HOPE Reconciliation Action Plan Final Decision Paper

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Householders' Options to Protect the Environment Inc.

12th of October, 2026

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HOPE Reconciliation Action Plan Decision Paper

1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) project undertaken during a social work placement with Householders' Options to Protect the Environment (HOPE Inc. (Australia), referred to throughout this paper as 'HOPE'. The project explored how HOPE, as a volunteer-based environmental organisation, could strengthen its relationships, responsibilities and practices concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Additionally, the information captured throughout the project will inform future decisions and determine whether developing a formal RAP would be appropriate, meaningful and sustainable for the organisation. The project incorporated stakeholder consultation, research into reconciliation and eco-social justice, examination of comparable organisational approaches and initial efforts to engage with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as well as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country. The findings have indicated that a formal RAP may not be the most appropriate pathway for HOPE at this stage. It is therefore recommended that HOPE undertake a period of practical reconciliation and capacity-building with the intention of reviewing its readiness for a Reflect RAP in the future.

2. Purpose and Scope

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this project was to investigate how HOPE Inc. could strengthen its relationships, responsibilities and practices concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to assess whether a formal Reconciliation Action Plan would be an appropriate and sustainable step for the organisation.

The project was developed in recognition that HOPE's environmental work operates within a broader social and cultural context. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have longstanding and continuing relationships with Country, land, waters, plants, animals and ecological systems. Consequently, environmental organisations have an opportunity to recognise and respect First Nations knowledge and perspectives within environmental work while also acknowledging the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation.

From a social work perspective, the project was not approached solely as an organisational exercise. Instead, reconciliation was considered through the principles of social justice, human rights, participation, self-determination, cultural respect and relationships. This is consistent with the profession's broader commitment to challenging structural inequity and supporting the rights and participation of communities.

The project therefore sought to answer the broader question: How can HOPE strengthen its relationships, responsibilities and practices concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples, and would a formal RAP be an appropriate and sustainable pathway for the organisation?

2.2 Scope

The scope of the project was divided into five key areas of interest. Firstly, the project examined the meaning and purpose of reconciliation and the role that organisations can play in advancing reconciliation through relationships, respect and opportunities. Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework was considered as a potential organisational structure for translating reconciliation intentions into practical commitments. Secondly, the project explored the relationship between First Nations perspectives, environmental stewardship and eco-social justice. This recognised that environmental issues have social consequences and that environmental wellbeing is interconnected with community wellbeing, culture, identity, place and Country.

Thirdly, the project examined HOPE's organisational readiness. This included gathering stakeholder perspectives through a survey and considering HOPE's existing strengths, limitations, resources, organisational culture and capacity to undertake reconciliation work (see Appendix E). Additionally, the project investigated comparable organisational approaches, including the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions case study, to identify lessons that may be relevant to HOPE. This provided an opportunity to examine how another environmental organisation has approached reconciliation and what organisational factors may contribute to meaningful implementation. Finally, the project considered potential pathways for HOPE, including the possibility of developing a formal RAP and the preparatory work that may be required before undertaking one.

An important factor to consider is that the project does not attempt to speak on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples nor does it determine what reconciliation should look like for First Nations communities. Rather, it identifies the responsibility of HOPE to listen, seek guidance and develop relationships with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This distinction is important from both an ethical and social work perspective because meaningful participation requires that communities have opportunities to exercise agency and influence decisions that may affect them.

The project also recognises that Aboriginal and Torrs Strait Islander peoples and communities are diverse. A single perspective cannot be assumed to represent all First Nations peoples, and engagement should therefore be locally appropriate and responsive to the communities and Traditional Custodians with whom HOPE seeks to work.

3. HOPE's Organisational Context

HOPE Inc. is a volunteer-based environmental organisation whose work is centred on supporting householders and communities to make environmentally responsible choices and contribute to environmental protection. Its volunteer structure provides HOPE with a distinctive organisational context for reconciliation because the organisation's capacity for

action is strongly influenced by the commitment, knowledge and availability of its volunteers and leadership.

The volunteer nature of HOPE represents both a strength and a potential limitation. On one hand, volunteers can provide a strong foundation for organisational change because they are directly involved in community activities and can act as advocates for environmental and social change. On the other hand, limited financial resources, competing volunteer commitments, varying levels of knowledge and the absence of dedicated organisational staff may make it difficult to introduce and maintain new initiatives.

These factors are particularly important when considering a formal RAP. Reconciliation Australia describes RAPs as a structured approach through which organisations can embed reconciliation and progressively develop commitments across relationships, respect and opportunities. The RAP framework includes four stages; Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate. These stages allow organisations to undertake reconciliation according to their level of development and organisational capacity.

HOPE's environmental focus also creates an important opportunity for reconciliation. Environmental sustainability is inherently connected to social wellbeing because environmental degradation can affect communities, livelihoods, health, access to resources and people's relationship with place. A social work approach therefore recognised environmental concerns as social justice concerns rather than treating environmental issues as separate from human wellbeing.

This perspective aligns with eco-social approaches to social work, which emphasises the relationships between people, society and the natural environment. For HOPE, this provides an opportunity to consider how environmental advocacy can be strengthened through recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationships with Country and the knowledge systems that have supported environmental care for generations.

However, HOPE must avoid assuming that environmental interests automatically equate to Indigenous perspectives. A genuine reconciliation approach requires listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognising their right to determine how their knowledge, cultures and perspectives are represented and shared. The AIATSIS ethical framework emphasises that Indigenous peoples have rights to control and maintain their culture and heritage and that meaningful engagement and reciprocity are central to ethical practice. Therefore, HOPE's organisational context creates a strong rationale for exploring reconciliation, while also demonstrating the importance of taking a realistic and appropriately paces approach. A formal RAP would need to reflect HOPE's actual capacity rather than reproduce commitments designed for larger organisations with substantially greater financial and human resources.

From a social work perspective, this means recognising both strengths and structural limitations within the organisation. Rather than viewing limited resources as evidence that reconciliation is not possible, the project considers how HOPE can use its existing strengths while developing realistic structures to support longer-term change. Pre-existing strengths

include HOPE's strong environmental purpose, volunteer base, community connections and willingness to learn.

The organisational context also highlights the importance of organisational self-reflection. Social work practice recognised that practitioners and organisations critically examine their own assumptions, power and practices. Applied to reconciliation, this requires HOPE to consider not only what it can do for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but also what it needs to learn and change within its own organisation.

4. Method and Ethical Approach

4.1 Method

The project used a qualitative, exploratory and participatory approach to investigate HOPE's potential Pathway toward reconciliation. Rather than relying on a single source of information, multiple forms of information were considered to develop a broader understanding of HOPE's organisational context, stakeholder perspectives and potential pathways.

The first component involved a review of relevant literature and organisational resources concerning reconciliation, RAPs, First Nations perspectives, environmental justice, eco-social justice and ethical engagement. Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework was examined to understand the purpose, structure and progression of RAPs. This included consideration of the Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate stages and the central pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities.

The second component involved stakeholder consultation within HOPE through a survey distributed to volunteers and relevant organisational stakeholders (see Appendix A). The survey explored participants' understandings of reconciliation, perceptions of the importance of strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, views about whether HOPE should develop a RAP, perceived organisational strengths and potential barriers. The survey findings were analysed to identify recurring themes, patterns and differences in stakeholder perspectives. This provided an important internal perspective on organisational readiness and helped identify areas requiring further education, discussion or organisational development.

The third component involved a case study of the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS). The case study examined the organisations approach to reconciliation and identified lessons that may be transferable to HOPE. The purpose of the case study was not to suggest that HOPE should replicate another organisations RAP, but to identify practical lessons about governance, organisational commitments, relationship-building, implementation and sustainability (see Appendix C).

The fourth component involved stakeholder mapping and external engagement. Potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, Traditional Custodians and relevant peak organisations were identified as potential sources of guidance and future partnership. Initial

attempts were made to contact relevant organisations to seek information and guidance regarding appropriate approaches to reconciliation and RAP development. The external engagement component is particularly important because the project recognised that internal HOPE stakeholders cannot independently determine what meaningful First Nations engagement should look like. Rather, HOPE's internal readiness needs to be complemented by appropriate external relationships and guidance.

Finally, the information gathered through these activities was synthesised to assess HOPE's readiness, identify potential pathways and develop recommendations for future action.

4.2 Ethical Approach to First Nations Engagement

Ethical engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was a central consideration throughout the project. The project recognised that research, consultation and organisational decision-making concerning First Nations peoples must be undertaken with respect for cultural authority, self-determination and community priorities.

The AIATSIS Code of Ethics identifies four core principles: Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability. These principles provide a useful ethical foundation for HOPE's future engagement, particularly because the organisation is considering activities that may involve Indigenous knowledge, culture, Country and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The project also recognised the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and avoided assuming that one organisation, community or individual could represent all First Nations perspectives. Future engagement should therefore be locally relevant and guided by the appropriate Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and knowledge holders.

The AIATSIS framework further identifies recognition and respect, engagement and collaboration, cultural capability and learning, Indigenous perspectives and participation as well as ongoing Indigenous governance and benefit. These principles are particularly relevant to HOPE because any future RAP should be developed through genuine engagement rather than solely through internal organisational planning.

4.3 Ethical Limitations

The project also acknowledges limitations. The internal survey represents the perspectives of the HOPE stakeholders who participated and should not be interpreted as representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Similarly, the research undertaken during the placement provides an initial organisational assessment rather than a comprehensive assessment of all potential First Nations partnerships or perspectives.

A further limitation was the difficulty in establishing contact with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations during the timeframe of the placement. This means that the project should be understood as an initial assessment and foundation for continued engagement, rather than a completed consultation process with First Nations communities.

This limitation is ethically significant as Indigenous perceptive, and guidance is essential during the RAP process. However, the absence of a response from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation should not be interpreted as agreement, disagreement or lack of interest. Instead, it reinforces the importance of allowing relationships to develop at a pace determined by the communities and organisations being approach.

Consequently, one of the central findings of the methodological process is that relationship-building itself must be considered an ongoing component of HOPE's reconciliation journey, rather than something that can be completed within a single placement project. Overall, the methodology sought to balance organisational investigation with ethical responsibility. From a social work perspective, this meant recognising HOPE's capacity to create positive change while remaining critically aware of power, representation, cultural authority and the need for meaningful participation. The project therefore provides HOPE with a foundation for future action while recognising that the next stages of reconciliation must involve continued learning, relationship-building and First Nations guidance.

5. First Nations and Eco-Social Justice Framework

A social work perspective provides an important foundation for considering reconciliation within HOPE because social work is concerned with social justice, human rights, participation, self-determination and respect for diversity. These principles are relevant to reconciliation because meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples require organisations to recognise historical and ongoing inequalities, reflect on their own practices and support the participation and self-determination of First Nations peoples.

