CITY OF LAUNCESTON

ABORIGINAL PARTNERSHIP PLAN

Community Engagement Strategy



City of LAUNCESTON

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The Purpose of the Aboriginal Partnership Plan

This plan has been designed to enhance engagement with Aboriginal people in the context of our City of Launceston Community Engagement Framework and Strategy.

Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land where we work and live, the Stoney Creek Nation, made up of at least three clans - Tyerrenotepanner; Panninher and Letteremairrener

The Stoney Creek Nation clans lived along the riverways in harmony with the seasons for several thousand generations, and today they are remembered as the traditional owners of this land.

We celebrate the stories, culture and traditions of all Aboriginal Elders and people who work and live on this land.

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Community Engagement Strategy

Executive Summary

The City of Launceston genuinely values its relationship with local Aboriginal people and community.

We foster a strong desire and responsibility to respond to their needs. This can include advocacy and facilitation roles regarding Aboriginal cultural heritage and its contemporary expression, health, wellbeing and economic issues.

For some time now, our Council has been on a journey of understanding and learning in this space.

It is true that in the past, we have made mistakes and we acknowledge and apologise for that.

But one thing we can promise is that we will continue to listen and we will continue to learn.

Over the term of the current Council, we have made a number of positive steps forward on our journey.

For the first time, the City of Launceston flies the Aboriginal flag over Town Hall - permanently.

During the recent NAIDOC Week celebrations, the Aboriginal flag was joined by the Torres Strait Island flag - flying above both Town Hall and the Queen Victoria Art Gallery at Royal Park.

Importantly, we no longer support the celebration of Australia Day activities on January 26 - a day that Council recognises is distressing to many people in our community.

And we are taking steps to urge the Federal Government to release us and all other local government authorities across the country from holding citizenship ceremonies on January 26.

We believe it is important that we continue to represent the views of all members of our community, as well as finding new ways to celebrate shared pride in our country.

We need to engage more effectively with local Aboriginal people.

It is also important to acknowledge that not effectively engaging our First Nations people in the past has sometimes led to outcomes that have not been supported by some members of local Aboriginal people.

In short, we want this to change and we have identified a need to have a more meaningful partnership with Aboriginal people and community.

This is a significant step for Tasmania's local government sector. One that will enable us to celebrate and recognise the history, achievements and culture of First Nations people - because it is Australia's true and original culture.

From the Council's perspective, the Plan also provides an opportunity to learn, to gain a new understanding, to forge stronger and more meaningful relationships and to reflect on our past and future by sharing knowledge.

The Partnership Plan was developed through meaningful conversations with a range of Aboriginal people in Launceston and surrounds.

Throughout this process, a number of themes and focus areas emerged as particularly relevant and important to the development of the Plan.

Practically, we will remove the hurdles and create dialogue with Aboriginal people on proposed significant maintenance work, capital works, plans, strategies, services, policy changes and anything else that may impact on the lifestyle or amenity of Aboriginal residents.

Consistent with our Community Engagement Framework, we will focus on three key areas moving forward:

1. Continuous improvement
2. Building internal capacity
3. Closing the loop

We have pledged our commitment to employing more Aboriginal people. We will seek greater truth-telling, openness and transparency in all of our dealings with Aboriginal people.

We believe it is incredibly important that we promote to the broader community just what the City of Launceston stands for in this respect. We aspire to be a respected leader of all people.

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Introduction

The City of Launceston has a strong desire and responsibility to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people in the Launceston region. This can include an advocacy and facilitation role regarding Aboriginal cultural heritage and its contemporary expression, health, wellbeing and economic issues.

The Council has a sound and progressive community engagement approach which is informed by the City of Launceston's Community Engagement Framework and Community Engagement Strategy.

The objectives of the Council's Community Engagement Framework are to:

- ensure our Councillors and Council employees have a clear understanding of, and a commitment to engage with the community about decisions that will have an effect on their lives
- ensure there is a coordinated and a consistent approach to community engagement across our municipality
- ensure all community engagement strategies and activities are carried out to a high standard and are inclusive of all
- ensure the feedback from the community will be listened to, respected and taken into account
- acknowledge that as a service delivery organisation, and a monopoly provider, there is a moral obligation to enable constant dialogue.

The Council acknowledges that this approach has tended not to effectively engage with as large a cross-section of local Aboriginal people as we would like.

The Council wishes for this to change and has identified the need to have a meaningful partnership with local Aboriginal people, so as to improve our engagement and understanding of our respective needs and cultural requirements.

