

DFAT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER RECRUITMENT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Launch of the Strategy by Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Canberra 6 July 1993

DFAT's Strategy is being launched at a time of heightened domestic and international focus on Australia's indigenous peoples. Major factors in this regard include:

- more active promotion of the process of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians;
- Mabo decision and subsequent public debate;
- 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People
 - during which Australia will host two international conferences - the Second World Indigenous Youth Conference in Darwin 5 - 11 July; the World's Indigenous Peoples 1993 Conference: Education, to be held in Wollongong in December); and
- the celebration this week of National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week, in which the history and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are publicised through a variety of celebrations, educational events and exhibitions.

The development of strategies which aim to improve the employment, education and training opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a 1991 Cabinet initiative applying to the whole APS.

While DFAT, like all other Departments, was bound by that decision, it had established itself by that time as an equal opportunity employer.

- The Department's EEO program, launched in 1991, already contained a 'mini-strategy' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and the Human Rights Section has been pro-active in this area over a number of years.
- The need for a broader strategy had in any case become apparent to the

Department as government policy placed more focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-related concerns both at home and abroad, with a resulting need in DFAT for the skills and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Those concerns include:

- the need to promote and enhance Australia's image with regard to the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and human rights issues generally; and
- the need to respond to local and international interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, including through the development within the public sector of programs and areas of responsibility with specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elements.

It is fair to say that a significant proportion of DFAT already deals with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concerns to varying degrees. A representative cross-section of the Department shows, for example, the involvement of:

- International Organisations Branch in the development of DFAT's role in promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and indigenous people's perspectives within DFAT operations, both domestically and at international multilateral and bilateral levels;
- Cultural Relations Branch in promoting international exposure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, cultures and peoples and facilitating the return of cultural property from overseas collections to traditional owners;
- Overseas Information Branch, which distributes a range of public affairs material to overseas media and other target groups in an effort to increase international understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and government policies relating to them;
- Environment Branch, promoting indigenous perspectives in environment matters, and in Australia's participation in the UNCED process;
- Legal Office, dealing with various indigenous peoples' issues and currently compiling information on the Mabo decision to distribute to overseas posts;
- Americas Branch, dealing with matters concerning, and liaising with, indigenous peoples overseas;

- PNG Branch, in relation to the Torres Strait Border Treaty;
- Consular and Passports Branch, as a contact point for the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people travelling overseas;
- Regional Offices, providing consular and other services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- Australia's Overseas Missions, in liaising with, and reporting on the policies of, countries with significant indigenous populations or with a particular interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

The list would not be complete without also mentioning Personnel Branch, which plays a central role in promoting awareness of EEO in DFAT and prepared the Department's response to ATSI's 1992 and 1993 Budget Related Papers on "Social Justice for Indigenous Australians". The Branch also coordinated the development of the Strategy being launched today, utilising the services of a consultant together with a steering committee comprising departmental officers and including senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers.

Although the launch of the Strategy has been delayed by external factors beyond the Department's control [GE: it sat in DEET for over 5 months and no amount of pushing could get it out], the Department has not waited until now to implement many of its provisions. Implementation has been an ongoing process since June last year.

- In keeping with the Strategy's principal objective of increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within DFAT to a level commensurate with their representation in the wider Australian community, that is 1 - 2 per cent, greater emphasis has been placed on recruitment in the first year of implementation. Following a first recruitment drive, DFAT now has 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers working in a variety of mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific areas.

- This bodes well for the Department reaching its target figure of 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers by 1997.

- The Department has also taken a number of other steps in the ongoing process of implementing the Strategy, including career development and training and cross-cultural awareness training, both of which will be central to the Strategy's acceptance and success.

- Details of these and other aspects of the strategy are set out in the Second Implementation Report, copies of which are available here today.

Before closing, I would like to offer my congratulations to the committee which put the Strategy together, including its Chairman - and our MC today - Keith Hardy of the Personnel Development Section. Particular mention should also be made of the efforts of Sue Jorgenson who, I am assured, showed great dedication - not to mention stamina - in producing the Strategy.

But I think the effort has been worth it. The final document is something of which not only the committee, but the whole Department can be proud. It is a significant development in its own right; it can serve as a model to other Departments in the development of their own strategies; and above all, it will contribute in its own way to the process of reconciliation so necessary to Australia's future as a nation which can hold its head up in our immediate region and in the world.

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