Throughout this report, the terms Traditional Owners and Traditional Custodians are used to acknowledge the distinct but interconnected concepts of First Nations authority and responsibility in relation to Country. Traditional Ownership recognises the inherent rights and authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while Custodianship emphasises the ongoing cultural responsibilities and reciprocal relationships associated with caring for Country. Both concepts are relevant to understanding First Nations sovereignty, self-determination and the relationship between people and the natural environment.

Moreover, an eco-social approach to social work recognises the interconnectedness of people, communities and the natural environment. Environmental issues can have significant social consequences, while social inequality can influence people's experiences of environmental harm and access to environmental resources. This creates a strong connection between HOPE's environmental purpose and social work values. It also highlights the importance of recognising the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' relationships with Country and ensuring that environmental work does not overlook these social and historical dimensions.

Self-determination and participation are particularly important to HOPE's proposed reconciliation journey. AIATSIS identifies Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous leadership as core principles for ethical engagement, alongside impact and value and

sustainability and accountability (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020). For HOPE, this means reconciliation should not be developed solely according to what the organisation believes is appropriate. Instead, HOPE should seek guidance from relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, Traditional Custodians and knowledge holders and provide meaningful opportunities for First Nations people to influence future activities.

This framework suggests that reconciliation for HOPE should be approached as an ongoing process of relationship-building, learning, reflection and organisational change, rather than as a single project. A RAP may provide a structure for this process however; meaningful reconciliation depends on the quality of the relationships and actions developed through it. This provides the foundation for considering the RAP model and assessing which pathway is most appropriate for HOPE.

6. Overview of the RAP Model

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a framework developed by Reconciliation Australia to support organisations to turn their commitment to reconciliation into practical and measurable actions. RAPs provide organisations with a structured process for developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, building cultural understanding and creating meaningful opportunities. The framework is based around three core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities (Reconciliation Australia, n.d.)

Moreover, the RAP framework consists of four stages; Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate. These stages recognise that organisations have different levels of experience, capacity and readiness for reconciliation. A Reflect RAP prepares organisations to engage in meaningful reconciliation. Committing to a Reflect RAP starts with engaging staff and leaders in understanding the importance of reconciliation. It includes developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, and scoping where the organisation can best impact in their area of interest. This level of RAP is typically implemented over 12 to 18 months.

An Innovate RAP outlines actions for achieving the organisation’s vision for reconciliation. Innovate RAP commitments allow the organisation to gain a deeper understanding of the area of interest and establish the best approaches to advance reconciliation. This level of RAP focuses on strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and piloting strategies for further reconciliation commitments over the course of two years.

A Stretch RAP is best suited to organisations that demonstrate strong meaningful engagement with internal and external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. Organisations need to have established a very strong approach towards advancing reconciliation internally and within the organisation’s field of interest. The Stretch RAP requires organisations to embed reconciliation initiatives into business strategies, so they become a part of daily operations. This process spans across a three-year period and can only be consider after successfully completing a Reflective or Innovate RAP.

The final level is the Elevate RAP which focus on transformational change. This RAP has a strong strategic relationship with Reconciliation Australia and actively champion initiatives to uphold the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Elevate RAP organisations have a proven track record of embedding effective RAP initiatives in their organisation through Stretch RAP's and are ready to take on leadership to advance national reconciliation.

7. Comparable Organisational Approaches

The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) provides a relevant comparison for HOPE because both organisations operate within the environmental sector and have a focus on community and environmental outcomes. In 2026, CISS launched its first Reflect RAP, with a focus on strengthening relationships with First Nations peoples and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into environmental work (see Appendix C). CISS demonstrates the importance of connecting reconciliation with an organisation's existing purpose rather than treating it as a separate activity. Its work with First Nations partners, including the Juunjuwarra Rangers, highlights how environmental organisations can develop relationships that support caring for Country while respecting Indigenous knowledge and participation.

The CISS example provides several lessons for HOPE. Firstly, relationship-building should be central to reconciliation rather than simply developing a RAP document. Secondly, First Nations perspectives should be incorporated through genuine participation and appropriate relationships. Thirdly, reconciliation requires organisational responsibility and ongoing commitment rather than relying on one individual. Finally, CISS demonstrates that the Reflect RAP stage can provide an appropriate starting point for an environmental organisation beginning its reconciliation journey

Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework similarly emphasises that RAPs can support organisations to embed reconciliation through relationships, respect and opportunities (Reconciliation Australia, n.d.). For HOPE, the key lesson is not to replicate another organisations RAP, but to adapt relevant approaches to its own volunteer structure, environmental purpose, capacity and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These lessons contribute to the assessment of HOPE's organisational readiness in the following section.

8. HOPE Organisational Readiness Assessment

Assessing organisational readiness is an important component of determining whether HOPE is appropriately positioned to progress its reconciliation commitments and potentially pursue a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). Throughout the placement project, organisational readiness was considered through internal stakeholder perspectives, existing organisational practices, cultural responsiveness, available resources and HOPE's capacity to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and

organisations. Overall, the findings indicate that HOPE demonstrates an emerging commitment to reconciliation but requires further capacity-building and relationship development before progressing to a formal RAP.

8.1 Internal Stakeholder Perspectives

An internal stakeholder survey was distributed to HOPE volunteers to explore their understanding of reconciliation and RAPs, perceptions of organisational readiness and priorities for future action (see Appendix A). The findings demonstrated volunteer support for strengthening HOPE's relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Approximately 89% of respondents considered strengthening these relationships to be at least somewhat important.

However, the survey also identified gaps in knowledge and confidence. Approximately 56% of respondents reported being only slightly familiar or not familiar with RAPs, while 67% indicated that they would benefit from further information or did not feel confident in their current understanding. These findings suggest that while there is interest in reconciliation within the organisation, further education and capacity-building would be beneficial before significant organisational commitments are made.

Perceptions of readiness reflected a similar pattern. Approximately 89% o respondents considered HOPE to be at least slightly ready to progress reconciliation activities; however, no respondents considered the organisation to be "very ready". This distinction is important, as it indicates that internal stakeholders generally support progressing reconciliation while recognising that further foundational work is required.

Survey responses also demonstrated that stakeholders were interested in moving beyond symbolic recognition towards meaningful relationships and collaboration. Building genuine partnerships emerged as a key desired action. This aligns with the broader direction of the project, which has emphasised relationship-building and consultation rather than viewing reconciliation as solely the development of a formal organisational document.

8.2 Organisational Strengths

Several existing characteristics of HOPE provide a foundation for further reconciliation work. As an environmental organisation, HOPE's activities provide opportunities to recognise the interconnected organisation, HOPE's activities provide opportunities to recognise the interconnected relationships between Country, culture, community and environmental wellbeing. This creates potential for reconciliation to be incorporated within HOPE's broader environmental and social justice objectives rather than approached as an isolated organisational initiative.

Another strength is the organisation's willingness to engage in a process of organisational reflection. The development of this readiness project, distinction of the internal stakeholder survey, consideration of First Nations perspectives, review of comparable organisations and exploration of culturally responsive organisational practices demonstrate an emerging willingness to examine HOPE's current position and identify opportunities for improvement.

The organisation also has opportunities to build reconciliation into existing activities. Environmental education, community engagement, volunteer development and public events could provide practical settings in which HOPE progressively strengthens recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, perspectives and relationships. This provides a foundation upon which more formal commitments could later be developed.

8.3 Barriers to Readiness

Despite these strengths, the assessment identified several barriers that may influence HOPE's capacity to undertake reconciliation initiatives. The most frequently identified barriers in the internal stakeholder survey were volunteer capacity reported by approximately 78% of respondents. Financial limitation and gaps in organisational knowledge were each identified by approximately 67%, while approximately 56% identified difficulties associated with developing partnerships.

These findings are particularly relevant to HOPE's organisational structure. As a volunteer-based, non-government organisation, HOPE operates with limited financial and human resources. A formal RAP process requires sustained organisational commitment rather than the completion of a single project or document. Without clearly allocated responsibility, reconciliation initiatives may become difficult to maintain alongside other organisational priorities.

Financial limitations may also affect HOPE's capacity to provide cultural capability training, participate in community initiatives, engage appropriately with First Nations organisations or undertake other reconciliation activities. This does not prevent HOPE from progressing reconciliation however; it reinforces the importance of establishing realistic commitments that reflect the organisations available resources. External funding opportunities, partnerships and grants may assist in addressing some of these limitations and are considered further in Section 14.

Knowledge was also identified as an important limitation. Limited familiarity with RAPs and reconciliation processes creates a risk that organisational actions could become symbolic rather than informed by a broader understanding of reconciliation. The development and circulation of education resources during the project have begun responding to this gap however, ongoing learning should remain a priority.

8.4 Cultural Responsiveness and Organisational Reflection

Cultural responsiveness was further considered through the development of a cultural safety and organisational self-reflection audit informed by culturally responsive practice principles (see Appendix B). This process encouraged consideration of whether HOPE currently recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia, acknowledges diversity between communities, understands the continuing impacts of colonisation and dispossession, and recognises connections between Country, culture, community and wellbeing.

Moreover, cultural responsiveness should not be understood as a checklist that can simply be completed. Rather, it requires ongoing critical reflection about organisational assumptions, practices, power and relationships. For HOPE, this includes considering whose knowledge is represented within environmental discussions, how First Nations perspectives are incorporated into organisational activities, and whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions that concern their communities, cultures and Country.

From a social work perspective, this process also requires consideration of power, privilege and the potential for predominantly non-Indigenous organisations to unintentionally reproduce colonial or culturally dominant approaches. Critical reflection therefore remains an important safeguard as HOPE develops its reconciliation activities. Cultural responsiveness should be treated as an ongoing organisational responsibility rather than something achieved through the adoption of a RAP alone.

8.5 Relationship Readiness

A further component of organisational readiness concerns HOPE's capacity to develop genuine and sustainable relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Initial stakeholder engagement undertaken during the project has demonstrated that relationship-building requires time, respect and an openness to guidance rather than approaching First Nations organisations only when assistance or endorsement is required.

This is particularly important because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations should not be expected to carry responsibility for educating HOPE or developing its reconciliation approach. HOPE should undertake its own internal learning while creating opportunities for relationships to develop respectfully and reciprocally. Consultation should therefore not be approached as a one-off activity undertaken for the purpose of completing a RAP. Instead, relationship development should occur progressively and contribute to longer-term collaboration where there is mutual interest and benefit.

The early stage of HOPE's existing First Nations relationships represents both a limitation and an opportunity. While strong established partnerships are not currently evident, beginning from this position provides HOPE with an opportunity to develop its approach collaboratively rather than establishing commitments first and seeking First Nations endorsement afterwards.

