Indigeneity and sport in Reconciliation Action Plans

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More than 25 years after the founding of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR), reconciliation is entrenched as a way to understand, practise and aspire to better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But what, precisely, does such a nebulous concept as reconciliation mean in contemporary Australia? How does it ask us to imagine Indigeneity? Through what instruments does it represent non-Indigenous/Indigenous difference? This chapter takes a single contemporary initiative, Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs), and one cultural field, sport, as a concrete starting point to investigate these questions.

Reconciliation and Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)

In 1991 the Federal Government created the CAR to oversee a ten-year process of national reconciliation. The CAR's legislated responsibilities included addressing 'Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relation to land, housing, law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, economic development, and any other relevant matters' (Australian Government 1991). Fostering and supporting local reconciliation groups and sponsoring public discussions became the mainstays of the CAR's public awareness strategy. However, at the end of its ten-year term, the CAR 's final report sternly warned that the goal of reconciliation was far from being achieved, urging '[t]rue reconciliation will require concerted efforts in all spheres of our nation's life' (CAR 2000, p. 9).

To this end, the CAR created a successor, an independent foundation named Reconciliation Australia (RA) that soon received financial support from the Australian

government and from corporations. RA sponsored projects and campaigns related to Indigenous youth, education, Indigenous leadership capacity and governance. Continuing the CAR's program of public opinion research, RA initiated a biennial 'Reconciliation Barometer' survey to measure attitudes towards the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In 2007, Prime Minister Howard celebrated the launch of RA's new RAP program, honouring the initiative of the eight 'trailblazing' organisations, including ANZ Bank, BHP Billiton, Centrelink, and the Melbourne City Council.

The RAP program has become the most far-reaching initiative since reconciliation was announced as government policy in 1991. RAPs have touched the lives of more than 3 million Australians through their employment and membership through roughly 1,000 participating organisations by the end of 2018.[1] Each organisation must secure approval from their top executive as well as RA on customized RAPs that pledge to implement roughly one to two dozen actions with measurable targets to recognise, celebrate and manage Indigenous difference. Although many organisations become temporarily or permanently inactive in the RAP program,[2] an astounding figure of more than 1.4 million Australians and 24,000 Indigenous Australians work or study in an organisation with a current RAP and an estimated 3 million work or study in an organisation that has adopted a RAP at some point in the past decade, corresponding to about 25 per cent of the Australian workforce (RA 2015, 2016a, 2017). RA reports that RAP organisations developed 9,579 partnerships with Indigenous organisations, procured $265 million goods and services through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business and contributed $28 million in charitable donations, scholarships and pro bono work for Indigenous people and organisations in the past year alone (RA 2017). The 'Workplace RAP Barometer' conducted every two years consistently finds more favourable attitudes towards Indigenous

people and reconciliation in RAP workplaces compared to the general population (Nelson 2016; RA 2017). These and many other positive outcomes of the RAP program are proudly reported to stakeholders by RA and by RAP participants.

Sports, racism and reconciliation

It is particularly significant for the public awareness of reconciliation that sports organisations have signed up to RAPs. Australians deem sports heroes to have influenced the way that they see themselves nearly as much as Anzacs – suggesting that sport provides 'day to day reinforcement crucial for maintaining national identity' (Donoghue & Tranter 2016; Tranter & Donoghue 2007, p. 180). In total, 36 sports organisations – including clubs, governance bodies, regulatory agencies, and players' associations – adopted RAPs from 2006 to 2018. More than most other RAP participants, these organisations pursue RAPs in a particularly public way. Few can match their guaranteed screen time, constant media commentary, and devoted popular followings. Sports organisations are therefore significant, high-profile participants in the RAP program.

