



## **Presentation to Melbourne Water staff – National Reconciliation Week**

**Jo Benvenuti: Executive Officer, CUAC**

**Date: 28.5.14**

**Venue: Melbourne Water, 990 Latrobe Street, Docklands, VIC 3008**

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- Thank you for the opportunity to present today during Reconciliation Week.
  - I would like to begin by paying respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Wurundjeri people, acknowledging elders past and present.
  - The theme of this year's reconciliation week is 'Lets Walk the Talk,' this is quite fitting for the subject matter I am here to discuss today which is about Reconciliation, and what can be done to improve your practices in this important area.
  - CUAC's has been committed to Aboriginal Reconciliation since we undertook research in this area in 2011.
  - We produced a report called *Victorian Aboriginal Experiences of Water and Energy*. The aim of this report was to learn about Aboriginal consumers' experiences and needs in relation to electricity, gas and water, and to develop and implement strategies to address these challenges in a sustainable way.
  - This report generated a number of recommendations, including the need for utility providers to give formal consideration to their corporate responsibilities to Victorian Aboriginal people as consumers of energy and water services. One method to achieve this that came out of the research was to develop Reconciliation Action Plans.

- Pursuant to this recommendation, CUAC hosted a workshop for the water businesses on Aboriginal Reconciliation in conjunction with *Reconciliation Australia* in August last year. The aim of the workshop was to encourage industry to take proactive steps towards Reconciliation with Victorian Aboriginal communities, and to explain how this can be achieved by developing a Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Fourteen of Victoria's water businesses attended the workshop from both urban and regional areas, including Paul from Melbourne Water. Colin Hunter, who will speak today, presented on the importance of Reconciliation. It was an excellent opportunity for the businesses to not only reflect on the importance of Reconciliation, but on their current practices and how they might be improved.
- The feedback from this workshop was overwhelmingly positive. While there has not been as much take up in the area of Reconciliation Action Plans as we would have hoped, some businesses are in the process of developing them since the workshop, so we believe that is a start. CUAC plans to hold follow-up workshops with the distribution businesses and energy retailers in 2014 as we believe this is an important area of our work to continue.
- Reconciliation Action Plans are one of many mechanisms that can be used to work towards reconciliation. I understand that here at Melbourne Water, there is work being done in the way of cultural heritage management, which is guided by your Cultural Heritage Strategy. However, reconciliation goes beyond project management.
- It is embodied in the theme of this year's reconciliation week, 'Lets Walk the Talk.' This is about taking your good intentions to engage with the Aboriginal community and turning them into actions.
- A key learning that came out of our Aboriginal Reconciliation workshop with the water businesses was that sometimes there are fairly simple yet significant steps a business can take to work towards reconciliation. This can be achieved through a general recognition of Aboriginal people, such as flying the Aboriginal flag during Reconciliation week, hanging Aboriginal art in your workplace or beginning your major events and with an acknowledgement of Aboriginal people, as I did in my speech today. Even if Aboriginal people are not present, it is a symbolic reminder of the importance of Aboriginal Reconciliation in our communities.
- At CUAC we have been able to turn our efforts into actions by developing resources around water and energy efficiency, tailored specifically for the Aboriginal

community; participating in NAIDOC week events where we can better engage with the Aboriginal community; and continuing our research and advocacy in this area.

- So I challenge you at Melbourne Water to think about how you can ‘Walk the Talk’ with respect to Aboriginal Reconciliation.
- CUAC is eager to assist water or energy businesses wishing to develop or learn more about Reconciliation Action Plans. If any of you are interested in CUAC’s work in this area, we have provided copies of our report on key outcomes and learning from our workshop with the water businesses last year. We also have a handout of key recommendations from our report on Aboriginal Experiences of Water and Energy. This report is available to be downloaded from our website at [www.cuac.org.au](http://www.cuac.org.au)