Standing in solidarity to achieve reconciliation



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The SSTUWA continues to remain steadfast in its efforts to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their fight for justice and equality.

As a union, we will continue to work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee, UnionsWA and the Australian Education Union (AEU) to stand in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

At the recent AEU Federal Conference, key reports from union officials, Yalukit Yulendj and invited guests discussed the issue of “where to next” after the referendum.

The power and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in the union movement was recognised as a significant contributing factor to 67 per cent of union members supporting the Yes vote.

It is also important to not forget the Uluru Statement from the Heart in its entirety - Voice, Treaty and Truth.

The AEU conference statement highlighted the following:

> *Our Priorities – The Uluru Statement from the Heart – What Next*
>
> *In 2017, the AEU accepted the invitation issued to all Australians by the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We accepted the generous offer from Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities to walk together to build a strong foundation for a safer, respectful, more compassionate Australia, in which we can all thrive.*
>
> *The referendum campaign was hard fought and traumatic, with people from all walks of life coming together with hope and a shared vision for the future. Now is the time to strengthen our efforts and commitment to justice for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities.*
>
> *The referendum result, and the journey to this point, reminds us that change can be a long and challenging process. As teachers, principals and education support personnel, we have an intrinsic responsibility to build the skills, knowledge and understanding of our students, to help shape the world that our students live in.*
>
> *This is transformative, and public education is at the heart of our society and indeed democracy.*
>
> *Education provides a path to knowledge, opportunity, and social progress for all. It is a powerful tool that can challenge biases, behaviours, dismantle stereotypes, micro-aggressions, racism and create inclusive environments.*
>
> *As we walk together for a better future, we must never take a step backwards or look away. We will ensure an environment in public education where open, honest and truthful discussions about our history can take place.*
>
> *We have an obligation to develop critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of responsibility amongst all students.*
>
> *When we equip young people with the knowledge needed to truly understand the past, we empower them to be active, informed citizens who can shape a more just and compassionate future.*
>
> *Our work to achieve equity and prosperity for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities is not finished.*
>
> *Today, and every day, we recommit ourselves to walking together towards a better future for all members, staff, students, families and communities.*

A key discussion point with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee has been around cultural responsiveness in our schools.

The Department of Education’s Aboriginal Cultural Standard Framework (which was last produced under former Minister for Education Peter Collier and previous Director General Sharon O’Neill) is in much need of an update.

The biggest concern from the committee is the need to ensure the framework is prioritised as part of a school’s plan and to support schools to action the framework.

Part of the framework’s implementation would be to engage in local communities and support the creation of partnerships with the community.

Schools also need to be properly funded via targeted initiatives to allow meaningful and effective cultural training to cater for individual school contexts.

And let’s not forget that teachers in regional and remote areas need to be provided with additional professional learning and community engagements in order to best support Aboriginal students in these areas.

Within the SSTUWA, our Communications Team actively sources articles regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education matters to ensure Western Teacher contains such content.

All our senior officers and organisers are aware of the local country they are on when on itinerary, as was discussed in 2022 and 2023, and use this in their Acknowledgement of Country.

We recently were invited to participate in the Reconciliation Industry Network Group - Reconciliation in Education with other education associations and universities. In 2024 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee is moving forward and open for only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. We are also hoping to have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officer in the union soon.

We also have commissioned union shirts with our First Nations artwork and the SSTUWA logo has been refreshed and reflects our connections to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Now More than Ever is the theme for this year's National Reconciliation Week (NRW), which runs 27 May to 3 June.

As said by Reconciliation Australia, Now More than Ever the work continues and the SSTUWA will participate in reconciliation activities during NRW. For more information on NRW see page 21 of this issue of Western Teacher.

Regardless of the outcome of last year's Voice to Parliament referendum, as a society and more importantly as educators, we must not lose sight of the fight for justice and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our workplaces and communities on the unfinished business of reconciliation.

SSTUWA
State School Teachers' Union of WA

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