OUR PLACE, OUR SKIES
Air Force’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy
2019-2028

Air Force acknowledges the traditional custodians of this place

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE
Acknowledgment of Country

Air Force acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, air and seas in which we live, work and train. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

We also pay our respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

Cultural Disclaimer

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document may contain images or content referring to deceased persons. It may also contain words or descriptions that may be deemed culturally insensitive. The term “Indigenous” is used throughout this document to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
The Royal Australian Air Force will become a fifth-generation Air Force.

The fifth-generation Air Force requires a workforce that is highly-qualified, motivated and adaptable in order to exploit fully the potential of its modern platforms and systems.

This will require Air Force to recruit the best people from the broadest possible cross-section of Australians and then develop them as air power professionals.

Defence recognises the unique skill sets, knowledge and perspectives that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring to strengthen and enhance our capability.

Air Force is committed to the Whole of Australian Government ‘Closing the Gap’ strategy through recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women.
Warrant Officer Len Waters: Aboriginal RAAF fighter pilot WWII.
Source: Australian War Memorial
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Welcome to the Our Place, Our Skies Strategy 2019-2028.

The continent that we serve through Air Force is the continent that hosts the world’s longest continuing culture. It makes sense that we are all culturally proficient in the ways, world views and understanding of this land.

One of the Air Force Strategy 2017-2027 strategic change vectors that will shape Air Force over the next decade and beyond is people capability. We continue to develop a fifth-generation workforce that can quickly and effectively adapt to rapid technological and operational change and exploit the opportunities presented by Australia’s changing workforce demographics.

To achieve this, Air Force needs to recruit and engage with the broadest cross-section of Australians and then develop them as air power professionals.

Australia’s First Peoples bring unique skill sets, knowledge and perspectives to our capability and will enhance our workforce culture. Air Force is committed to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ contribution within our workforce. To do so, we offer opportunities for education and professional development to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

This updated Our Place, Our Skies Strategy 2019-2028 outlines initiatives that are designed to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution within Air Force, be respectful of the world views of Australia’s First Peoples, and increase understanding of connections to people and place, history and culture, spirit and belonging. The intent of this Strategy is to:

- increase the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Air Force trades and specialisations
- increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Air Force
- continue Air Force’s positive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.
- ensure Air Force is an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, and
- ensure a culturally safe workplace for all Air Force members.

I commend the Our Place, Our Skies Strategy 2019-2028 to you.

Leo Davies, AO, CSC
Air Marshal
Chief of Air Force
I believe that many people are unaware of the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to serving their country. By enlisting and serving, they also took the opportunity to improve themselves, improve their communities, not only just for themselves but for future generations to follow.

Uncle Harry Allie
Inaugural Air Force Elder
CONTEXT

Closing The Gap

In 2007, members of the Council of Australian Governments struck an agreement to work towards Closing the Gap between Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. The long-term vision is to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy the same opportunities as other Australians, so they may realise their full potential in whatever they choose to do.

The Closing the Gap – Prime Minister’s Report 2018 confirms the Government’s continued commitment to work with Australia’s First Peoples to honour and celebrate the richness and diversity of the world’s oldest living culture, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to prosper.

Defence Reconciliation Action Plan

The Defence Reconciliation Action Plan is Defence’s roadmap to contribute to the Government’s Closing the Gap Strategy. The Action Plan reflects Defence’s enduring commitment and recognition of reconciliation as a fundamental aspect of Pathway to Change and the Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. It provides the broader plan for progressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs reform across Defence, enhancing capability by providing career opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and supporting the Australian community.

ADF Indigenous Employment Plan

The ADF Indigenous Employment Plan supports the Defence Reconciliation Action Plan, outlining ADF Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment activities through four lines of operation:

- community engagement
- attraction
- recruitment, and
- retention

The focus of the ADF Indigenous Employment Plan is on changing perceptions and provision of employment and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ADF members.

Air Force Strategy

The Air Force Strategy 2017-2027 outlines a set of strategic change vectors that will shape how Air Force will transform to a fifth-generation force over the next decade and beyond.

Vector Two is people capability – developing a fifth-generation workforce that can quickly and effectively adapt to rapid technological and operational change and exploit the opportunities presented by Australia’s changing workforce demographics.