Australia's racial tensions have erupted in sport in seven major publicised episodes since 2011 in the AFL alone (AAP 2017). The most well-known centres on the Sydney Swans' star Adam Goodes, who paused his play to point at a 13-year-old girl among the spectators after she heckled him and called him an 'ape' (Crawford 2013), a racist slur. Shortly after the incident, Goodes accepted the girl's apology and urged the public to support her.[3] In 2014 the Australian government declared Goodes Australian of the Year, in commendation of his leadership in the Indigenous community (Devine 2014; Farrell 2014; O'Brien 2014). However, by calling attention to popular racism, Goodes aroused a furore, and many fans began to boo him. Public stances against the booing poured in, from individuals using the '#IstandwithAdam' hashtag, to a

condemnation of fans' 'unacceptable behaviour' by all 18 AFL club captains, to Prime Minister Tony Abbott's call for 'basic respect' (ABC 2015a, 2015b). The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) offered its national 'Racism: It Stops with Me' campaign as a resource for those wishing to make a difference.[4] It also issued a joint statement entitled 'Australia must and can be better than this' co-signed by 150 other organisations, primarily Australian non-profits, arguing that 'a line has been crossed to racial abuse' with the booing of Goodes (AHRC 2015a). However, after two years, the controversy continued with sustained booing of Goodes by spectators during competition, vandalism of his Australian of the Year marker in Canberra and the girl's mother publicly calling on Goodes to apologise (Davey 2015; Gee & McKeon 2016; Parry 2015). 'The history wars are back with us,' lamented one article, 'This time, the chosen battle ground is the MCG on a Friday night two years ago when a young girl called Adam Goodes an ape' (Le Grande 2015, p. 7).

Goodes himself had supported RA's 'Unfinished Oz' campaign in 2010 (RA 2010) and in 2014 he launched the Sydney Swans' RAP. The document was illustrated with stunning artwork by his mother, Lisa Sansbury, which also featured on the Swans' Indigenous Round guernsey (Swans Media 2014). Additionally, Goodes contributed a statement, which featured alongside a special message from RA's Chief Executive, in the AFL's third RAP adopted in 2014.[5] Upon Goodes' retirement from the AFL, RA farewelled him as an 'exemplary role model and a dedicated supporter of reconciliation in Australia' (RA 2016b). Goodes became 'reconciliation advisor' to David Jones (a retail chain) as they planned their first RAP (AAP 2015; Mohamed 2015).

What RAPs do

Released in 2008, RA's 20-page 'RAP Toolkit' explained the philosophy of the program 'to turn good intentions into measurable actions that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and provided a template for organisations to create their own RAP document (RA 2008, p. 6). The Toolkit defined three areas of action for reconciliation within organisations that are still in use today: demonstrating *respect* for Indigenous history and culture, forming *relationships* with Indigenous communities, and creating *opportunities* for Indigenous people. Organisations were asked to resolve actions related to each category by filling in charts specifying the person or unit responsible for the action, a timeline for implementation, and a measurable target to evaluate the success of the actions – which they were asked to report to RA and to use to guide the creation of future RAPs. The template also prompted organisations to articulate a customised vision for reconciliation and to tell the story of how their RAP was developed. RA expanded its staff to work with organisations throughout the RAP development process and it reviewed each document individually, often asking for changes before issuing its final approval alongside the 'executive sign off' within the organisations. In 2013, after hundreds of organisations joined the program, RA implemented the 'RISE' structure with four levels of RAP participation (Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, Elevate), each with increasingly stringent 'minimum elements'.

Whatever may be an organisation's motives for joining the RAP program and however dedicated – or lax – its follow-through on pledged actions, merely completing the process of creating, adopting and launching a RAP has important consequences. As a public document signed by executives, the RAP constitutes an official reference for organisations' acknowledgement of Indigenous people and endorsement of a difference-conscious approach to

Indigeneity within the organisation. Audiences for RAPs, which are typically launched in a burst of publicity with ceremonial fanfare, include an organisation's upper management, stakeholders, clients and employees. Even if actions pledged in the RAPs remain aspirational, they are nonetheless associated with the organisation's intentions towards Indigenous people. Moreover, the process of creating a RAP puts in place organisational infrastructures linking the management of and reporting on many aspects of Indigenous difference, from demonstrating respect for culture to hiring practices, to charity programs for youth, to mentoring programs for employees. Although scattered Indigenous initiatives may already exist in the organisation, it becomes meaningful for the organisation to conceptualise and to govern such activities as part of a national project of reconciliation. The articulations of Indigeneity and reconciliation in RAPs are consequential contributions to the ways that Australians understand Indigenous difference and imagine Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations. What themes and concepts are most prominent in professional sports organisations' visions for reconciliation? How do professional sports organisations position Indigeneity in their RAPs, both in word and action?

