

Organising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workers in Unions

Advancing the representation and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in unions

1. Congress is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers have strong and effective union representation in their workplace and in their union structures.
2. The capacity of the union movement to represent and organise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers depends on the movement's ability to reflect views and address issues that are particularly relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members must be able to fully participate in all levels of union decision making processes and structures. Congress commits to the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in elected positions in unions; acknowledging the need to better reflect the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.
4. Creating these opportunities will improve the union's ability to attract the best possible leadership talent and tap into the growth potential of organising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
5. Unions should develop strategies to recruit, retain and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, delegates, workers, elected officials, and leaders.
6. Unions should be aware Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are more likely to be engaged in low skill, low paid employment, and underpaid with little or no power to bargain directly with their employer over wages and conditions.
7. Unions should be aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and ill treatment.
8. Unions recognise the impact of racism, bullying, harassment, and discrimination on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers and acknowledge that all workplaces should be safe and free from racism, bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Unions will make an active effort to work with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to address barriers in their workplaces.
9. Unions will work with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to develop industrial provisions and policy that can be used in workplaces to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples intellectual, cultural knowledge and experience is recognised and valued and that if these skills are a core part of their employment – employees are appropriately compensated.
10. First Nation Workers Alliance to provide culturally informed education and training to the wider union movement when requested by affiliates.
11. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the movement is the ACTU Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Committee, and the First Nations Workers Alliance. Affiliates will commit to nominating representative/s to participate and engage in the work of the Committee.
12. The ACTU Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Committee will focus on nationally co-ordinated actions in priority areas, including:
 - a. The work of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Committee and the First Nations Workers Alliance.
 - b. Government Employment Programs.

- c. Organising, recruitment and education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worker.
 - d. Campaigns with a focus on the pay and conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
 - e. Anti-racism campaign.
 - f. Continue the commitment to implement the 'Uluru Statement from the Heart' in its entirety.
 - g. Black lives Matter – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Deaths in Custody and the criminalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples leading to disproportionate rates of incarceration.
 - h. and raising the age of criminal responsibility and participate in justice reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
13. The Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Committee will ensure that best practice organising, recruitment and engagement strategies are shared across the movement through mechanisms such as:
- a. ACTU Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander biannual conferences & forums.
 - b. Inclusion of regional & remote visits to engage workers, including employment program workers, to join & participate in unions.
14. Where public funding that is tied to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is used by employers to justify precarious employment initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australian Unions commits to investigate the extent to which employers use the government funding model to justify precarious employment.
15. Unions should have an easy point of call to personalise the membership joining process for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander workers. Congress recommends that all affiliates appoint an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Officer in an identified position in each National office & in peak union bodies in the States and Territories.

Consultation, engagement, and education

16. Congress will endorse affiliates to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates and members participation in union structures by:
- a. Setting appropriate goals, actions, and time limits to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members active participation in the union, including the use of quotas and other measures to grow structural support and representation.
 - b. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members have influence in setting union agendas and priorities on issues that directly affect them.
 - c. Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campaign activities
 - d. Removing barriers which discourage the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in union activities.
 - e. Identify and mentor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates to move into roles including elected positions.
 - f. Encourage and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander union employees to take on more senior roles within the union.
 - g. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander union employees are given opportunities to access career development such as acting in higher duties and board positions.

- h. Developing and implementing policies for union employees to provide protection against racism, sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination. Provide mandatory training for all officials and union employees regarding these union policies.
- i. Ensuring there is a union official(s) who has responsibility in the union for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and reports at each union decision making bodies.
- j. Establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's committee and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members conference; and
- k. Monitoring and reporting to relevant union decision making body annually on the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members at all levels within the union. In addition to this, unions should obtain regular qualitative feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, executive members, council members, and delegates about the union culture, issues and challenges they face.

Peak council leadership and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members

17. Ensure peak council leadership and representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members by:
- a. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander member's issues are addressed in industrial, growth and campaign priorities, actions and resources set at union, trades and labour councils, ACTU executive and congress level.
 - b. Ensuring all unions have a representative on the ACTU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee and integrating the work of the committee into other recognised priorities of the ACTU, including in education, industrial and campaigns.

Bargaining and industrial agenda

18. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members' issues are included in the bargaining and industrial agenda by:
- a. Developing bargaining guide and claims that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers' rights, including.
 - i. Standalone cultural leave.
 - ii. Acknowledging 'Sorry Business/funerals.'
 - iii. Recognise Kinship structure for bereavement leave.
 - iv. Include Kinship in the Definition of 'Family.'
 - v. Standalone ceremony leaves.
 - vi. Standalone leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander days of significance.
 - vii. Traditional Torres Strait Islander adoption leave, foster care leave, and kinship leave for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers.
 - viii. Recognition and compensation for cultural/colonial load and identity strain.
 - ix. Recognition and compensation for cultural knowledges, traditional languages, and skills.
 - x. Employment and upskilling targets.

- xi. Recognise traditional culture and language proficiency as a genuine qualification for the purposes of remuneration where relevant.
 - xii. Provisions for culturally safe workplaces for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers that relate to cultural safety through consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the design of policies and procedures.
 - xiii. Removing barriers which unfairly discourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander's participation.
- b. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members are included on bargaining committees; where there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members; and
 - c. Develop a bargaining checklist in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members to ensure claims are prioritised in negotiations.