



# PRINCIPLES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' RIGHTS WORK

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) is an organisation deeply committed to the realisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' human rights.

The HRLC operates nationally. Most of the HRLC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights work is undertaken by a team of three staff. We receive funding from philanthropic foundations and donors to undertake this work and also draw on significant amounts of pro bono support from law firms and barristers.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights work contributes to a broader mission to protect and promote human rights in Australia and in Australian activities overseas, through a strategic combination of legal action, advocacy, research, education and UN engagement.

The purpose of this document is to articulate principles that guide how the HRLC engages in work that directly relates to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

These partnership principles reflect a commitment

by the HRLC to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination and to the development of best practice human rights-based partnerships for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.

These principles have been informed by feedback received from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations about the HRLC as a partner and supporter of self-determination.

## PRINCIPLES

1. The HRLC supports the **self-determination** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By this, we mean:

a) **Partnerships:** We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led partnerships. Where possible, we seek to direct the resources the HRLC receives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights towards work done in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations and coalitions; and to sharing knowledge and networks to increase the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, which are often under-resourced.



b) **Consultation:** We work in a consultative way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders to ensure our work is appropriately guided and supported, rather than duplicates, existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led activities. We value the expertise and input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, board members and partner organisations in determining the areas of work that we prioritise, within the overall HRLC strategic plan. When we seek input, we will do so in a way that respects the significant resource constraints and competing demands placed on many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

c) **Legal action:** Legal work undertaken by the HRLC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights team is undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or organisations. Due to the sensitive nature of some matters, there might be times when a partner understandably decides not to make this partnership public, such as legal action against a government. All partnership arrangements are underpinned by deep respect for the expertise of

the partner organisation – expertise that guides the goals of legal action – and, a commitment to building the capacity of partner organisations.

d) **Media comment:** When engaging in public comment on matters relating to the rights of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, we ensure our advocacy supports the broader justice calls of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations, coalitions and leaders. We seek to identify appropriate spokespeople and, where possible, promote and prioritise the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and/or relevant partner organisations. We also consider whether an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisation has requested or consented to the HRLC engaging in media comment.

e) **Advocacy:** When engaging in political or public advocacy on matters relating to the rights of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, we will consult with and seek to promote the voices of relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and leaders. We will also consider whether an Aboriginal and Torres



Mimih Spirits Hunting Artist: Larry Bangarr



Strait Islander partner organisation has requested or consented to the HRLC engaging in political or public advocacy.

f) **Research:** When considering a significant research project that focuses on the rights of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, we will consult at an early stage with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations and coalitions to determine the need for the research; explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership; and to discuss appropriate approaches to undertaking the project. Where we partner on a research project, we will jointly develop an agreed project plan with the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander partner organisation to guide project actions and roles.

2. The HRLC is committed to building and maintaining **respectful relationships** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations. By this we mean:

a) We prioritise developing and maintaining long-term relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations, underpinned by:

- i. deep respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' diverse experiences and cultures;
- ii. strong support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisations and initiatives; and
- iii. an understanding that historical and continuing colonisation and related discrimination contributes to ongoing power and resource imbalances between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples and organisations.

b) We prioritise developing cultural competence and safety within the HRLC, including by undertaking annual training, seeking feedback and learning from the expertise and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and board members and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations that we partner with.

c) We seek to continuously improve the way the HRLC works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations, including communication and planning processes for identifying agreed goals, actions and responsibilities on joint projects.

3. The HRLC is committed to being **accountable** for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights work that we undertake. By this, we mean:

a) We will seek to engage in capacity building and an informal debriefing process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations at the end of projects.

b) We invite feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations, staff and board members, including through an annual survey, about the way we do business.

c) We take seriously the feedback we receive from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisations, staff and board members and take action to respond to issues raised.

d) We carefully consider our capacity to deliver before committing to a particular piece of work with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partner organisation.

e) We will review these principles on an annual basis.