This Aboriginal Partnership Plan has been developed to form part of the Council's Community Engagement Strategy. It outlines a focused and agreed approach for the City of Launceston to engage with our Aboriginal people in a culturally respectful and genuine manner.

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Background

The Council's Aboriginal Partnership Plan is consistent with the approaches and practices of other levels of government which are being led by the *Closing the Gap* initiative.

Closing the Gap began in response to a call for governments to commit to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health and life expectancy within a generation. The priorities of the initiative have changed over time and so *Closing the Gap (2020)* has evolved from health and life expectancy measures to overcome inequality faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so their life outcomes are equal to all Australians.

Under this initiative there has been a greater focus on partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At the centre of this new way of working is local action, and a determination to achieve change.

As governments work in this new way, there is increasing involvement and support for local communities to set their own priorities and tailor services to their unique contexts. In a commitment to devolving decision-making as close to the ground as possible, Aboriginal community leaders are directly involved in making recommendations to government about how services and funding align with community priorities.

Consistent with these priorities, the Tasmanian Government released its *Closing the Gap - Tasmanian Implementation Plan 2021-2023*, which, according to the former Premier's opening statement, is aimed at supporting and strengthening a partnership between the State Government and Tasmanian Aboriginal people. Then Premier Peter Gutwein said:

"Tasmanian Aboriginal people are best placed to determine and deliver services to meet their needs and cultural requirements".

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[2] Photo credit: Pete Harmsen

The *Closing the Gap - Tasmanian Implementation Plan* focuses on embedding broad actions aligned to four key Priority Reforms across the work of the Tasmanian Government:

Priority Reform One:
Formal partnership and shared decision-making

Priority Reform Two:
Building the communities-controlled sector

Priority Reform Three:
Transforming government organisations

Priority Reform Four:
Shared access to data and information at the regional level

Underpinning Tasmania's *Closing the Gap* partnership are four principles of:

1. inclusiveness, ensuring all perspectives are heard, respected and acknowledged appropriately as decisions are made
2. genuine shared decision-making, including transparent negotiations and transparent data sharing;
3. the views, needs, interests and aspirations of Tasmanian Aboriginal people is central in all decision-making; and
4. the development and growth of partnerships, including Aboriginal partnerships, in accordance with the strong partnership principles outlined in the National partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap.

This Partnership Plan has been developed to reflect these principles and ensure that Aboriginal people have a strong relationship and voice with the City of Launceston.

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[3] Photo credit: Launceston Place Brand

Our Partnership Approach

Aims

The aims of this Aboriginal Partnership Plan are to strengthen our community engagement strategy to ensure that:

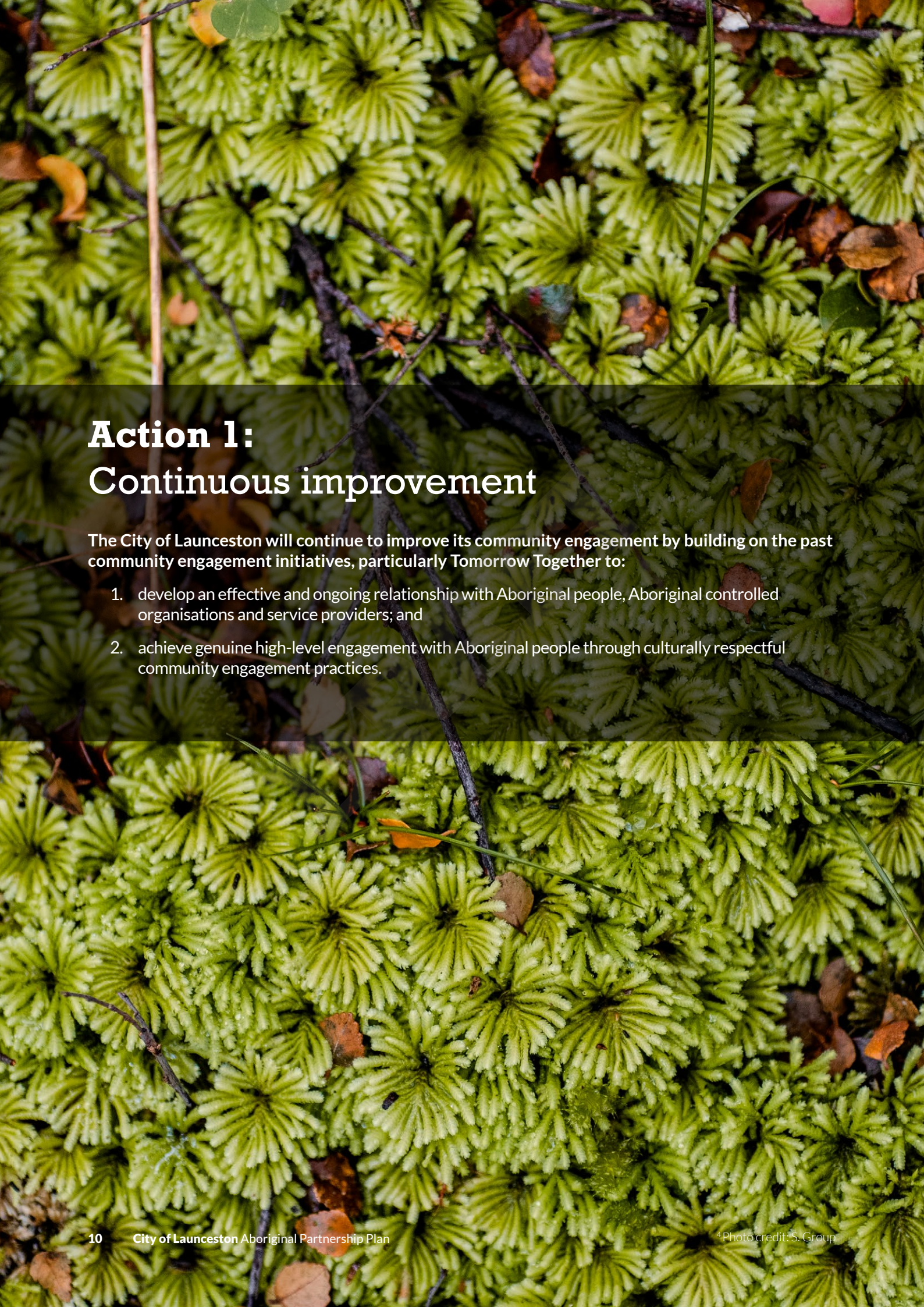
1. the Council is able to effectively engage with Aboriginal people in a culturally respectful and genuine manner;
2. the views, needs, interests and aspirations of Aboriginal people is central in the Council's decision-making; and
3. the Council promotes what the Plan stands for.

