

Law Council hosts public consultation on Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

Last night the Law Council of Australia hosted a consultation forum with representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to discuss how the legal profession can contribute to reconciliation in Australia.

The consultation, held in Canberra, was the first of a series of meetings to discuss practical measures to improve Indigenous participation in the legal profession, and to promote understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the legal profession.

Law Council President, Mr Alexander Ward said the RAP consultation reinforced the role the Law Council and the entire legal profession needs to play in closing the gap and improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Reconciliation is a topic of great importance to Australia’s legal profession.

“Indigenous Australian’s are among the most disadvantaged people in the country and the legal profession has an important role to play in closing the gap in Indigenous living standards,” he said.

The decision to develop a RAP followed the launch of the Law Council’s first Policy Statement on Indigenous Australians and the Legal Profession, in February 2010.

This landmark Policy Statement sets out a number of commitments for the Law Council, including promoting initiatives which boost indigenous participation in the legal profession and the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

“I am proud to say Indigenous affairs are an important part of the Law Council’s policy agenda but it is also an important issue for the legal profession across Australia.

“Indigenous Australians make up a very small proportion of the legal profession and a fundamental objective for the legal profession must be finding ways to increase the number of Indigenous people studying law and gaining admission to practice,” Mr Ward said.

The RAP consultation meeting was chaired by Raelene Webb QC and Tony McAvoy and discussed a number of actions the Law Council can take to:

- promote relationships and improve respect and understanding between the legal profession and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations; and
- to increase opportunities for Indigenous people in the legal profession.

Mr Ward said the Law Council is considering a number of positive suggestions arising from the meeting, including improving education outcomes, increasing cultural awareness and developing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and legal professional bodies .

“I am also pleased to note that a number of the Law Council’s constituent bodies are also developing their own RAPs and we will work with them to develop an integrated approach,” Mr Ward said.

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