8.6 Overall Readiness Assessment

Overall, the findings indicate that HOPE demonstrates emerging organisational readiness for further reconciliation work. There is evidence of internal support, willingness to learn, and alignment between reconciliation and HOPE's broader environmental and social justice objectives. However, limitations relating to volunteer capacity, finances, organisational knowledge and established First Nations relationships indicate that HOPE is not yet positioned to undertake an ambitious or resource-intensive reconciliation process without additional foundational work.

This assessment should not be interpreted as suggesting that HOPE should delay reconciliation until it is considered fully prepared. Organisational readiness can instead be developed through the reconciliation process itself. The findings support a staged approach in which HOPE initially prioritises internal education, organisational reflection, relationship-building and achievable practical actions while progressively strengthening the foundations required for long-term commitments.

Accordingly, HOPE's current position is best characterised as one of willingness with developing capacity. Progressing reconciliation should therefore focus initially on building organisational knowledge and relationships rather than measuring success primarily through the completion of a formal RAP document. This readiness assessment provides the basis for considering the available pathways outlined in later sections of this report and determining an approach that is meaningful, culturally responsive and realistic within HOPE's organisational capacity.

9. Stakeholder and Relationship Considerations

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is central to HOPE's reconciliation journey. Reconciliation should not be approached solely as an internal organisational process, but as one that requires respectful relationships, consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Throughout this project, stakeholder mapping and initial engagement and activities were undertaken to identify relevant internal and external stakeholders and consider how HOPE could develop these relationships appropriately.

9.1 Internal Stakeholders

HOPE's volunteers and Management Committee are important internal stakeholders because their understanding, support and participation will influence whether reconciliation commitments can be embedded and sustained within the organisation. As identified in the organisational readiness assessment, internal stakeholders generally demonstrated support for strengthening relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while also identifying gaps in knowledge, confidence and organisational capacity.

This highlights the importance of ensuring that reconciliation is understood as a shared organisational responsibility rather than being dependent upon a single volunteer, student or project. Building internal understanding though accessible information, discussion and cultural capability development may assist volunteers to understand both the purpose of reconciliation and their role in contributing to it.

Leadership involvement is particularly important. The Management Committee has a role in ensuring that reconciliation commitments are reflected in organisational priorities, decision-making and resources allocation. Establishing clear responsibility for reconciliation, such as through a nominated reconciliation champion or working group, may assist HOPE in maintaining momentum beyond the completion of the current placement project.

9.2 First Nations Stakeholders and Traditional Custodians

An important component of this project has involved identifying and beginning engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Traditional Custodian groups. Initial outreach has included organisations representing communities within Toowoomba and surrounding regions, as well as consideration of broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that may provide relevant knowledge, guidance or opportunities for future collaboration.

This process highlighted that HOPE is currently at an early stage of developing these relationships. Rather than viewing this as a barrier to reconciliation, it provides an opportunity for HOPE to establish relationships carefully and respectfully from the beginning.

Engagement should focus initially on listening and relationship-building rather than seeking immediate endorsement of a RAP or asking First Nations stakeholders to determine HOPE's reconciliation strategy. Initial communication undertaken during the project has therefore positioned HOPE as being at the beginning of its reconciliation journey and seeking to understand how it can approach this work respectfully.

9.3 Avoiding Cultural Load and Tokenism

A significant consideration identified throughout the project is the risk of placing responsibility for reconciliation onto Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. First Nations organisations and Traditional Custodians may receive numerous requests for consultation, cultural advice and organisational guidance. Therefore, HOPE should avoid assuming that these stakeholders have an obligation to provide education, advice or participation.

Prior to seeking external guidance, HOPE should undertake its own foundational learning and clearly identify why engagement is being sought. Requests should be respectful, specific and realistic, while allowing First Nations stakeholders to determine whether and how they wish to participate. This approach also reduces the risk of tokenism. Inviting an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person to contribute to a single event, document or consultation does not necessarily constitute meaningful engagement. Similarly, the inclusion of an Acknowledgement of Country or participation in events such as NAIDOC Week can be valuable, but these actions should form part of a broader commitment to relationships, learning and organisational change rather than functioning as isolated symbolic activities.

9.4 Local Relationships and Connection to Country

HOPE's environmental focus makes relationships with Traditional Custodians particularly significant. Environmental work occurs on Country, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold longstanding cultural, spiritual and ecological relationships with Country. Developing greater awareness of the Traditional Custodians associated with the areas in which HOPE operates can therefore strengthen both its reconciliation and environmental practice.

As HOPE has a national environmental focus while maintaining organisational connections to Toowoomba, stakeholder engagement may need to occur at different levels. Local relationships can provide opportunities for sustained and place-based engagement, while broader First Nations organisations may contribute perspectives relevant to HOPE's wider environmental activities.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities should not be treated as a single stakeholder group. Different communities, Traditional Custodians and organisations have distinct histories, priorities, governance structures and relationships with Country. Therefore, HOPE should seek locally appropriate guidance when undertaking activities within regions rather than assuming that engagement with one organisation represents the perspectives of all First Nations peoples.

9.5 Broader External Stakeholders

HOPE's reconciliation activities may also involve relationships with other external stakeholders, including environmental organisations, community organisations, universities, funding bodies and organisations that have undertaken their own reconciliation initiatives. The review of comparable environmental organisations undertaken during this project demonstrates that HOPE can learn from the experiences of organisations that have progressed through RAP processes while adapting these lessons to its own size, structure and capacity.

Universities and community events may also provide opportunities for HOPE to increase awareness of its environmental and reconciliation activities while attracting younger volunteers. Funding bodies may become increasingly important where activities such as cultural capability training, community events or collaborative environmental initiatives require financial resources. These relationships aim to foster direct engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

9.6 Principles for Future Stakeholder Engagement

Based on the findings of this project, future stakeholder engagement should be guided by several principles. Engagement should be respectful, relational, reciprocal, culturally responsive and sustainable. HOPE should approach relationships with an intention to listen and learn while remaining clear about its own responsibilities and limitations.

Relationships should also develop at an appropriate pace. Building trust may require ongoing communication rather than immediate outcomes, and successful engagement should not be measured solely by whether an organisation agrees to participate in HOPE's reconciliation activities. Respecting decisions not to engage is equally important.

From a social work perspective, this approach reflects principles of self-determination, respect, cultural humility and critical reflection. It also requires awareness of power imbalances that may exist when non-Indigenous organisations seek First Nations knowledge or participation. Therefore, HOPE should continually reflect on who benefits from engagement, whose perspectives are being prioritised and whether First Nations stakeholders have meaningful influence over activities that directly concern them.

9.7 Key Relationship Priorities

The stakeholder work undertaken during this project suggests that HOPE's immediate priority should be the development of a small number of meaningful and sustainable relationships. Initial relationships should focus on Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations connected to the areas in which HOPE has an established presence.

Internally, HOPE should strengthen volunteer understanding of reconciliation so that responsibility for maintaining these relationships does not fall to one individual. Externally, engagement should focus on listening, identifying areas of shared interest and gradually exploring opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, the quality of HOPE's relationships will be more significant than the number of organisations contacted. Developing genuine, reciprocal and sustained relationships will provide a stronger foundation for reconciliation than consultation undertaken solely for the purpose of developing a RAP. These considerations should therefore inform the assessment of available reconciliation pathways and the recommendations presented in the following sections.

10. Assessment of Available Pathways

Based on the organisational readiness assessment and stakeholder considerations outlined in previous sections, three potential pathways have been identified for HOPE's future reconciliation work. These pathways vary in their level of formality, resource requirements and organisational commitment. Each pathway has been considered in relation to HOPE's volunteer-based structure, financial capacity, current level of reconciliation knowledge and developing relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

10.1 Pathway One: Continue Informal Reconciliation Activities

The first pathway would involve HOPE continuing to undertake smaller reconciliation activities without formally committing to a RAP. This could include incorporating an Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of meetings and organisational materials, recognising significant events such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, sharing educational resources with volunteers and committing to engaging with First Nations organisations.

As a part of this recommendation, HOPE should make ongoing commitment to developing respectful relationships with First Nations organisations and Traditional Custodians. This engagement should focus on relationship-building rather than approaching organisations only when HOPE requires advice, consultation or endorsement. In a practical setting, this commitment could include identifying relevant Traditional Custodians in regions where HOPE operates, attend local First Nations events, seek guidance on appropriate cultural protocols and policies and establish a consistent contact person within HOPE to support ongoing communication.

This pathway has the advantage of being somewhat achievable within HOPE's current volunteer and financial capacity. It would allow the organisation to progressively increase awareness of reconciliation without committing to a formal process. This may be particularly appropriate where volunteers require further education before undertaking more significant organisational commitments. However, relying solely on informal activities presents several limitations.

Without an established framework, timeframes or monitoring process, activities may become inconsistent. There is also a risk that reconciliation becomes focused on symbolic action rather than sustainable organisational change and relationship-building. While informal activities can contribute positively to reconciliation, this pathway alone may not provide sufficient structure to address the organisational knowledge, relationship and governance gaps identified throughout this project.

10.2 Pathway Two: Pre-RAP Capacity-Building and Practical Action

This pathway would involve HOPE undertaking a defined period of capacity-building and practical reconciliation activities before formally committing to a RAP. This recommendation recognises the HOPE demonstrates willingness to progress reconciliation but currently faces limitations relating to volunteer capacity, financial resources, organisational knowledge and established First Nations relationships.

A pre-RAP phase could occur over approximately 6-12 months and focus on strengthening the foundations required for long-term reconciliation commitments. Internally, HOPE could continue providing accessible reconciliation information to volunteers such as the HOPE Information Pack which was circulated via email. Additionally, HOPE can incorporate cultural learning opportunities, review relevant organisational policies and establish clearer intent towards reconciliation. To do this, it is recommended that a RAP champion and a potential working group be established with the responsibility of coordinating activities and monitoring progression.

Importantly, this pathway would still involve practical action. HOPE could participate in environmental and community events, recognise National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, provide cultural learning opportunities and explore collaborative environmental activities where appropriate. Moreover, information stalls at local community centres and universities could promote HOPE's environmental work while supporting the recruitment of younger volunteers. This supports reconciliation while also helping to address existing volunteer capacity limitations.

This pathway utilises external grants and community funding opportunities to explore ways HOPE can create meaningful relationships, strengthen its community participation and enhance volunteer recruitment, including taking an active approach to encouraging First Nations peoples to become involved with HOPE. Increasing First Nations representation within HOPE could strengthen the organisation's understanding of diverse community perspectives and environmental and eco-social justice issues of significance. Funding could be explored to support activities such as cultural training, environmental events, educational

resources, information stalls and community engagement. This would reduce reliance on HOPE's limited existing financial resources while supporting greater organisational and volunteer capacity.

Overall, this pathway would allow HOPE to make practical progress while strengthening the knowledge, relationships and resources required for a future Reflect RAP. Clear responsibilities, actions and review dates would be important to ensure the capacity-building period leads towards further organisational commitment rather than becoming an indefinite delay.