Indigenous difference in 'Visions of Reconciliation'

To answer these questions, I have analysed the reconciliation vision statements from 34 professional sports organisations that adopted RAPs between 2006 and the end of 2018 (Appendix A). Since RAPs tended to be rather long (the average length of RAPs in this sample was 14 pages), the analysis was limited to the most recent 'Our Vision' statement for each organisation rather than the full text of each RAP. Ranging from one sentence to several paragraphs, these statements responded to the standard prompt in each RAP template: 'State your organisation's vision for reconciliation, how it relates to your business and the wider

community'.[6] These statements, often deeply inflected by the 'respect, relationships, opportunities' elements of reconciliation embedded in the structure of the RAP program, offer a cross-section of the themes and concepts of sports organisations most closely associate with reconciliation.

Sample

My sample of 36 RAP organisations (Appendix A) includes professional or semi-professional sport clubs and sport governing bodies. I excluded players' associations, sport service organisations, and regulatory agencies in order to focus on the most powerful organisations that set the tone – internally and publicly – for the relation of sport to Indigeneity. I also excluded RAP participants such as fitness, sports medicine, and youth organisations that, despite connection to physical activity, were not primarily oriented towards sport.[7]

These 36 professional sports organisations include four national governing bodies (AFL, ARU, Cricket Australia, NRL) and four regional governing bodies (AFL Queensland, Netball SA, QRU, West Australian Football Commission). The 28 professional teams come from only three sports: Australian football (15), rugby league (12) and rugby union (1). They primarily include professional clubs in the AFL (13) and NRL (8) as well as some semi-professional clubs in the WAFL (2), NSWRL (2) and QRL (2). Between 2006 and 2018, these organisations produced 54 RAP documents, with 11 organisations adopting a renewed RAP at least once and 5 organisations adopting a renewed RAP at least twice. However, 12 teams have been inactive in the RAP program since 2015 or earlier. The majority of sports organisations fall into the mid-level tiers of the RAP program's 'RISE' structure, with 16 at the 'Innovate' level and 6 at the 'Stretch' level. Six clubs are currently at the introductory 'Reflect' phase and only one club – Richmond FC – has adopted an advanced level 'Elevate' RAP. The state with the most club

participation was New South Wales (8), followed by Victoria (7), Queensland (6), Western Australia (4), South Australia (2) and the Australian Capital Territory (1).

Coding Method

This chapter employs a content analysis technique known as coding, or the systematic application of clearly defined thematic labels pertaining to manifest and latent content present in text-based data (Bailey 2007; Berg 2006; Strauss & Corbin 1990; Warren & Karner 2010). Coding entails a much-discussed quantitative aspect in its ability to provide insight into the frequency and distribution of qualitative elements (Berg 2006, pp. 241–2) and can be used to test hypotheses. However, this article follows a well-trodden path of using coding within the larger context of a 'grounded theory' tradition (Charmaz 2014; Cho & Lee 2014; Strauss & Corbin 1990), which stresses the importance of discovering themes *emergent* from data rather than the strict imposition of pre-defined categories and concepts (Strauss & Glaser 1967; Suddaby 2006). Coding is a highly iterative process that cycles between the generation of coding categories and definitions, the systematic application of these codes to standard units of analysis in the data, reflection on how precisely and accurately the codes capture phenomenon present in the data, and subsequent adjustment of the coding system. For this reason, researchers applying the coding method should be clear about their conceptual frameworks and questions of interest that inevitably shape the results of analysis (Weston et al. 2001). Practitioners of coding also emphasise that even after a robust coding system is applied to the data, a careful process of making connections, developing interpretations, and validating analysis remains (Warren & Karner 2010, pp. 208–18).