One of the goals of Vector Two is to increase Air Force’s operational capability by developing and maintaining a diverse workforce.
Our Place, Our Skies

Whether they hail from remote, regional or urban communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples understand and share spiritual connections to place and responsibility to care for and serve Country. An Air Force career provides the opportunity to expand that responsibility through guardianship of the land from the skies.

Our Place, Our Skies recognises the unique position held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia’s First Peoples. The strategy has been updated to ensure Air Force’s approach is respectful of the world views of Australia’s First Peoples, and increases understanding of connections to people and place, history and culture, spirit and belonging.

Our Place, Our Skies defines the capability intent to be achieved via appropriate pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inclusion.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in Air Force will be enhanced through five Vectors as follows:

- Cultural Guidance
- Community Engagement
- Recruiting
- Retention
- Cultural Awareness

The aim is to progress an employment context that will enhance the attraction of Air Force as a career choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Air Force Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Implementation Plan will outline how the Pathways detailed in this strategy will be achieved.

The Implementation Plan will ensure initiatives remain relevant, funded and are successfully implemented.
### OUR PLACE, OUR SKIES - STRATEGIC VECTORS

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| **Cultural Guidance**    | 1. A Senior Indigenous Leadership Circle as the principle advisory group to Air Force  
2. Culturally appropriate advice, and recommendations on people, place, policies, practices and programs  
3. Enhancing awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture | Air Force respects and appreciates the world views of Australia’s First Peoples |
| **Community Engagement** | 1. Utilising the awareness and knowledge of Indigenous Liaison Officers to forge and maintain respectful engagement.  
2. Inclusion of Indigenous Elders in Air Force protocols  
3. Increased Air Force member engagement with local communities  
4. Support of the Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy | A strong relationship built upon respect, mutual trust and understanding between Air Force and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities |
| **Recruiting**           | 1. Air Force specific advertising campaign  
2. Specialist Indigenous recruiting staff  
3. Pathway programs to enhance confidence or physical fitness  
4. Flexible education opportunities  
5. Partnerships with Universities and TAFEs  
6. Recruit to Area initiative  
7. Recruit when Ready initiative  
8. Return to Country initiative  
9. Culturally sensitive recruiting approach  
10. Indigenous representative on selection boards | A diverse workforce with increased employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Air Force |
| **Retention**            | 1. Learning conversations  
2. Individual retention strategies  
3. Monitor and measure retention  
4. Analyse reasons for transfer/separation  
5. Mentoring  
6. Training and education opportunities  
7. Return to Country initiative  
8. Assist individuals to balance Air Force and cultural obligations | Air Force is an employer of choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples |
| **Cultural Awareness**   | 1. Provision of cultural awareness education and immersion  
2. Promotion of Indigenous history and service  
3. Establishment of Indigenous Liaison Officer network  
4. Enhanced Commander and Supervisor awareness and understanding  
5. Assist ADF Cultural Awareness, appreciation, and diversity Programs | A culturally safe and inclusive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members |
VECTOR 1: CULTURAL GUIDANCE

Cultural guidance will enhance awareness, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture across Air Force. It will be utilised to influence and shape Air Force polices, practices, training and programs to ensure Air Force takes a considered and inclusive approach.

The Senior Indigenous Leadership Circle (SILC) is our principal cultural advisory group comprising the Air Force Elder and a selected range of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders who hold key Indigenous Affairs positions within Air Force. Standing Members of the SILC are to be of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, with invitations extended to other personnel on an as required basis. The SILC is to meet at least four times per year and consider issues out-of-session when required.

The SILC supports our Senior Leadership and the broader Air Force through providing culturally appropriate recommendations and advice on a broad range of issues including Air Force policy, workforce cultural education and awareness and provisions that enhance inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders within Air Force. The SILC also influences broader Defence through its direct links into the Defence Indigenous Cultural Advisory Group.