10.3 Pathway Three: Commence a Reflect RAP

The final pathway would involve HOPE progressing directly towards the development of a formal Reflect RAP. A Reflect RAP is intended to support organisations in establishing the foundation of their reconciliation commitments, including organisational understanding, relationships, governance and opportunities for future action. It could also strengthen organisational accountability by establishing defined actions and responsibilities rather than relying on informal initiatives. A formal RAP may provide a clear organisational direction and demonstrate that reconciliation has been recognised as an ongoing commitment. For a more detailed explanation of the formal RAP requirements, see Appendix G.

Moreover, a Reflect RAP also aligns with HOPE's position as an organisation at an early stage of its reconciliation journey. The organisation has already begun several activities that could contribute to this process including internal consultation, organisational self-reflection, stakeholder mapping and review of comparable organisational approaches. However, progressing immediately to a Reflect RAP may place additional pressure on HOPE's existing resources. The volunteer survey identified volunteer capacity as the most significant perceived barrier, alongside financial limitations, knowledge gaps and limited established First Nations partnerships. A RAP requires ongoing responsibility and implementation beyond the development of the document itself. Beginning the process without sufficient internal ownership or capacity may therefore create a risk that commitments cannot be consistently maintained.

There is also a risk that prioritising completion of a formal RAP too early could shift attention towards producing the document rather than developing the relationships and organisational learning that should underpin it. Therefore, a Reflect RAP may present an appropriate future direction for HOPE, but its effectiveness would be strengthened if the organisation fist addressed some of the foundational limitations identified throughout this project.

11. Recommended Pathway

Based on the findings of this readiness assessment, it is recommended that HOPE focus on their pre-RAP capacity-building and practical action before committing to a formal Reflect RAP. This approach is appropriate as it allows HOPE to strengthen its organisational

knowledge, relationships and practical commitment to reconciliation. The readiness assessment identified considerable interest in strengthening relationships with Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander peoples however, it also highlighted barriers including limited volunteer capacity, financial constraints, gaps in RAP knowledge and limited established First Nation partnerships. A pre-RAP approach responds to these limitations by allowing HOPE to progress reconciliation activities at a pace appropriate to its size, volunteer-based structure and available resources.

Before progressing with practical reconciliation activities, HOPE should first establish a clear organisational position regarding First Nations peoples and reconciliation. This could include formal recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Australia, their continuing connection to Country, the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession, and the significance of First Nations perspectives on environmental protection. Establishing this position would provide HOPE with a foundational acknowledgement from which future reconciliation activities, policies and relationships can develop.

Under this pathway, HOPE could prioritise practical and achievable actions, including strengthening relationships with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations. In practice, this could involve identifying relevant local organisations and Traditional Custodians, making respectful introductory contact, attending community events and NAIDOC Week activities as well as inviting opportunities for informal conversations. Moreover, it is encouraged that HOPE maintain contact with First Nations communities over time rather than approaching with the purpose of requiring assistance or perpetuating cultural load. HOPE could also explore opportunities to attend or support First Nations-led environmental and community initiatives where appropriate. Recognising that initial engagement may not always receive an immediate response, HOPE should view relationship-building as a gradual and ongoing process that requires consistency, patience and respect.

As an initial step, HOPE could undertake the Cultural Responsiveness Audit adapted from Bindi Bennett's framework to establish a clearer baseline of its current organisational practices. While the internal survey provided insight into members' attitudes, knowledge and perceived readiness for reconciliation, the audit provides an opportunity for the Management Committee to critically reflect on HOPE's existing policies, practices and organisational culture. This process may help identify areas where First Nations perspectives, voices and considerations of justice are currently absent, while also highlighting specific areas for improvement. Undertaking the audit early in this pathway would allow HOPE to recognise that its reconciliation journey is beginning from a limited organisational baseline and establish practical priorities before progressing towards more formal reconciliation commitments. Additionally, the audit could be repeated over time to monitor organisational growth and demonstrate progress.

Importantly, this pathway provides HOPE with time to develop genuine and reciprocal relationships with First Nations stakeholders before making formal organisational commitments. This reflects social work principles of self-determination, cultural humility,

respect and meaningful participation, while reducing the risk of reconciliation becoming symbolic or overly focused on completing a formal document.

Therefore, it is recommended that HOPE initially focus its resources on capacity-building, relationship development and practical action, while periodically reviewing its readiness for a formal RAP. A Reflect RAP may remain a future option once HOPE has developed stronger organisational capacity, sustainable resources, leadership commitment and established First Nations relationships. Overall, Pathway Two provides HOPE with a realistic and achievable approach to progressing reconciliation while responding to its current organisational capacity. It enables meaningful action to begin now without requiring HOPE to enter the formal RAP process before the organisation has developed the foundations necessary to support it effectively.

12. Staged Implementation Plan

To support the implementation of the recommended pathway, a staged approach is proposed that allows HOPE to progressively strengthen its reconciliation capacity while continuing practical action. The timeframes are intended as a guide and should remain flexible according to volunteer capacity, available funding and guidance received through engagement with First Nations stakeholders.

12.1 Stage One: Establish Foundations – 0-3 Months

The initial stage should focus on establishing responsibility, strengthening internal understanding and demonstrating a commitment to First Nations inclusion. HOPE should identify a reconciliation champion or small working group to coordinate activities and maintain momentum. HOPE's Management Committee and volunteers should be provided with accessible information about reconciliation, cultural safety and the purpose of RAPs, building the information and resources developed through this project. During this period, HOPE could also review its existing policies, communication practices and organisational materials to identify opportunities to strengthen cultural responsiveness. This could include incorporating the Aboriginal and Torrs Strait Islander flags and appropriately authorised First Nations artwork into HOPE's website and organisational communications to visibly demonstrate its commitment to inclusion. Additionally, HOPE should consider developing targeted recruitment approaches that encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership, volunteering and participation, creating opportunities for greater First Nations representation and perspectives within the organisation. These initiatives should be undertaken respectfully and without placing expectations on First Nations individuals to provide unpaid cultural guidance or represent their broader communities. The cultural safety organisational audit developed during this project could also be used as a baseline for identifying areas requiring further development.

12.2 Stage Two: Relationship-Building and Learning – 3-6 Months

The second stage should prioritise genuine relationship-building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. HOPE should continue engagement with Traditional Custodians and Fist Nations organisations, particularly within Toowoomba and the areas in which HOPE operates, while recognising that relationships require time, reciprocity and respect.

HOPE should seek opportunities for volunteers to participate in cultural learning and locally appropriate activities. This could include attending community events, recognising National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week, and exploring cultural capability training where resources permit. Importantly, engagement should focus on listening and learning rather than expecting First Nations organisations to provide unpaid cultural knowledge or assume responsibility for HOPE's reconciliation work.

12.3 Stage Three: Practical Action – 6-12 Months

As organisational knowledge and relationships develop, HOPE could expand its focus to visible and practical reconciliation activities that align with its environmental purpose. This may include environmental information stalls, community education activities, university engagement and volunteer recruitment events that incorporate appropriate recognition of First Nations perspectives and connections to Country.

Where relationships and community interest support it, HOPE could also explore opportunities for collaborative environmental activities with First Nations organisations. Any collaborative initiatives should be developed through consultation rather than predetermined by HOPE. During this stage, HOPE should also explore relevant grant and funding opportunities to support cultural capability development, community engagement, environmental events and other reconciliation-related activities.

12.4 Stage Four: Review and Future Direction – 12+ Months

Following the initial period of capacity-building and practical action, HOPE should review its progress and determine its future direction. This could involve repeating elements of the organisational readiness survey and cultural safety audit, seeking feedback from volunteers and First Nations stakeholders where appropriate, and reviewing progress against the actions identified in this report.

The review should consider whether HOPE has developed stronger organisational knowledge, sustainable volunteer capacity, leadership commitment, financial resources and meaningful First Nations relationships. These findings can then inform whether HOPE should continue with the pre-RAP approach or consider progressing toward a formal Reflect RAP. Progress should therefore be determined by organisational readiness and the quality of relationships developed rather than by a fixed deadline. This ensures that reconciliation remains an ongoing and meaningful organisational commitment rather than a process driven primarily by completion of a formal RAP.

13. Risks and Safeguards

While the recommended pre-RAP pathway provides HOPE with a flexible and achievable approach to reconciliation, several risks should be considered to ensure that activities remain respectful, meaningful and sustainable. These risks are particularly important given HOPE's volunteer-based structure, limited financial resources and developing relationships with First Nations stakeholders. Appropriate safeguards can reduce these risks while supporting continued organisational learning and accountability.

13.1 Tokenism and Symbolic Action

There is a risk that reconciliation activities may become primarily symbolic if actions such as Acknowledgement of Country or recognition of NAIDOC Week are implemented without broader organisational learning, relationship-building or practical commitment. This could limit the meaningfulness of HOPE's reconciliation efforts. To reduce this risk, symbolic actions should form part of a broader commitment to reconciliation that includes ongoing cultural learning, organisational reflection, relationship-building and practical action. HOPE should regularly consider whether its activities are contributing to meaningful organisational change rather than focusing solely on visible outcomes.

13.2 Cultural Burden and Inappropriate Engagement

Engagement with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations may unintentionally place expectations on individuals or organisations to educate HOPE or provide cultural knowledge without appropriate recognition. This is particularly important when HOPE is seeking guidance while developing its reconciliation approach. Therefore, engagement should be respectful, voluntary and relationship focused. HOPE should clearly communicate the purpose of contact, avoid placing responsibility for its reconciliation work onto First Nations stakeholders, and recognise that organisations may not have the capacity to participate. Where substantial cultural expertise or consultation is requested, appropriate remuneration should be considered where possible.

13.3 Limited Volunteer Capacity

The internal readiness assessment identified volunteer capacity as a significant organisational barrier. Introducing too many reconciliation activities simultaneously could create additional pressure on existing volunteers and make actions difficult to sustain. The staged implementation approach outlined in Section 12 provides an important safeguard by allowing activities to occur progressively. Responsibilities should be shared where possible through a reconciliation champion or small working group, with actions prioritised according to available capacity.

13.4 Financial Constraints

Limited financial resources may affect HOPE's ability to access capability training, participation in activities or implementing larger reconciliation initiatives. HOPE should prioritise low-cost actions while continuing to investigate external grants and funding

opportunities. Available resources should be considered before commitments are made, ensuring that reconciliation activities are realistic and financially sustainable.

13.5 Loss of Momentum

As a volunteer-based organisation, change in volunteer availability or leadership may result in reconciliation activities losing momentum over time. There is also a risk that responsibility could become concentrated with one individual. To safeguard against this, reconciliation activities should be incorporated into organisational planning and documented rather than relying solely on individual commitment. Maintaining records of relationships, actions and progress would also support continuity when volunteer membership changes.