In keeping with common practice, I first used a technique known as 'open coding' to loosely label all themes and topics I noticed while initially reading the vision statement for 34 of

the 36 organisations for which vision statements were available (Bailey 2007, pp. 128–9; Berg 2006, pp. 251–3; Strauss & Corbin 1990, pp. 204–11).[8] My goal was to identify the discrete concepts that organisations relied upon to articulate the nebulous concept of reconciliation whether directly, that is, 'Our vision for reconciliation is an inclusive AFL community', or indirectly, such as in the Parramatta Eels RLFC's pledge to 'work tirelessly towards ensuring all Australian children have an equal opportunity to live a long, healthy and happy life'. I also paid close attention to when and how Indigeneity was deployed in the text and when more general language, such as 'members' or 'society', was used instead.

The next step I took was to carefully review each code to make sure it referred to a distinct theme that did not overlap with other codes. For instance, I decided to combine the two codes of 'inclusive sport/club' and 'Indigenous participation in sport/club' into a single code ('inclusive sport/club with Indigenous participation') because of the similarity of the underlying concepts expressed in the vision statements. I also decomposed some codes into more precise categories, such as dividing an initial code of 'positive social change' into 'positive social change, improve community (general)' and 'improve lives of Indigenous people' when it became clear that organisations had different target groups in mind as the beneficiaries of their reconciliation efforts. I then reviewed every vision statement to ensure that each of the remaining 24 codes had been applied accurately and again reviewed each code for internal consistency.

Findings

While the 24 codes generated inductively during the coding process each refer to a distinct concept, these concepts in turn speak to one of four emergent themes: working and walking together, social and economic change, sports organisations as national social actors, and celebrating Indigeneity. These overarching themes were each found in 82–97 per cent of the 34

vision statements, demonstrating a strong consensus on how sports organisations articulate reconciliation in the RAPs. Because of the small sample size of only 34 sports organisations, I will avoid comparing the relative importance of themes and will refrain from suggesting that certain themes may be more salient in particular sports compared to others.

Despite the finding that four thematic categories feature prominently in the RAPs of most sports organisations, the identification and treatment of Indigenous difference varies significantly across the themes. Therefore, the goal of this section is to illustrate how each theme positions Indigeneity in sports organisations' RAPs, in terms of both discourse and actions pledged. Although the themes were generated inductively by content analysis restricted to the vision statements, the discussion of these themes will draw on all the textual and visual elements.[9] In the explication of each thematic category, special attention will be paid to the way that Indigenous people are imagined to be different in statements, pledged actions, and images used by sports organisations in their RAPs.

Table 11.1 Themes in 34 sports organisations' RAP Visions for Reconciliation

Category	Individual Codes	No. of orgs	% of orgs
social & economic change		**33**	**97**
	economic opportunities for Indigenous people	16	47
	positive social change, improve community (general)	13	38
	support Indigenous players & employees	10	29
	close the gap	9	26
	improve lives of Indigenous people	9	26

	support children & youth	7	21
	equality	6	18
	fairness & justice	2	6
walking & working together		**31**	**91**
	strong relationships with Indigenous people & communities	25	74
	inclusive sport/club with Indigenous participation	15	44
	working together, collaboration, teamwork (general)	10	29
	unity (general)	9	26
	mutual respect & trust	8	24
	inclusive communities/society (general)	7	21
	cultural safety & accessibility	4	12
	mutual benefits	4	12
celebrating Indigeneity		**30**	**88**
	acknowledge, respect & celebrate Indigenous cultures	22	65
	understanding & knowledge of Indigenous cultures	14	41
	affirm Indigenous history & contributions in sport/club	11	32
	recognise unique position of First Peoples	9	26
sports organisations as responsible national actors		**28**	**82**
	embrace public responsibility & leadership	18	53
	contribution to national reconciliation effort	10	29
	demonstrate formal commitment to reconciliation	10	29
	set goals & measure success of RAP	5	15

Celebrating Indigeneity

The RAP vision statements of sports organisations present Indigeneity as something to be understood, acknowledged, respected, recognised, valued and celebrated. There were nine direct references in the vision statements – and many more in the full text of the RAP documents – highlighting the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the First Peoples of Australia. Roughly one-third of the vision statements recognised the value of Indigenous contributions to the organisation or acknowledged Indigenous participation in the history of their sport or club. Fourteen organisations also said that understanding and learning about Indigenous cultures and traditions was part of their vision for reconciliation. RAPs rarely mention any other kinds of ethno-racial, cultural or religious difference: one of the few that did, the Geelong Cats FC's RAP, makes sure to emphasise the 'special place' of Indigeneity amongst other kinds of diversity.[10]

