

ABORIGINAL POLICY

PREFACE

We aim to be an effective organisation. Having an access and equity program to make sure that our services are accessible to all members of the public and to disadvantaged groups in particular is one way of achieving this. It is essential that our office is accessible to anyone who needs our services and any barriers are identified and where possible eliminated.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to outline our commitment to improve our services to Aboriginal people as well as working with key agencies to improve the delivery of their services. It details strategies we have or will put in place to comply with our legislative obligations or policy responsibilities that are applicable to government agencies.

RESPONSIBILITY

The Deputy Ombudsman (Human Services) is the nominated lead officer with responsibility for co-ordinating a broad range of project, complaint and oversight activities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. The Director Strategic Projects Division provides day to day support to the Deputy Ombudsman and provides direction and support to our Aboriginal Unit.

The Director Corporate has responsibility for the specific strategies relating to employment and accessibility to our services.

All senior staff have a responsibility for delivering improved services to Aboriginal people in accordance with this policy, our corporate strategies and relevant government policies.

LEGISLATIVE/POLICY FRAMEWORK

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

NSW State Plan

Two ways together – Partnership: A new way of doing business with Aboriginal People

Making it our business – the NSW Aboriginal Employment Action Plan

Closing the Gap – the commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and in particular provide a better future for Indigenous children

DEFINITIONS

Aboriginality - The term ‘Aboriginal’ refers specifically to the Aboriginal people of Australia. Throughout this document, Aboriginal also includes Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal Person - The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* defines an Aboriginal person as a person who:

- is of Aboriginal decent
- identifies as an Aboriginal person, and
- is accepted by the Aboriginal community in which he/she lives.

Aboriginal Unit - The Aboriginal Unit is a small group of our staff who deliver or support the delivery of a range of Ombudsman services to Aboriginal people. The Unit also conducts cultural appreciation training as well as providing general advice and assistance to staff. Positions in the Aboriginal Unit are identified, requiring the occupants to be Aboriginal.

Senior Officers Group - The senior management committee consists of the Ombudsman, all Deputy Ombudsman, the Director Corporate and the Director Strategic Projects.

Senior staff - For the purpose of this policy, the senior staff are all the Deputy Ombudsman, the Director Corporate and the Director Strategic Projects.

Welcome to country - Conducted by an Aboriginal Elder who is a descendent from the Traditional Owners/Custodians, welcomes people visiting/meeting on that land.

Acknowledgement of country - A formal process that recognises the Traditional Owners/Custodians.

Results and Services Plan - The Results and Services Plan (RSP) is a brief, high-level service delivery and funding plan that shows what an agency plans to achieve with its current resources. The RSP is a planning and budgeting tool used by the Budget Committee of Cabinet, NSW Treasury and agencies.

POLICY STATEMENT

1. Improved services and outcomes

The Ombudsman is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people as set out in the NSW State Plan and other NSW Government policy documents. We will focus not only on improving our own services, but through our project, complaint and oversight activities will work with other agencies to improve their services to Aboriginal people. This goal is reflected in our Results and Services Plan and corporate/business plans.

The Deputy Ombudsman (Human Services) has the authority to amend strategies and timeframes following consultation with relevant staff, and if appropriate, the Senior Officers Group.

2. Accountability

All senior staff will have responsibility for achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal people reflected in their contract of employment (where applicable), position description and performance agreement.

3. Improved accessibility

We will develop formal strategies to identify and remove barriers to our services and to provide information about our services in a range of formats. These strategies will be developed following consultation with our Aboriginal Unit and, if appropriate, with external stakeholders.

The Director Corporate has the authority to amend strategies and timeframes following consultation with relevant staff, and if appropriate, the Senior Officers Group.

4. Employment Opportunities

The NSW Government is committed to a minimum target of 2.6 per cent Aboriginal employment in the public sector by 2015. *Making It Our Business: The NSW Aboriginal Employment Action Plan (MIOB) – 2009 –2012* requires all agencies, including our office, to develop an Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

Our Aboriginal Employment Strategy, which accompanies this policy, outlines our actions to improve the recruitment, retention and career development of Aboriginal people and to meet the government target of 2.6 per cent Aboriginal employment within our office.

The Director Corporate has the authority to amend strategies and timeframes following consultation with relevant staff, and if appropriate, the Senior Officers Group.

5. Cultural appreciation training

To improve our staff's understanding of issues affecting Aboriginal people and their needs, we have developed a comprehensive Aboriginal cultural appreciation training package. Participation in this training is compulsory for all staff.

6. *Welcome to/acknowledgement of country*

The cultural protocol of 'Acknowledgement to Country' and 'Welcome to Country' should always be conducted at the beginning of significant forums, conferences or meetings.

'Acknowledgement to Country' should be conducted by an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal person or visitor not from that area.

'Welcome to Country' is conducted by an Aboriginal Elder who is a descendent from the Traditional Owners/Custodians of the land where the forum is held, and is a welcome to those attending the forum from outside the area.

Further details about these cultural protocols are attached to this policy.

7. *Monitoring and reporting*

The Deputy Ombudsman (Human Services) and the Director Corporate will report on their respective responsibilities under this policy to the Senior Officers Group at least quarterly. Progress with implementation will also be reported in our annual report.

8. *Supporting plans*

Any supporting plans developed under this policy are office policy.

OMBUDSMAN APPROVAL

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. A. Barbour". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bruce Barbour
OMBUDSMAN