Focus Areas

The City of Launceston will seek to remove the hurdles and create dialogue with Aboriginal people on proposed significant maintenance work, capital works, plans, strategies, services, policy changes and anything else that may impact on the lifestyle or amenity of Aboriginal residents. Consistent with the City's Community Engagement Framework, the Council will focus on three key areas moving forward:

1. Continuous improvement
2. Building internal capacity
3. Closing the loop

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Action 1: Continuous improvement

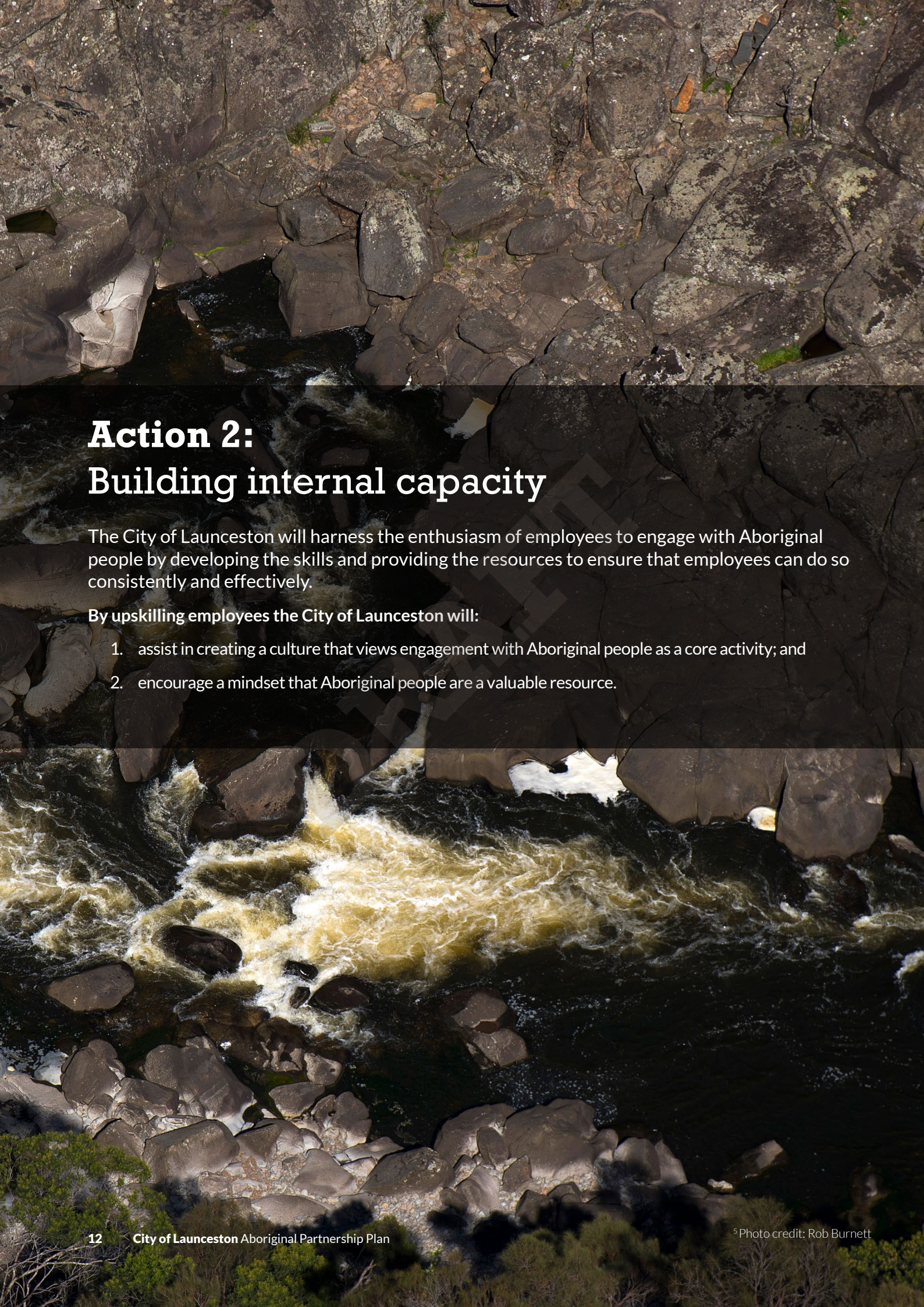
The City of Launceston will continue to improve its community engagement by building on the past community engagement initiatives, particularly Tomorrow Together to:

1. develop an effective and ongoing relationship with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal controlled organisations and service providers; and
2. achieve genuine high-level engagement with Aboriginal people through culturally respectful community engagement practices.

[4] Photo credit: S. Group

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Desired Outcomes
1	Develop a terms of reference and undertake an expression of interest process to form a Panel of Knowledge Keepers to guide the Council in its engagement with Aboriginal people. This panel will be diverse, flexible in participation and approach and will have a wider community/organisational perspective than the *QVMAG Aboriginal Reference Group*, which has a mandate to focus only on the Museum and Art Gallery.	Innovation & Performance Team	The Aboriginal Partnership Plan is governed effectively to ensure that it is successfully implemented. A clear communication exchange between the *Panel of Knowledge Keepers* and the *QVMAG Aboriginal Reference Group* to strengthen cohesive workings. The Council receives a broad community perspective which includes, but is not limited to, Aboriginal elders.
2	Identify Aboriginal stakeholders and organisations within the City of Launceston's sphere of influence.	Office of the CEO	Strengthen mutually beneficial relationships between the Council and Aboriginal peoples and organisations. Build trust and relationships with local Aboriginal people and organisations.
3	Establish a preferred approach for engagement with the panel.	Innovation & Performance Team	
4	In addition to the regular catch-ups which will be driven by need, the Council and the Council's Executive Leadership Team to meet with the *Panel of Knowledge Keepers* annually.	Office of the CEO	
5	Increase the presence of Aboriginal connection in Launceston's parks and reserves, starting with the Aboriginal Reconciliation garden area in Royal Park.	Parks and Sustainability Team	Aboriginal connection is highlighted through features, naming, signage and interpretation in Council's parks and reserves.

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Action 2:
Building internal capacity

The City of Launceston will harness the enthusiasm of employees to engage with Aboriginal people by developing the skills and providing the resources to ensure that employees can do so consistently and effectively.

By upskilling employees the City of Launceston will:

1. assist in creating a culture that views engagement with Aboriginal people as a core activity; and
2. encourage a mindset that Aboriginal people are a valuable resource.

