

Statement from Indigenous educators and community members
on the
Inclusion of Indigenous Perspectives in the Australian Curriculum

To: The Hon Julia Gillard, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

CC: Professor Barry McGaw, Chairperson, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Dr Peter Hill, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

The policy context and framework outlined by the Rudd Labor Government highlights the importance of engagement of Indigenous peoples. It determines that this should be a central focus of all Departments and agencies of Government at a national level. In his historic Sorry Day speech, Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd stated:

“We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.”¹

Noting that education is the foundation of knowledge, understanding and engagement of the future decision-makers of Australia, it is important that a framework of engagement and Social Inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be enacted effectively across all levels and sectors of the education system. This is particularly pertinent to the formative stages of development of Australia’s new Australian Curriculum Framework.

The new Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has stated that it will establish an Indigenous reference group to guide the development of all curricula and to appoint Indigenous people to a number of the subject-specific writing panels. This is a good start and must be acknowledged as such, even though the names of the people on this panel have not as yet been made public.

Any framework for the development of a new Australian Curriculum must be inclusive of Indigenous Australian content, knowledges and expertise, and include explicit reference across all areas of the curriculum framework. This can only occur with genuine engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators and community members at all levels of the process.

The recently released framework for the development of the Senior Secondary Years Curriculum mentions Indigenous perspectives only twice: in English, in terms of the

development of a course for students from diverse backgrounds with English as an Additional Language or Dialect; and in History – Ancient History. Whilst it may not be ACARA's intention, the current framework relegates Indigenous peoples and their knowledges to the category of historical artifacts in the History course.

Further, although the intent of the EALD stream is inclusive, the fact that it is the only stream in the English course that explicitly mentions Indigenous students, could be interpreted as exclusive of those Indigenous students who may choose stream (d), for example, to 'study literature at a more intensive level... (and) enhance the breadth and depth of students' understandings of literary texts.' Both of these examples could be interpreted as offensive to Indigenous people and institutionally racist in their construction.

To reiterate the words of the Prime Minister – it is time to create a future for *all* Australians. This future should envisage Indigenous Australians as peoples with living histories, and include knowledge frameworks which value Indigenous sciences, technologies, mathematics, languages and literacies. These should be recognised in the framework of the new Australian Curriculum.

Consequently, we the undersigned call on the Deputy Prime Minister and ACARA to ensure that:

- Structured opportunities are created for Indigenous educators and community members from all areas of Australia to engage collectively in all levels of the process of the development of the Australian Curriculum;
- Through this engagement, the Australian Curriculum accurately include and reflect perspectives of Indigenous Australia;
- Consideration be given to a stand-alone stream of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies in the Australian Curriculum;
- Indigenous people are appointed to all panels established to guide the development of the Australian Curriculum;
- An Indigenous person with appropriate educational qualifications/experience and expertise in curriculum development is appointed to the ACARA board; and
- Indigenous educators are employed by ACARA to drive the above processes.