13.6 Cultural Safety and Organisational Knowledge

Limited knowledge or confidence may increase the possibility of unintentionally using inappropriate language, communication or engagement practice. Avoiding engagement altogether due to uncertainty. However, this may also prevent meaningful relationship-building and organisational learning. Therefore, HOPE should approach cultural capability as an ongoing process. Accessible learning opportunities, organisational self-reflection and use of the cultural safety audit developed through this project can assist HOPE to identify areas requiring further development. Where appropriate, guidance should be sought from credible First Nation led resources and organisations.

13.7 Safeguarding the Overall Approach

These risks do not suggest that HOPE should delay reconciliation activities until all potential challenges have been resolved. Rather, they demonstrate the importance of proceeding gradually, reflectively and with appropriate safeguards. The recommended pre-RAP pathway allows HOPE to learn through practical action while regularly reviewing its organisational capacity, relationships and approach.

Ongoing reflection, documentation and review should therefore accompany the implementation plan. Where concerns emerge, HOPE should be prepared to reconsider or adapt its approach rather than continuing an activity solely because it was previously planned. This flexibility will support reconciliation activities that are respectful, sustainable and appropriate to HOPE’s organisational context.

14. Resource Implications

The recommendation pre-RAP capacity-building pathway has been designed to reflect HOPE’s current organisational capacity and minimise the need for significant financial or administrative resources. However, successful implementation will still require consideration of volunteer capacity, financial resources, cultural learning, relationship-building and access to external support.

14.1 Volunteer Capacity and Time

Volunteer capacity represents one of the most significant resource considerations for HOPE. The organisational readiness survey identified limited volunteer capacity as the mot commonly reported barrier, with 78% of respondents identifying this as a potential challenge. As HOPE operates primarily through volunteers, reconciliation activities should therefore be realistic, manageable and incorporated into existing organisational practices wherever possible.

Rather than establishing many new responsibilities, HOPE could initially nominate a RAP or reconciliation champion, or establish a small working group, to coordinate activities and maintain organisational momentum. Responsibilities could include identifying cultural learning opportunities, maintaining relevant resources, coordinating participation in events such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week and supporting ongoing engagement with First Nations organisations. Implementation should remain flexible to avoid placing unrealistic expectations on individual volunteers. Responsibilities should also be shared where possible to reduce reliance on a single person when volunteers change.

14.2 Financial Resources

Financial limitations were identified by 67% of survey respondents as a potential barrier to progressing reconciliation. However, the recommended pathway does not require HOPE to immediately commit substantial financial resources to developing a formal RAP. Many initial actions can be undertaken at relatively low cost, including reviewing organisational policies and practices, strengthening the use of Acknowledgement of Country, identifying relevant First Nations organisations and events, incorporating reconciliation into volunteer communication, and accessing freely available reconciliation resources.

Some activities may require additional funding, particularly cultural learning or training, participation in community initiatives, engagement activities and future First Nations-led projects. Therefore, HOPE could seek external grant funding where appropriate rather than relying on existing organisational funds. Grant opportunities identified through this project may assist HOPE in supporting cultural learning, community engagement, environmental initiatives and volunteer participation. Importantly, where HOPE seeks cultural knowledge, advice or substantial involvement from First Nations individuals or organisations, appropriate remuneration should be considered rather than assuming this contribution will be provided voluntarily.

14.3 Cultural Learning and Organisational Knowledge

The readiness assessment also identified knowledge as an important resource's consideration, with 67% of respondents indicating either a need for further information or limited confidence regarding RAPs. Therefore, developing organisational knowledge should be an early component of the recommended pathway. HOPE can initially utilise freely available resources from Reconciliation Australia and other reputable First Nations organisations.

Where financially feasible, this could later be supplemented by cultural awareness training delivered by appropriately qualified First Nations providers.

Cultural learning should be understood as an ongoing organisational process rather than a single training activity. Building knowledge over time may assist volunteers to engage more confidently and respectfully with reconciliation while reducing the risk of actions becoming tokenistic.

14.4 Relationships and Partnerships

Relationship-building requires fewer material resources but represents a significant investment of time, consistency and organisational commitment. HOPE should recognise that meaningful relationships with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations are unlikely to develop through one-off contact.

Resources should therefore be allocated to maintaining communication, attending relevant community events and supporting First Nations-led initiatives. Engagement should prioritise relationship-building rather than approaching First Nations organisations primarily for advice, endorsement or assistance with HOPE's reconciliation journey. This approach may also educe the risk of placing unnecessary cultural load on First Nations organisations and individuals. Where opportunities for collaboration develop, expectations, responsibilities and available resources should be discussed openly.

14.5 External and In-Kind Support

Given HOPE's limited financial and volunteer capacity, external and in-kind support may assist implementation. This could include grant funding, partnerships with universities and community organisations, access to free educational resources, participation in community events, and collaboration with other environmental organisations undertaking reconciliation initiatives. These opportunities may allow HOPE to progressively build its organisational capacity without committing to a formal RAP before sufficient resources, knowledge and relationships are established. Resources requirements should be reviewed periodically as HOPE progresses through the recommended implementation stages, allowing activities to expand in accordance with organisational capacity.

15. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

Monitoring and evaluation will assist HOPE to assess whether its reconciliation activities are contributing to meaningful organisational change and increasing its capacity to progress toward a formal RAP in the future. Given HOPE's volunteer-based structure and current resource limitations, the monitoring process should remain practical, achievable and proportionate to the organisation's capacity. Evaluation should consider both the completion of practical actions and the broader development of organisational knowledge, relationships and cultural responsiveness. Progress should not be measured solely by the number of activities completed, as meaningful reconciliation requires ongoing learning, reflection and relationship-building.

15.1 Monitoring Progress

HOPE could undertake a brief review of reconciliation activities every six months. Responsibility for coordinating this process could be allocated to a reconciliation champion or small working group, while findings should be communicated to the broader organisation.

The following framework provides potential areas for monitoring:

Area	Indicators of Progress	Possible Evidence
Relationships	Increased and ongoing engagement with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations	Record of engagement, attendance at community events or collaborative activities
Cultural learning	Increased opportunities for volunteers to develop cultural knowledge and awareness	Training participation, educational resources shared, volunteer feedback
Organisational practice	Reconciliation increasingly incorporated into HOPE's regular practices	Use of Acknowledgement of Country, updated organisational documents, meeting practice and communication
Community participation	Increased participation in relevant First Nations-led events and initiatives	Participation in NAIDOC Week, National Reconciliation Week or community activities
Volunteer engagement	Volunteers demonstrate increased awareness and involvement in reconciliation activities	Volunteer feedback, participation levels and internal discussions
Resources and capacity	Improved ability to support reconciliation activities	Grant applications, funding obtained, partnerships, allocated volunteer roles and access to external resources
Future RAP readiness	Increased organisational understanding and capacity to consider a formal RAP	Follow-up readiness assessment, increased RAP knowledge and evidence of established relationships

15.2 Evaluation and Organisational Reflection

In addition to monitoring practical activities, HOPE should create opportunities for volunteers to reflect on what is working, what challenges have emerged and whether activities remain culturally appropriate and achievable. A follow-up version of the organisational readiness survey used during this project could be conducted after 12 months. Comparing these findings with the initial results would allow HOPE to identify changes in volunteer knowledge, confidence, perceived organisational readiness and identified barriers.

The cultural safety audit developed during this project could also be repeated periodically to identify areas of improvement and areas requiring further attention. These tools should be used to support organisational reflection rather than as a checklist demonstrating that reconciliation has been completed. Where appropriate and where relationships have been established, HOPE may also consider feedback from First Nations organisations or

community partners involved in collaborative activities. However, evaluation process should avoid placing unnecessary responsibility or cultural load on First Nations people to assess HOPE's reconciliation progress.

15.3 Reviewing Future RAP Readiness

After approximately 12-18 months of implementing the recommended pathway, HOPE could formally reconsider its readiness to commence a Reflect RAP. This review should consider whether the organisation has developed greater volunteer capacity, cultural knowledge, financial resources and meaningful relationships with First Nations communities. Progress towards a formal RAP should therefore be determined by organisational capacity and the quality of relationships established rather than by a predetermined deadline. If significant barriers remain, continuing practical reconciliation activities outside a formal RAP would remain an appropriate option.

Overall, monitoring and evaluation should function as an ongoing cycle of action, reflection, learning and improvement. This approach allows HOPE to progressively strengthen its reconciliation practice while ensuring that future decisions remain responsive to organisational capacity and relationships with First Nations communities.

16. Conclusion

The readiness assessment explored HOPE's current capacity to strengthen its approach to reconciliation and consider the potential development of a Reconciliation Action Plan. Overall, the findings demonstrate an organisational interest in progressing reconciliation, while also identifying several practical barriers that should be addressed before committing to a formal RAP. In particular, volunteer capacity, financial limitations, organisational knowledge and the development of meaningful relationships with First Nations communities remain important considerations.

Based on these findings, this report recommends that HOPE pursue Pathway two which is pre-RAP capacity-building and practical action. Rather than immediately commencing a formal RAP, this pathway provides HOPE with an opportunity to strengthen the foundations required to support reconciliation in a way that reflects the organisations current size, structure and resources. This may include increasing cultural learning opportunities, strengthening organisational practices, participating in First Nations-led events and initiatives, and gradually developing relationships with Traditional Custodians.

Importantly, reconciliation should not be understood as a process measured solely through the completion of formal actions or the development of a RAP. For HOPE, meaningful progress will require ongoing reflection, learning and relationship-building, alongside consideration of how reconciliation can be embedded within the organisations broader environmental values. Taking a gradual approach may also assist HOPE to minimise the risk of tokenistic engagement and ensure that future actions are supported by sufficient organisational capacity.

Ultimately, the recommended pathway provides HOPE with a realistic foundation to progress reconciliation while recognising its current limitations as a volunteer-based organisation. Through the staged implementation, monitoring and evaluation of practical actions, HOPE can continue to build its organisational readiness and reconsider the development of a formal RAP. Additionally, it can commit to respectful relationships, cultural learning and meaningful action with the purpose of strengthening reconciliation in the organisations environmental practice.

Appendices

Appendix A

HOPE Internal Reconciliation Readiness Survey

Importance of strengthening relationships

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
Very important	7	46.7%
Important	4	26.7%
Somewhat important	3	20%
Not important	1	6.7%

Key finding: 93.3% considered strengthening relationships at least somewhat important, with 73.3% of people rating it as either important or very important.

