

Save Reconciliation Victoria!

Reconciliation Victoria (Rec Vic) is currently facing the possibility of forced closure, having received no future funding commitment from the Victorian Government for the coming financial year. This is despite the recommendations in successive Federal and State Government reports calling for the need for state-based reconciliation groups, and the continuing imperative for greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Since its inception, RecVic has supported community reconciliation networks and formed positive relationships with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations throughout Victoria. Despite its successes, for the first time, RecVic's funding is in question. They have received no confirmation that the State Government will be supporting it this coming financial year (09/10).

ANTaR Victoria is supporting RecVic in its cause, calling on the Brumby government to provide ongoing and increased funding, as a key aspect of its closing the gap strategy. In addition to this, ANTaR and RecVic are asking for your help to put pressure on the government, as it is only through organisations such as RecVic that the hard work of changing community attitudes can happen to make Victoria a culturally safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Background

Reconciliation Victoria was established and provided with state government funding as part of the Victorian Government's response to the reconciliation documents of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. In the seven years since, RecVic has demonstrated a commitment to building genuine relationships across a wide range of Aboriginal people and organisations, and has fostered credibility among Aboriginal organisations and people, and across the general community.

Reconciliation Victoria exists to bring about reconciliation in Victoria. This means improving the life chances of Aboriginal Victorians, 'closing the gap'. To achieve this, the attitudes of non-Aboriginal Victorians (99% of the population) need to change. RecVic contributes to this by community education, products and services, and supporting communities and organisations to develop reconciliation initiatives.

Rec Vic has been funded by the Vic State Govt, through the Dept. Planning and Community Development (DPCD), for seven years, including one three year grant between mid 2005 and mid 2008 inclusive, followed by a belated extension for one year, 2008/9. This grant of around \$200,000 per year pays for the operation of the organisation. RecVic also been able to attract additional grants of around \$40-60,000 pa from various other sources, including the City of Melbourne and other areas of Government. These grants hit their peak in 2007/8 – the year of the 40th Anniversary of the referendum and the Federal Govt's apology. Since then grants have been harder to come by. Trusts have also contributed small amounts, but without DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient – for tax

deductible donations) , these amounts remain small and in any case are NOT for core operations, nor are these recurrent.

Essentially, RecVic needs to continue to build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal people, organisations and communities, so that the Victorian community can best understand Aboriginal aspiration. They achieve this by being involved, working with, and supporting Aboriginal led activity. The focus needs to also be on the non-Aboriginal community (99.3% of the Victoria population), to inform, educate, engage and activate them to also work towards Reconciliation. RecVic has and wants to continue to target local government, young people at schools and universities, service NGOs, faith and 'ethnic' organisations, service and sporting clubs and then more widely, community organisations – Scouts, Neighbourhood Houses and so on. Where ever possible RecVic will also work with corporate and small businesses. No other organisation has this brief.

Rec Vic needs your help

RecVic urgently needs to secure a funding commitment from the government, so they need you to raise your voice. You can help by writing letters to your local MPs and key ministers (Richard Wynne, Rob Hulls, and Premier Brumby) highlighting the need for the continued government support for RecVic. As well as this, we need to stimulate discussion in the media, so get involved by writing letters to the editor, and calling in to talk-back radio.

RecVic is seeking: a three-year funding agreement, to provide sustainability for our relationship-building with Aboriginal organisations and communities; and an increase on the current \$200,000 pa grant, which only allows a small impact on the large challenge of reconciliation. If no funding is received by 25 May, RecVic will need to make the decision to close down.

See below for a list of answers to frequently asked questions compiled by RecVic about the need for their organisation, to help inform your letters.

Contact your MPs and Ministers

Visit, telephone or write to your local MP highlighting your support for ongoing State Government funding for Reconciliation Victoria.

Also, write a letter and send copies to Premier John Brumby, Deputy Premier and Attorney General Rob Hulls, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Richard Wynne, Minister for Community Development Peter Batchelor.

For contact details, visit the [Parliament of Victoria](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au) website.

Write a Letter to the Editor

- The Age - letters@theage.com.au

- Herald Sun - <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/editorial/letter/>

Or write in to your local paper.

Contact Talk-back radio

- 3AW (693) with Neil Mitchell 8.30am - 12noon
Call **03 9690 0693**
- 774 ABC with Jon Faine 8.30am – 12noon
Call **1300 222 774**

