

Role and Function of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee

1. Background

Delegates to the 2001 Indigenous Unionists conference unanimously endorsed the formation of an ACTU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee.

The committee's main aim is to:

Provide culturally appropriate and accountable leadership, support and advice to the ACTU executive and affiliates in relation to Indigenous employment and Social Justice issues and strategies affecting the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. Objectives

The ACTU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee exists to, in line with ACTU policy:

- Promote equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the workplace and in society, and to achieve a society and workplaces free from discrimination and harassment;
- Promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations people of Australia;
- Promote Social Justice and Equity and fair representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at every level of society and organisations, including trade unions;
- Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for active participation in trade unions.

3. Composition

Representatives of the ACTU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee will consist of Indigenous members reflective of the broad cross section of Industries and reflect a gender balance.

The Committee is comprised of one representative from each affiliated union and one representative from each State and Territory Labour Council. In addition, affiliates are free to nominate additional contacts, who receive papers, and are free to attend meetings.

The Committee can establish ad-hoc sub-committees. For example, in addition to the committee meetings, members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee contribute to the work of the ACTU through the establishment of:

- Sub-committees to provide detailed input on a particular issue (for example, Treaty);
- Reference groups to provide advice in a specialised area (for example, health);

4. Roles

The Committee exists to participate in the development of a strategic focus for the ACTU and unions as a whole, to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. This is facilitated through ensuring that issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and social justice permeate the ACTU's policy frameworks and its operations.

Specifically, the committee's roles are:

- Advisory;
- Assistance to ACTU officers;
- Leadership Development;
- Networking and communications.

4.1 Advisory

The Committee has a particular role to:

- Monitor and advise the ACTU executive, and other relevant committees on Indigenous rights and issues covered by legislation and international conventions;
- Monitor and advise the ACTU executive, and other relevant committees on the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the workforce, including Indigenous participation, wages and pay equity, coverage and impact of collective and individual bargaining, access to retirement incomes, conditions of employment etc;
- Monitor and advise the ACTU Executive on social policy matters that are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- Actively research, monitor and advise the Executive on the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within unions in Australia;
- Monitor and advise the ACTU Executive and relevant committees on the position of Indigenous peoples internationally;
- Actively assist unions to develop programs to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be active in the union movement and address cultural diversity in organising campaigns, where necessary through the reapplication of resources and priorities to an organising focus or for any other reason.

4.2 Assistance to ACTU Officers

Members of the committee:

- Act as a contact point within affiliates for the implementation of the ACTU Strategic Plan, particularly as it relates to the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy;
- May be called upon to facilitate the involvement of their union/labour council in the campaign, case-work, organising and training activities of the ACTU;
- May make recommendations to the ACTU Executive on representation at an international level, and provide assistance to ACTU nominees in international forums.

4.3 Leadership Development

The committee provides a forum for unions to nominate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in the ACTU, and develop their potential in the broader union movement.

The committee monitors the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in unions, including decision-making and leadership within the ACTU and its affiliates, and may develop programs, in conjunction with the Organising Centre, which promote the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within unions.

4.4 Networking and Communications

The committee provides an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to establish and maintain contact with each other in industries and unions, to share information and learn from the experiences of their colleagues.

5. Meetings

The committee meets in the month prior to the ACTU Executive meeting, for the purpose of reviewing the matters before the Executive, and having the opportunity to:

- Provide feedback and advice to the officers and the Executive from the perspective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and union members;
- Take issues back to affiliates for consideration before the Executive meeting.

Decisions and resolutions of the committee are forwarded to the ACTU Executive for its consideration and appropriate action.