[5] Photo credit: Rob Burnett

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Desired Outcomes
7	Develop an agreed set of Aboriginal protocols, including a cultural protocol for the provision of Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country to support consistent use across the organisation and inclusion in important meetings and events.	Office of the CEO	Ensuring that accepted protocols around Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country are observed by City of Launceston. Develop an organisational understanding of local Traditional Owners and their lands and water. Actively foster a culturally safe workplace. Publicly acknowledge Aboriginal peoples in Council communications.
8	Include a budget allocation annually to facilitate the provision of Welcome to Country at important meetings and events.	Finance Team	
9	Incorporate the Aboriginal Partnership Plan in the employee induction process for the organisation. This could involve a session with Aboriginal community members or other induction activities that will best connect and educate staff and Aboriginal people.	People & Culture Team	
10	Implement an Aboriginal cultural awareness training program for Councillors and employees utilising a mixture of programs to ensure diversity of knowledge.	Office of the CEO	
11	Provide staff with training and templates to support the provision of Acknowledgement of Country at meetings and events. This needs to be authentic, so the template should enable tailoring to suit individuals and situations.	Office of the CEO	
12	Develop and share a list of contacts for the delivery of Welcome to Country and other cultural offerings with key City of Launceston employees.	Office of the CEO	
13	Develop meaningful acknowledgements of Aboriginal people in relevant corporate communication including print, web, social and e-mail communications.	Community Relations Team	

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Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Desired Outcomes
14	Promote opportunities for employing Aboriginal people at the Council.	People & Culture Team	Increase diversity at City of Launceston. Provide a culturally safe workplace.
15	Raise awareness and share information amongst our staff about the meaning of NAIDOC and Reconciliation Weeks.	Office of the CEO	Build understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture and history.
16	Collaborate with TasFire and local Aboriginal people to incorporate traditional burns into the Council's annual controlled burning program.	Parks and Sustainability Team	

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[6] *Ochre Ceremony at the Queen Victoria Art Gallery at Royal Park*, 2017.
Photo credit: QVMAG

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Action 3:
Closing the loop

As the City of Launceston matures in the community engagement space, it is important to demonstrate how feedback/input from Aboriginal people has influenced strategic direction. This process commenced with Tomorrow Together but needs to be expanded across all engagement activities.

To make this possible, the Council will:

1. make it clear from the commencement of any engagement process which parts of the matter are issue are negotiable and which parts are non-negotiable;
2. ensure there is a process by which community input feeds into the decision-making process; and
3. report back to the community showing how its input has been used or how it will be used moving forward.

Closing the loop is an important part of the community engagement planning process and the following actions will ensure that the Council is effectively doing this with our engagements with Aboriginal people.



Photo credit: Launceston Place Brand

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Desired Outcomes
17	Ensure that the findings of engagement processes are communicated back to local Aboriginal people in draft form for review.	Innovation & Performance Team	Accountability and transparency is provided by reporting achievements and challenges internally and externally.
18	Report annually on the actions included in the Aboriginal Partnership Plan.	Innovation & Performance Team	
19	Review our approach by periodically checking in with Aboriginal people.	Office of the CEO	The Plan remains contemporary and relevant to Aboriginal people and the city generally.
20	Complete a review of the Partnership Plan following the first two years of implementation.	Office of the CEO	Progress and initiatives generated by the Plan are evaluated and recorded. The Plan is updated following its first two years of implementation.

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[8] Photo credit: Adam Gibson

How we will resource this plan

The plan has been developed to be integrated into and enhance our existing strategies and actions but in particular, our Community Engagement Strategy. Responsibility for implementation of the actions included in the Plan have been assigned to specific Teams or Networks.

Where there are resources required to implement an action, it will be the responsibility of these Teams or Networks to identify and provide the necessary resources.



References

List of References

1. Commonwealth Government. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. (n.d.). *National Agreement on Closing the gap*. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap

2. Commonwealth Government. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. (n.d.). *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets

3. Tasmanian Government. Communities Tasmania. (n.d.), *Closing the Gap - Tasmanian Implementation Plan 2021-2023*. Closing-the-Gap-Tasmanian-Implementation-Plan-August-2021.pdf (communities.tas.gov.au)

And the many Tasmanian Aboriginal people who have freely met with the Council's Chief Executive Officer to help guide our way forward.

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List of Photography

1. Front Page Cover Image
   kanamaluka/Tamar River.
   Photo credit: Rob Burnett.

2. *Bradys Lookout.*
   Photo credit: Pete Harmsen.

3. *Cataract Gorge.*
   Photo credit: Launceston Place Brand.

4. *Moss.*
   Photo credit: S. Group.

5. *Cataract Gorge.*
   Photo credit: Rob Burnett.

6. *Ochre Ceremony at the Queen Victoria Art Gallery at Royal Park*, 2017.
   Photo credit: QVMAG

7. *Cataract Gorge.*
   Photo credit: Launceston Place Brand.

8. *Image of Wallaby.*
   Photo credit: Adam Gibson.

9. Rear Page Cover Image
   Ochre Ceremony at the Queen Victoria Art Gallery at Royal Park, 2017.
   Photo credit: QVMAG



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