Familiarity with RAPs before the Survey

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
Very familiar	2	13.3%
Somewhat familiar	1	6.7%
Slightly familiar	6	40%
Not familiar	6	40%

Key finding: 80% were only slightly or not familiar with RAPs

Perceived readiness of HOPE to develop a RAP

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
Ready	0	0%
Somewhat ready	7	46.7%
Slightly ready	7	46.7%
Not ready	1	6.7%

Key finding: 93.3% of people consider HOPE has some level of readiness however, no respondent considered HOPE *ready*

Confidence in knowledge about RAPs

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
Yes	2	13.3%
Would benefit from additional information	8	53.3%
No	5	33.3%

Key finding: 86.7% of people indicated that they either would benefit from additional information or did not feel confident in their RAP knowledge

Usefulness of HOPE Information Pack

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
Yes	6	100%
No	0%	0%

Identified barriers to developing and implementing a RAP

As respondents could select multiple barriers, percentages do not add to 100%

Barrier	Number of Replies	Percentage
Volunteer capacity	12	80%
Limited finances	11	73.3%
Limited knowledge/confidence about reconciliation	6	40%
Difficulty establishing partnerships	4	26.7%
Limited time	8	53.3%
Maintaining log-term commitment	6	40%
Uncertainty about how a RAP relates to HOPE's environmental purpose	2	13.3%
Establishing and maintaining an authentic working relationship with relevant First Nations representatives so their voice truly shapes our work	1	6.7%

Suggested actions and commitments

These were open-ended responses, so I've grouped similar suggestions into broader themes

Suggested action/theme	Approximate frequency	Examples
Partnerships and relationships	10+	Traditional Custodians, Indigenous organisations, relevant reconciliation bodies
Incorporating Indigenous knowledge	5+	Environmental knowledge, traditional practices, Indigenous perspectives
Greater Indigenous involvement/representation	5+	Involving Indigenous people in HOPE's work and decision-making

Acknowledgement of Country	3+	Meetings, events, publications, podcast
NAIDOC/Reconciliation Week recognition	3+	Recognition of important cultural/reconciliation events
Cultural awareness/education	2+	Cultural awareness training, RAP education
Indigenous content in HOPE communications	2+	Articles, social media, podcasts
Indigenous perspectives in environmental advocacy	2+	Government advocacy, environmental issues

Due to the open-ended responses, the frequencies are approximate where respondents expressed similar ideas in different wording

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identification

Response	Number of Replies	Percentage
No	15	100%
Yes	0	0%

Overall picture

Area	Main finding
Importance	93.3% see strengthening relationships as at least somewhat important
RAP familiarity	80% are slightly or not familiar with RAPs
RAP confidence	86.7% would benefit from more information or do not feel confident
Readiness	93.3% see HOPE as at least slightly ready, but 0% say very ready
Main barrier	Volunteer capacity (80%)
Other major barriers	Finances (73.3%), Time (53.3%)
Top desired action	Building genuine partnerships
Key underlying theme	Moving beyond symbolic recognition toward meaningful relationships and collaboration

Appendix B

HOPE Cultural Safety Organisational Audit

Based on Bindi Bennetts' Organisational Audit Tool

Cultural Safety Indicator	Yes	Work in Progress	No	Unknown	Evidence/Comments
1. Organisational Awareness					
HOPE recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia	☐	☐	☐	☐	
HOPE recognises the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and cultures	☐	☐	☐	☐	
HOPE demonstrates awareness of the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession	☐	☐	☐	☐	
HOPE recognises the connection between Country, culture, community and wellbeing	☐	☐	☐	☐	
2. Organisational Self-Reflection					
HOPE critically reflects on its organisational assumptions, values and practices	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Volunteers and leadership are encouraged to reflect on their own cultural positioning and assumptions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural awareness learning opportunities are available to volunteers and leadership	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural learning is understood as an ongoing organisational responsibility	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Relationships and Engagement				
HOPE has established or is developed relationships with Traditional Custodians and First Nations organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
First Nations peoples are engaged early in matters that may affect or concern them	☐	☐	☐	☐
Engagement focuses on genuine relationship-building rather than one-off consultation	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Power, Participation and First Nations Knowledge				

HOPE considers power imbalances when engaging with First Nations peoples and organisations	☐	☐	☐	☐
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives can meaningfully influence organisational decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐
First Nations knowledge is respected and not used without appropriate consultation or permission	☐	☐	☐	☐
HOPE recognises Traditional Custodians' continuing relationships with and responsibility to Country	☐	☐	☐	☐
First Nations knowledge and perspectives are recognised as relevant to environmental sustainability	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Policies and Organisational Practice				
HOPE has policies or formal commitments relating to reconciliation and cultural responsiveness	☐	☐	☐	☐

Acknowledgement of Country is appropriately incorporated into relevant organisational activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
HOPE's policies and procedures are reviewed for cultural inclusivity	☐	☐	☐	☐
Responsibility for reconciliation and cultural responsiveness is shared across the organisation	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Communication, Representation and Recognition				
HOPE uses culturally respectful and appropriate terminology in communications	☐	☐	☐	☐
First Nations cultural knowledge, artwork and intellectual property are used only with appropriate permission and attribution	☐	☐	☐	☐
HOPE meaningfully recognises events such as National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Accountability and Ongoing Development				

HOPE evaluates its progress toward reconciliation and cultural responsiveness	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback from First Nations stakeholders informs organsiational improvement	☐	☐	☐	☐
Identified cultural safety gaps lead to clear actions and responsibilities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Cultural responsiveness is understood as an ongoing process rather than something the organisation simply “achieves.”	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C

CISS Reflect RAP Case Study

The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) is an Australian organisation focused on addressing the environmental, agricultural and economic impacts of invasive species. The organisation works through research, innovation, collaboration and community engagement to develop solutions to invasive pests and weeds. CISS is governed by an independent skills-based Board and works with research leaders, innovators, land managers and other partners across Australia. The organisation also acknowledges the continuing connection of First Nations Peoples to culture, Country and community.

CISS provides a particularly relevant case study for HOPE because both organisations operate within the environmental sector and have an interest in protecting Australia's natural environment. CISS's development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) provides an example of how an environmental organisation can begin building reconciliation into its organisational practices. CISS launched its first RAP in 2026, with its Reflect RAP covering May 2026 to November 2027.

Why CISS decided to develop a RAP

CISS's decision to develop a RAP appears to be connected to the relationship between environmental management, Country and the knowledge and stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CISS's 2023-2024 Impact Report identified the development of a RAP as part of its future direction. The report described the RAP as reflecting the organisations commitment to building strong partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also identified opportunities to collaborate with First Nations organisations and recognised the important role of First Nations peoples as custodians of Australia's natural landscapes.

This is particularly relevant to CISS because the work is directly concerned with Australia's landscapes, biodiversity and ecological systems. Rather than treating reconciliation as separate from environmental work, the RAP provides an opportunity for CISS to consider how relationships with First Nations peoples can contribute to better environmental outcomes. This provides an opportunity for HOPE to learn and recognise that reconciliation can be connected directly to an environmental organisations core purpose rather than treated as separate.

Starting from the Ground Up

An important feature of the CISS case is that the organisation's 2026 RAP is its first RAP. This means CISS was not moving from an established RAP program but was beginning its formal reconciliation journey from the group up, which is relevant to HOPE. The CISS example demonstrates that an organisation does not necessarily need an extensive history of reconciliation initiatives to begin the RAP process. Instead, the Reflect stage can provide an opportunity for an organisation to examine where it currently stands, build its understanding

and determine what meaningful reconciliation could look like within its individual organisational context.

This aligns with Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework, where the Reflect RAP is intended to help organisations scope their reconciliation journey and develop relationships and understanding before progressing to more ambitious RAP stages. Reconciliation Australia identifies four RAP types: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate, allowing organisations to develop their commitments progressively.

Establishing a RAP Working Group

A significant component of the CISS process was the establishment of a RAP Working Group. The Working Group was involved in guiding the RAP from its early development through to endorsement and launch. This is important because a RAP should not simply be written by one person and then presented to the organisation. Reconciliation Australia's RAP process emphasises consultation with stakeholders during RAP development. For HOPE, this suggests that establishing a RAP Working Group or similar structure could be an important early step. A potential HOPE structure could include; a RAP champion, Management Committee representation, volunteers, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives where appropriate and external First Nations guidance. The purpose would be to ensure reconciliation becomes a shared organisational responsibility of one individual.

Connecting reconciliation with Environmental work

One of the strongest aspects of the CISS case study is the connection between reconciliation and environmental stewardship. The RAP launched by CISS has a focus on Care for Country which is highly relevant to an organisation such as HOPE. Environmental organisations have an opportunity to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have longstanding cultural, spiritual and practical relationships with Country. Consequently, environmental work can provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration with First Nations peoples.

CISS has existing collaborations with Indigenous trusts, rangers and local communities. Its 2023-2024 Impact Report identified partnerships with Indigenous trusts and rangers as part of its collaborative approach and linked its RAP development with strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This demonstrates that reconciliation can potentially be incorporated into the core environmental work of an organisation rather than being limited to symbolic activities such as NAIDOC Week or Acknowledgement of Country. In the context of HOPE, this could mean considering First Nations knowledge in environmental projects, building relationships with Traditional Custodians, encouraging First Nations participation and recognising the cultural significance of Country to environmental preservation.

The importance of Relationships and Partnership

The CISS case study highlights relationships as an important component of its reconciliation journey. Its Impact Report described the RAP as a mechanism for building strong

partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and developing collaborations with First Nations organisations. This is consistent with Reconciliation Australia's RAP framework, which places relationships, respect and opportunities at the center of RAPs, supported by governance and reporting. For HOPE, this reinforces the idea that relationship-building must come before attempting to develop a detailed RAP.

What CISS did well

Based on the publicly available information, several strengths can be identified in the CISS approach. Firstly, CISS did not immediately attempt to establish the most ambitious type of RAP. Instead, it commenced with a Reflect RAP which covers May 2026 to November 2027. This demonstrates a staged approach to reconciliation. Moreover, the CISS approach does not treat reconciliation as separate but instead linking it directly to the organisations core purpose. As an environmental organisation focused on invasive species management, CISS operates in spaces that are deeply connected to Country, ecosystems and land stewardship. By framing its RAP within this context, CISS was able to position reconciliation as something that naturally aligns with its existing mission rather than something external to it.

Additionally, the organisation identified partnerships with First Nations organisations as an important part of its future direction. In its Impact Report, CISS highlighted the importance of collaborating with Indigenous trusts, ranger groups and First Nations organisations as part of its work in managing invasive species and protecting Australia's landscapes. This is significant because it demonstrates an understanding that environmental management is not only scientific, but also one that is deeply connected to cultural knowledge, land stewardship and long-standing relationships with Country. By acknowledging this, CISS positions First Nations partnerships as contributing to more effective and informed environmental outcomes.