Pathway. To enable cultural guidance, Air Force will:

1. Support and listen to its cultural appointments and advisory groups
2. Assist the Senior Indigenous Leadership Circle to convene quarterly (or as needs require) with representation from across Air Force
3. Take counsel and advice from the Senior Indigenous Leadership Circle on key areas including but not limited to: people, place, practices, programs, and policies.
Through community engagement, Air Force aims to build strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities based upon mutual trust and understanding. Our ability to defend Australia’s national interests at home, in a manner respectful to the land, seas and sky, relies upon open dialect with Australia’s First Peoples. Strong connections also serve to promote Air Force as an employer of choice for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

Pathways. To enhance community engagement, Air Force will:

1. Utilise the awareness and knowledge of the Indigenous Liaison Officers to forge and maintain respectful engagement
2. Include the Indigenous Elder in Air Force protocols
3. Work with internal and external agencies under SILC and ILO guidance to develop and implement respectful community engagement initiatives
4. Consult and consider impacts to Indigenous communities and environments as a result of Defence projects and activities
5. Identify and increase opportunities for Air Force members to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such as the Kummundoo Program
6. Develop and implement Community Engagement Programs tailored to meet local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community needs
7. Support the Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy
VECTOR 3: RECRUITING

Air Force will focus on enhancing employment, education and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders through tailored and flexible pathways. Engaging the unique skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is an asset for our organisation, increasing workforce diversity and our operational capability.

Pathways. To recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Air Force will:

1. Collaborate with Defence Force Recruiting to develop an Air Force specific advertising campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
2. Work with Defence Force Recruiting to ensure Indigenous attraction and recruiting events are effective and widely communicated
3. Provide specialist Indigenous recruiting staff to Defence Force Recruiting
4. Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Air Force candidates the opportunity to attend the Tri-Service Indigenous Pre-Recruitment Program to enhance their confidence or physical fitness if required
5. Implement flexible education opportunities to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to meet required educational standards for Air Force roles
6. Implement partnerships with Indigenous Higher Education Centres and state based TAFEs
7. Implement a Recruit to Area initiative to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to maintain a connection with their Community
8. Implement a Recruit when Ready initiative to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to manage community commitments by being recruited at a time of their choosing
9. Implement a Return to Country initiative to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to maintain their cultural connection with their Community and/or provide support to their Community
10. Apply a culturally sensitive approach during the recruiting process, particularly when assessing background eligibility
11. Collaborate with internal and external agencies to offer career exchange opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.
12. Include an Indigenous representative on selection boards where possible
The extent to which our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel feel valued and supported will directly influence their desire to continue to serve within Air Force. Ongoing engagement of personnel relies on building an inclusive and culturally safe work environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members can thrive.

**Pathways: To encourage ongoing engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel, Air Force will:**

1. Engage regularly in learning conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel to ensure any issues and opportunities for improvement are identified early
2. Implement individual strategies where required to retain serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, such as further education options or opportunities to change role and or service category
3. Analyse significant changes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander retention rates to identify causes
4. Seek to understand why individuals choose to leave Air Force, to inform future actions and policies
5. Create and maintain an inclusive environment where all personnel can thrive
6. Provide mentoring opportunities
7. Implement a Return to Country initiative to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to maintain their cultural connection with their Community and/or provide support to their Community by enabling them to regularly return to their Community for important cultural occasions or needs
8. Work with individuals to assist them to balance Air Force requirements with their cultural obligations
9. Collaborate across the Air Force Indigenous community to identify areas of improvement across Air Force
10. Collaborate with internal and external agencies to offer career exchange opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates.
Enhanced cultural awareness enables all Air Force members to ensure they are respectful of the world views of Australia’s First Peoples, including connections to people and place, history and culture, spirit and belonging. It will enhance mutual understanding, ensuring all Air Force members are equipped to provide culturally appropriate support to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues.

**Pathways: To enhance the awareness, appreciation and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture for all Air Force personnel, Air Force will:**

1. Provide cultural awareness, education and immersion experiences that are endorsed by the Senior Indigenous Leadership Circle
2. Review and provide input to Departmental cultural awareness programs to ensure appropriateness
3. Promote Air Force’s Indigenous history and service
4. Implement the immersion of Indigenous culture in Initial Military Training in order to foster cultural education, knowledge, and understanding in Air Force people from the outset of their careers, to be taken into the wider workforce. Importantly, all cultural awareness activities are to be endorsed by the SILC
5. Deliver the Air Force dedicated Indigenous Liaison Officer network to enhance understanding and appreciation by all Air Force personnel of Australia’s First Peoples’ culture
6. Enhance Air Force Commander and Supervisor understanding and appreciation of Australia’s First Peoples’ culture through cultural immersion experiences
7. Assist with wider ADF Cultural Awareness Programs