidelines.	Annually	Director, A/D Business Services

## About the artist – Caleb Nichols-Mansell

Caleb Nichols-Mansell is a visual artist, graphic designer and photographer as well as the Founder and Creative Director of Blackspace Creative Arts and Cultural Hub. He is a proud Palawa man with deep connections to Country, Community and Spirit. Caleb's lineage traces back to his Ancestral Grandfather, Chief Mannalargenna, through his daughters and their descendants. Caleb currently lives in Burnie in the northwest of Lutruwita/Tasmania with his partner. Through his visual art forms and photography, Caleb tells his stories and those of his Old People while sharing the cultural knowledges and pride of Palawa people. Caleb's art reflects his deep connections and intimate knowledge of Country and the Palawa community.

The artwork chosen for this Commitment Plan depicts kunikong/Pig Face. Kunikong is a succulent found on coastlines throughout Tasmania. The plant is edible and provides hydration when water is not available. This plant has been used by Caleb's people for thousands of years as food and medicine. The artwork was prepared by Caleb as a response to the theme of our Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan. When life gets busy and things become too much, Caleb takes time to reflect and refocus sitting on the sandy shores of the north-west coast often cushioned by the softness of kunikong.

[www.calebnicholsmansell.com.au](http://www.calebnicholsmansell.com.au)

## Our thanks

We thank the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, advisory group members, Working Group members, and community members who have helped guide us through the development of this commitment plan to achieve meaningful actions and outcomes.



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