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Govt has funded RV for 7 years – why should Government keep funding you?**
 - It has taken 220 years and millions of dollars (if not billions) to create this mess for Aboriginal people; it will take more than 7 years, a few hundred thousand dollars and 2.5 staff to fix it.
 - Racism exists – in schools, in work places and practices, in systemic governmental and other institutional policies, processes and procedures (eg form filling), as unintended and as covert or as overt, deliberate prejudice and exclusion; this too still needs to change across the community and will take generational change . This takes time.
 - Cultural and attitudinal change in the community is Government responsibility. It needs to lead.
 - **RecVic is the ONLY State Govt response to these issues in the Vic community.** Govt has some significant and very worthy programs targeting Aboriginal people (in Justice in particular, and possibly in the representative area via LINS), but nowhere any attempt to deal with community attitudes (Wannik is a good strategy to change school based teaching content, although after 12 months since its launch, nothing has yet been done).
2. **Rec Vic should get its money from ‘corporate’ and/or philanthropic sources**
 - **It is governments** over 220 years that have largely created or inspired and funded others to create this mess for Aboriginal people and the attitudes and beliefs that go with them –govt must accept responsibility for rectifying the consequences.
 - Rec Vic currently sources non-trivial amounts in addition to its core Government grant, but this is nowhere near sustainable funding.
 - Corporate and philanthropic sources **DO NOT** fund recurrent core/operational costs. While many corporates are sympathetic to the issues of Reconciliation, they are not well-placed to deal with the complex and controversial issues associated with the root causes and possible cures. Trusts are limited by the

rules of DGR status that disallow anything that might be considered 'advocacy' or attitudinal change.

- Corporate and philanthropic sources sometimes fund relevant projects, but a core government grant is needed for staff to research and write and negotiate the projects and the funding, which is seldom for more than one year. These grants are meant to complement existing work, not replace it.
- Further, sole reliance on project funding would lead to disjointed activity rather than structured, coherent work based on well formulated plans and organisationally defined strategies. A core Government grant is needed to provide continuity.
- Many philanthropic and corporate funding sources target Aboriginal people/projects directly (as do govt) which is to be commended. There is little appetite to support projects that target attitudinal change in the 99.3% of the Victorian population who are not Aboriginal.
- Legal advice is that RecVic CANNOT obtain DGR status under the present rules (Rec Aust got DGR as a gift from the former govt). We have also sought State Govt support and representation to the Feds – to no avail. Getting major grants is very difficult without DGR, although small grants (up to around \$30,000) are sometimes offered.

3. **Why won't Rec Aust fund RecVic and why have two orgs anyway?**

- Australia operates on three levels of Government: federal, state and local. Each level has a particular focus and responsibility. The three levels of reconciliation organisation - Rec Aust, Rec Vic and Local Reconciliation Groups (LRG) – reflect this and each have their focus and role. State governments are constitutionally responsible for certain matters and states differ greatly in their circumstances. It would not be desirable or sensible for a national body (over which a state government has no control) to deal with matters of state responsibility.
- Any move to transfer State responsibility and costs to a National organisation/government avoids state government responsibility – it does not deal with the issues created by this State government over the last 180 years or so.
- Rec Aust **WILL NOT** fund State Councils – these are seen as the responsibility of State Govts. We cannot change that policy (we have worked with other State Councils over the last several years to do so). RecVic has built a solid relationship with Rec Aust and works in cooperation with Rec Aust and other State Councils.
- Community engagement work is more effective the closer the organisation is to the community, the more effective.

4. **Why doesn't RecVic charge our members joining fees to raise funds?**

- As with seeking corporate/philanthropic funds, at best this would raise only minimum funds, and would diminish RecVic's relationship with its members. We are trying to engage people with an issue about which they may have only a vague sense and has little traction in the community.
- We have some 3000 people receiving Newsletters of which 600 are formal members (no fee). A membership fee would discourage many of these, yielding something less than \$20,000 (400x\$50). RecVic wants to reach as many people as possible, so the Newsletter needs to be free – if so, what else can we offer the paid membership? We already seek donations and pro bono contributions where ever possible, including on our brochures, 'membership' forms, website, newsletters, emails and e-list sign-on.
- Reconciliation is NOT a big issue in the community, other than as an idea, as something that **should** happen, something someone else **should** do. It is Rec Vic's challenge to change this attitude and the beliefs that underpin them.
- A Membership fee is NOT a solution to gaining the core funding Rec Vic needs to be effective. It is also another attempt to shift govt responsibility away, this time to the individual citizen. **Reconciliation IS a Govt responsibility** – to show leadership, to encourage and support action, to fund policy advocacy bodies and to create the climate and opportunities for a radical change in thinking about history and Aboriginal people past and present.

5. Why can't RecVic develop 'products' that it can sell to Local Govt, corporates and others, or offer consultancy work?

- We do, but reconciliation is not a high-profile issue in the community, not one where there is strong demand for products and services, or where there is it is for free or cheap. We see it as a future direction but require core funding to support the initiative. Products will never be self-sustaining when the full cost of development, marketing and distribution are factored in. It is govts responsibility to support the provision of products and services through core funding to RecVic.
- Even if products are pursued as a major initiative, core funding is required to support RecVic's other day to day work – building and maintaining relationships with Aboriginal people, orgs and community, supporting Reconciliation focused policy and actions in local government, corporate and community groups, running events and maintaining a website and newsletter information flow to the wider community and dealing with the dozens of requests we receive for information, speakers and workshops.

More Information

- [ANTaR Vic Media Release](#)
- [Reconciliation Victoria Website](#)