Another key feature of the CISS approach was the commitment to ongoing learning through the involvement of a RAP Working Group. This ensures the RAP was not treated as a tokenistic activity, but rather a continuous initiative embedded within an organistional level. This suggests that CISS recognised that meaningful reconciliation requires time, reflection and exposure to new perspectives. The RAP Working Group involves iterative discussion, feedback and refinement. This type of engagement allows organisations to test assumptions, identify knowledge gaps and adjust their approach as their understanding deepens

Potential limitations and considerations

It is important to recognise that CISS should not be viewed as a perfect RAP model, and that a case study must also critically examine both the strengths and limitations of what the example can realistically demonstrate. The publicly available information provides considerable insight into the existence of the RAP, its timing, its relationship to environmental stewardship and the involvement of a RAP Working Group. However, it does not provide insight into every consultation, challenge or internal discussion that occurred during development. For example, it is not clear how extensive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders was during the early drafting stages, what specific feedback may have shaped the final RAP commitments, or whether any proposed actions

were modified during endorsement by Reconciliation Australia. These unknowns are important because RAP development is often an iterative process that involves negotiation, refinement and organisational learning over time.

Additionally, public documents typically intend actions and positive outcomes rather than documenting difficulties, constraints or areas where progress may have been slower than expected. As a result, there may be gaps in understanding around resourcing challenges, internal capability limitations, or the time required to build organisational readiness for reconciliation work. These factors are often critical in shaping how effectively a RAP is implemented in practice.

Due to this, it would be inappropriate to assume that CISS experienced no barriers. Like most organisations beginning a formal reconciliation process, it is likely that CISS had to navigate questions around staff capacity, governance responsibilities, cultural capability, and how to meaningfully integrate reconciliation into existing operational priorities. However, without detailed internal documentation, these aspects remain speculative. Moreover, CISS has a different organisational structure, staffing arrangements, resources and national role to HOPE. It operates as a more established, professionally resourced organisation with formal governance systems and dedicated capacity to support strategic initiatives such as RAP development.

In contrast, HOPE is volunteer-based and therefore operates within a more limited and variable capacity environment, where expertise and continuity of involvement may differ significantly. Ultimately, this comparison highlights that organisational context is a critical factor in determining how reconciliation frameworks such as a RAP are implemented. What is effective and sustainable for a national research organisation may need to be significantly adapted to suit a small, volunteer-driven environmental organisation like HOPE.

Lessons for HOPE

The CISS case study provides several important lessons for HOPE as it considers whether developing a Reconciliation Action Plan is appropriate and sustainable. While HOPE should not simply replicate the CISS approach, the experience of CISS provides a useful comparison for understanding how an environmental organisation can begin its reconciliation journey and gradually develop its organisational capacity.

One of the key lessons from CISS is the value of beginning the reconciliation journey with a Reflect RAP. Rather than immediately committing to a highly developed and ambitious reconciliation strategy, CISS began with a stage that focuses on developing relationships, building cultural understanding and identifying appropriate future actions. This approach is particularly appropriate for HOPE as the organisation is currently at the beginning of its reconciliation journey. Importantly, this reinforces the idea that HOPE does not need to have everything established prior to beginning the process.

Moreover, the RAP Working Group could provide an opportunity to bring together the Management Committee and volunteers who are interested in reconciliation and environmental stewardship. Given HOPE's volunteer-based structure, this group would not

necessarily need to be largely formalised. Instead, it could be a small group that meets periodically to discuss progress, coordinate activities and ensure that reconciliation remains an organisational priority, The structure of this group would need to reflect HOPE's available capacity. The CISS approach should therefore be viewed as an example rather than a requirement. HOPE could develop a simpler model that is realistic for a volunteer organisation while still ensuring that responsibility for reconciliation is shared across the organisation. In this sense, the CISS case study provides HOPE with an example of what is possible, while also demonstrating the importance of adapting the reconciliation process to the organisation's own circumstances, resources, relationships and capacity.

Key takeaway for HOPE

The most significant lesson from CISS is that a RAP can be used as a structured process for learning, relationship-building and organisational change rather than simply being a document containing commitments. CISS's first RAP demonstrates that an environmental organisation can begin its reconciliation journey by establishing a working group, developing relationships, reflecting on its organisational position and connecting reconciliation with its environmental purpose. For HOPE, this supports a ground-up approach. This is consistent with Reconciliation Australia's broader RAP process, which expects organisations to develop their RAPs through consultation and progressively build their reconciliation commitments.

Overall Assessment

Overall, CISS provides a strong and relevant comparison case for HOPE. Due to their shared environmental focus, CISS provides an example for a RAP that directly connects Country and environmental stewardship to their organisational values of biodiversity, ecological protection and land management. Similarly, CISS had no previous partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and only recently decided to undertake a Reflect RAP. This is the most basic level of RAP and uses a ground-up approach to create collaboration, establish partnerships and strengthen knowledge of Indigenous perspectives to environmental justice. It establishes connection between reconciliation and the organisations environmental purpose as well as emphasised relationships with First Nations peoples. To conclude, CISS provides a strong and practical example for HOPE. However, the key lesson is not to replicate the RAP created by CISS, but to learn from its process while developing an approach that reflects HOPE's own size, volunteer structure, resources, relationships and organisational priorities.

Appendix D

Funding and Grant Opportunities Report

1. Purpose

This report identifies potential funding opportunities that may assist HOPE Inc. to strengthen its organisational capacity, environmental activities, volunteer engagement and emerging approach to reconciliation. As a volunteer-based environmental non-government organisation, limited financial and human resources can affect HOPE's capacity to undertake new initiatives. Therefore, external grant funding presents an opportunity to support activities that may otherwise be difficult for the organisation to resource.

This report does not suggest that funding should drive HOPE's reconciliation approach. However, funding should support activities developed through meaningful relationships, consultation and organisational commitment.

2. Priority Funding Opportunities

2.1 Gambling Community Benefit Fund

Provider: Queensland Government – Department of Justice

Funding available: Up to $35,000 (as of September 2026)

The Gambling Community Benefit Fund provides one-off grants to eligible not-for-profit community organisations for projects that benefit Queensland communities. More than $60 million is distributed annually through the fund. Funding can support community events, workshops, training, equipment and marketing.

This is currently the strongest funding opportunity for HOPE because the grant could improve community engagement and volunteer capacity. Potential activities could include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural learning or cultural capability training for volunteers
- Environmental workshops and community education events
- Environmental information resources
- Banners, marquees, displays and reusable information-stall equipment
- Community volunteer recruitment activities (e.g. university stalls to promote recruitment and increase engagement with young people)
- Guest Indigenous speakers
- Facilitate cultural workshops
- Community activities developed in partnership with appropriate First Nations organisations

This fund assesses community benefit, value for money, an organisation's financial position and in-kind contributions when prioritising applications. For more information, please visit https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/initiatives/community-grants

2.2 Queensland STEM Engagement Grants

Provider: Queensland Government – Department of the Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation

Funding available: Up to $25,000 per project (as of September, 2026)

Queensland STEM Engagement Grants support organisations, community groups, scientists and others to deliver science-focused community events, education activities and engagement projects. Currently, the program encourages participation by young people, women, regional communities and First Nations communities. One of its objectives is to increase community engagement with science while recognising and including First Nations cultural knowledge, practices and communities. Eligible projects may include:

- Activities involving tertiary students
- Interactive environmental education
- Workshops

This grant could support a project combining HOPE's environmental purpose with its reconciliation and volunteer-engagement objectives. For example, HOPE could collaborate with local community centers, universities and Fist Nations organisations to deliver interactive activities. These activities could explore Care for Country, First Nations environmental knowledge, sustainability, environmental stewardship and community engagement. Projects such as these are particularly relevant to promote environmental sustainability, Indigenous collaboration and youth engagement. For more information, please visit: https://science.qld.gov.au/engaging-queenslanders/stem-engagement-grants

2.3 Toowoomba Regional Council Community Grants

Provider: Toowoomba Regional Council

Funding available:

- Micro Grant: up to $1,000 (For 20206-2026, these grants will remain available across the calendar year until allocated funds are exhausted)
- Minor Grant: $1,001 - $10,000
- Major Grant: $10,001 - $150,000

The Micro Grant is particularly useful for a small, clearly defined project that does not require substantial administration. Funds could contribute to volunteer recruitment stalls, promotional resources, small reconciliation awareness activities and other community engagement activities. Future Micro grants could support more substantial initiatives such as cultural learning activities, environmental workshops and youth volunteer engagement projects. For more information, please visit: https://www.tr.qld.gov.au/Community/Grants-funding-and-scholarships/Community-Grants-Program

3. Volunteer and Organisational Capacity Funding

3.1 Australian Government Volunteer Grants

Provider: Australian Government – Department of Social Services/Community Grants Hub

Funding available: $1,000 - $5,000

Volunteer Grants are designed to support community organisations that rely on volunteers by reducing barriers to volunteering and increasing volunteer participation. Funding can assist with certain communication, insurance and volunteer-support items. As of September, the 2025-2026 round is now closed. HOPE should monitor future announcements and establish contact with its relevant Federal electorate office before the next nomination process.

This program has strong strategic relevance because HOPE operates solely through volunteers. Future applications could assist with volunteer participation, removing practical barriers to volunteering, increasing resources and improving awareness of volunteering opportunities. This could complement HOPE's goal of recruiting younger volunteers and moving towards reconciliation through the recruitment of Indigenous peoples. For more information, please visit: https://www.dss.gov.au/volunteering-initiatives/volunteer-grants

4. Philanthropic and Corporate Grants to Monitor

4.1 Queensland Country Bank – Good for Good Community Grants

Queensland Country Bank provides Good for Good Community Grants of up to $30,000 to eligible Queensland not-for-profit community organisations. Projects are intended to help Queenslanders participate, learn, connect and make a practical difference within their communities. This grant could support:

- Community engagement
- Volunteer resources
- Youth participation
- Indigenous partnership/collaboration

For more information, please visit: https://www.queenslandcountry.bank/community/good-for-good-community-grants/

5. Relationship Between Funding and HOPE's RAP Project

Financial limitations have been identified as one potential barrier to HOPE progressing reconciliation activities. However, reconciliation should not be understood solely as an additional financial cost. Many early actions can begin through organisational commitment, reflection, relationship-building and changes to practice. External funding may then allow HOPE to strengthen these commitments by providing resources for meaningful activities such as cultural capability development, properly remunerated First Nations involvement, environmental education and collaborative projects.

The most appropriate funding strategy is therefore not to search for a RAP grant. Instead, HOPE can identify individual reconciliation commitments and determine which activities require financial resources. This approach also reduces the risk of viewing a RAP as a stand-alone document and therefore, positions funding as a means of supporting substantive organisational action.

6. Grant Management Considerations

Before applying, HOPE should establish a simple internal funding process. For each proposed grant, HOPE should:

- Confirm HOPE's legal and organisational eligibility
- Check ABN, incorporation, insurance and financial documentation requirements
- Identify a specific project rather than applying simply because funding is available
- Confirm the project aligns with HOPE's strategic and environmental objectives
- Consult relevant First Nations stakeholders before proposing activities involving First Nations cultures, knowledge or communities
- Obtain quotes where required
- Document volunteer labor and other in-kind contributions
- Obtain letters of support from project partners where possible
- Nominate one volunteer or Management Committee member to be responsible for the application
- Establish responsibility for grant reporting and acquittal before accepting funding

HOPE's existing RAP readiness survey may also provide useful evidence of organisational need when preparing relevant applications. For example, findings relating to volunteer knowledge, organisational capacity and identified financial barriers could help demonstrate why additional resources are required.

7. Priority Grant Opportunities for HOPE

Based on the grant opportunities identified in this report, some funding options are likely to be more relevant and achievable for HOPE. Given HOPE is a volunteer-based environmental NGO, its limited financial, volunteer capacity and its work towards reconciliation provide opportunities for grants that support both environmental and community-focused activities.

The highest-priority funding opportunities for HOPE are those that could directly support the organisation's current needs, particularly reconciliation activities, engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, volunteer development, environmental initiatives, community education and volunteer recruitment.

Priority could be assessed as follows:

Priority	Type of Funding	Potential Use for HOPE	Rationale
Highest	Community benefit and small community grants e.g. Gambling	Cultural awareness training, community	Well aligned with HOPE's community-

	Community Benefit Fund	events, information stalls and volunteer initiatives	based and volunteer structure
High	Community/Environmental Sustainability Action Grants e.g. Queensland STEM Engagement Grants	Environmental education, workshops and community sustainability projects	Strong alignment with HOPE's core environmental purpose
High-medium	Reconciliation and First Nations partnership funding	National Reconciliation Week activities, cultural education, community engagement and collaborative activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities	Relevant to HOPE's reconciliation objectives and community action
Medium	Local Council Community Grants e.g. Toowoomba Regional Council Grants	Community events, environmental education, volunteer recruitment activities and local engagement	Council grants may provide smaller and more manageable funding opportunities that suit HOPE's volunteer-based structure.
Low	Philanthropic Grants	Major environmental programs, employment of project staff or larger partnerships	Potentially valuable but may require greater organisational capacity, established partnerships or extensive reporting requirements.

8. Conclusion

Grant funding presents a realistic opportunity for HOPE to reduce some of the financial and capacity limitations associated with expanding its environmental, reconciliation and volunteer-engagement work. There is unlikely to be one funding program capable of supporting every aspect of HOPE's reconciliation journey. Instead, a diversified funding strategy is recommended. The immediate priority should be investigating the Gambling Community Benefit Fund, Queensland STEM Engagement Grants and Toowoomba Regional Council Micro Grants, while establishing a grant register to monitor environmental, volunteer and philanthropic funding opportunities.

Grant applications should focus on clearly defined projects with measurable community outcomes. In relation to reconciliation, funding should support relationship-building, cultural humility, consultation and long-term organisational commitment. Where projects involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures or knowledges, HOPE should seek meaningful involvement from relevant First Nations stakeholders and appropriately value their contributions. This approach would enable HOPE to connect financial sustainability with its broader environmental and social justice objectives while progressively developing the organisational capacity required to undertake meaningful reconciliation action.

Appendix E

HOPE Organisational Reconciliation Summary

Understanding HOPE

HOPE Inc. is a non-profit organisation which aims to raise awareness of and encourage active participation in waste minimization and the conservation of energy. They encourage people to take responsibility for protecting and enhancing the environment to improve human wellbeing. HOPE is founded on the idea that environmental protection should not only be done on a global scale, but within our own communities, with their slogan “think globally – act locally”. To achieve their goal of waste reduction and energy conservation, HOPE encourages people to change behaviors within their daily lives such as reducing energy consumption, minimising pollution and prioritizing renewable resources. Additionally, HOPE is committed to making a difference by raising awareness on current environmental issues, providing practical solutions to minimize household energy consumption and modeling environmentally sustainable behaviors. These strategies are implemented to inspire communities to create, communicate and celebrate lifestyles that are more environmentally conscious.

HOPE Through a Social Work Lens

HOPE’s mission to promote and encourage environmental sustainability is heavily connected to the core values of social work. The organisations commitment to equitable access to healthy environments and community resources aligns with social justice. Additionally, their goals of community development empower people to incorporate more environmentally sustainable behaviors and encourage community decision-making. Moreover, HOPE’s commitment to advocating for environmental respect and waste management aligns with the values of advocacy and creating systemic change. Values such as these are essential to social work and ensure ethical practice. Finally, HOPE’s entire initiative is underpinned by an ecological systems perspective which encourages holistic thinking and highlights the importance of interconnectedness. It reflects on the multifaceted nature of people, communities and the natural environment to promote environmental and social justice.

Through HOPE initiatives, it is recognized that environmental and social justice intersect as they contribute to healthier individuals and communities. By promoting more sustainable living, community participation and connection to Country, HOPE strengthens both environmental protection and human wellbeing. This aligns with a holistic approach and social work values which recognize the interconnected nature of individual, organizational and environmental systems.

A clear value within the organisations is the commitment to collaboration and community participation with a suggestion that everyone has an essential role to play. However, incorporating a social work perspective uncovers a critical consideration as to the capacity of equal opportunities. To eliminate the risk of social exclusion, it is essential to consider whether all community members have equal opportunities and capacity to engage in decision-making processes. Additionally, HOPE’s mission appears to assume equitable access to

healthy environments can be achieved through community participation and environmental action plans. However, there is uncertainty in the organization's identification and response to potential structural barriers for diverse and marginalized communities.

HOPE's Capacity for Reconciliation

Currently, HOPE has some existing values, resources and initiatives which can support the development and implementation of reconciliation work. The strong focus on community participation and engagement builds relationships and establishes partnerships. Connections such as these can improve the organisation's overall diversity and enable stronger collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. Additionally, HOPE's commitment to sustainability provides a connection to Indigenous perspectives on caring for Country. This also facilitates more respectful collaboration through shared values. Moreover, HOPE is displaying a willingness to learn and a commitment to improve reconciliation through their decision to begin development of a Reconciliation Action Plan. While these strengths provide a foundation for reconciliation work, it is a reflexive process which requires ongoing leadership commitment, adequate resources and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

While there are signs of intent and willingness to implement reconciliation work, there are some limitations that can impact sustainability. HOPE is a small, community-based organisation that is heavily reliant on volunteer participation. There are concerns regarding volunteer availability and turnover which can impact on the organisation's ability to maintain long-term reconciliation initiatives. Additionally, limited resources, finances and staff capacity may restrict cultural training, implementation of RAP initiatives as well as create potential time restraints. Challenges such as these can make it difficult to maintain long-term change while still committing to existing priorities and daily operations.

Appendix F

HOPE Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Survey

How important do you think it is for HOPE to strengthen its relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities?

- Not important
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Very important

What do you think reconciliation should mean in practice for an environmental organisation such as HOPE and what is the main reason for your answer?

Your answer: _____

What challenges or barriers do you think HOPE may face in developing and implementing a RAP?

[Select all that apply]

- Limited time
- Limited finances
- Limited knowledge or confidence about reconciliation
- Uncertainty about how a RAP relates to HOPE's environmental purpose
- Difficulty establishing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Volunteer capacity
- Maintaining long-term commitment
- Other: _____

What actions or commitments would you like to see HOPE consider as part of its approach to reconciliation? (e.g. Partnerships with Traditional Custodians, Acknowledgement of Country, NAIDOC week recognition)

Your answer: _____

Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Before this survey, how familiar were you with Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)?

- Not familiar
- Slightly familiar
- Somewhat familiar
- Very familiar

Do you believe HOPE is ready to begin developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)?

- Not ready
- Slightly ready
- Somewhat ready
- Ready

Did you feel you had enough knowledge about RAPs to confidently complete this survey?

- Yes
- No
- I would benefit from additional information about RAPs

Finally, did the HOPE Information Pack provide useful background knowledge to help inform your answers?

- Yes
- No

Appendix G

Practical Requirements, Costs and Commitments of a Formal Reconciliation Action Plan

1. Purpose

This section provides HOPE's Management Committee with an overview of the practical requirements, financial considerations and organistional commitments involved in developing and implementing a formal Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). It is intended to support future decision-making regarding HOPE's capacity and readiness to participate in Reconciliation Australia's RAP program.

2. Eligibility and Registration

Before commencing a formal RAP, HOPE would need to confirm its eligibility with Reconciliation Australia. Current eligibility requirements specify that organisations must operate as workplaces, have employees and undertake operations in Australia. As HOPE is predominantly volunteer-based, clarification of its eligibility would be necessary before proceeding. If eligible, HOPE would register through Reconciliation Australia's RAP program and pay the applicable development fee.

3. Financial Commitments

Reconciliation Australia's current RAP development fees are determined by annual organistional revenue.

Annual organisation revenue	**Development fee (including GST)**
Under $1 million	$385
$1 million - $10 million	$1,375
Over $10 million	$2,750

Additional costs may arise through cultural awareness training, consultation with First Nations representatives, remuneration for cultural expertise, artwork, document design, events and other implementation activities.

These expenses are not necessarily mandatory in every instance but should be considered when determining an appropriate organistional budget.

4. Development and Endorsement Process

The formal RAP process involves several stages:

1. **Registration:** Confirm eligibility, provide organistional information and pay the development fee
2. **Development**: Establish internal responsibility, consult stakeholders and prepare the RAP using Reconciliation Australia's templates

3. **Review:** Submit the draft RAP for review and incorporate feedback. Reconciliation Australia advises organisations to anticipate at least two to three rounds of feedback, with a standard four-week review period for ach draft.
4. **Conditional endorsement:** Obtain approval of the RAP's written commitments and finalise the document's design
5. **Formal endorsement:** Submit the final document for endorsement and publication
6. **Implementation:** Undertake the agreed actions, monitor progress and fulfil reporting responsibilities

5. Time and Organistional Commitments

A Reflect RAP generally covers an implementation period 12-18 months following endorsement. The development and review process requires additional time, depending on organistional capacity and the number of revisions required. HOPE would need to establish clear responsibility for coordinating the RAP, potentially through a reconciliation champion or working group. This would involve Management Committee oversight, volunteer participation, stakeholder engagement, administrative coordination and ongoing monitoring.

Once endorsed, HOPE would also be required to participate in Reconciliation Australia's annual Impact Survey.

6. Implications for HOPE

For HOPE, the principal consideration is not solely the financial cost of registering for a RAP, but the capacity to sustain the associated responsibilities over time. As a volunteer-based organisation, HOPE would need to consider the availability of individuals to coordinate activities, maintain relationships, oversee implementation and fulfil reporting requirements. The development of a formal RAP should therefore be considered only once HOPE has confirmed its eligibility, established sufficient organistional commitment and demonstrated the capacity to maintain its responsibilities.

This supports the recommendation that HOPE initially pursue a period of practical reconciliation and capacity-building, with the intention of reviewing its readiness to undertake a Reflect RAP in the future.