In highlighting Indigenous difference as an object of respect and celebration by non-Indigenous people and organisations the statements are specific, detailed and even evocative. The ARU's vision statement 'acknowledges and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the oldest living continuous culture in this world and pays respect to First Australians' ongoing connection to the lands and waters of this country'. Indigenous cultures are often described as 'rich' and 'diverse' in the full text of the RAPs. The RAP documents also featured visual elements saturated with Indigenous cultural symbols and photographs of Indigenous people. Twenty-nine of the RAPs covers featured works commissioned from Indigenous artists, whether expressly for the RAP document or for the AFL's Indigenous Round guernsey. While all organisations acknowledged the origins of the cover art, several teams also dedicated full-page spreads with a photograph of the artist and a detailed description of the

artwork's symbolism. The other seven RAP covers were based on photographs that prominently included Indigenous individuals, five of which feature *only* Indigenous people: an Indigenous dancer in traditional dress performing on a grassy sports field under stadium lights, Indigenous teammates holding an Aboriginal flag dramatically flapping in the wind, two wide-eyed Indigenous children participating in a club's community outreach program, and Indigenous administrative staff standing should to shoulder with the club's Indigenous players on the field. Such cover photographs featuring Indigenous people are also typical of the many images in the RAP documents that celebrate Indigeneity.

Since identifying Indigenous staff is a required 'minimum element' for all levels of the RAP program, many sports organisations report this information in their RAP: 'We currently have the following Aboriginal employment outcomes: 6 staff who work across PAFC – 2 full time, 3 casual, 1 trainee; 5 current players; 5 past players on a casual employment register; and other Aboriginal athletes in (beach volleyball and softball) who support our community programs' (Port Adelaide FC). Many organisations even named or provided photographs and profiles for all current Indigenous players or dedicated sections to Indigenous history in the sport or club. The Richmond Tigers FC took the unique step of naming their RAP the 'Richmond Football Club Maurice Rioli Reconciliation Action Plan'. The club's full-page spread starts: 'Maurice Rioli stood only 175cm tall, but he was a giant in terms of his influence in both sporting and public life for his Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.' Similarly, the Cricket Australia RAP provides a section on the 'History of Indigenous Cricket' citing the famous 1868 team of Indigenous players who competed overseas and the AFL RAP's 'Iconic Moments' page features photographs of Sir Doug Nicholls and Nicky Winmar as well as a statement written by Adam Goodes. In its first RAP, the ARU committed to 'a historical review

of ARU and other records to identify and acknowledge any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander players' in order to 'recognise achievements of any Classic Wallabies that were unable to identify their Indigenous ancestry while playing'.

Sports organisations in the RAP program pledge, in addition, to respect Indigenous cultures. Many sports organisations include 'Acknowledgements of Country' in their RAP documents, as well as in other types of internal and external communications, and they install plaques at offices and stadiums to honour Traditional Owners. Organisations at all RAP levels observe National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week and organisations at the 'Innovate' level or above invite Traditional Owners to perform Welcome to Country ceremonies at important events, included in television coverage of such events.[11]

Walking and Working Together

The 'walking and working together' thematic category groups together eight codes that focus on positive relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Twenty-five of the sports organisations use RA's language of 'strong relationships' in the RAP vision statements, and many organisations mention existing or longstanding ties with Indigenous communities and people. Statements also prominently featured language of welcoming Indigenous participation in 'inclusive' sports and clubs as well as the general ideals of social inclusion, trust, unity, and shared futures. Several RAPs used a language of reciprocity: 'mutual respect' and 'mutual benefit' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

Indigenous difference is thus represented in a peaceful, productive relationship with the non-Indigenous. For instance, the West Coast Eagles FC's statement envisions 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Aboriginal Australians working together towards reconciliation for the mutual benefit of all'. Many statements do not name Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islanders but use vague terms such as 'working together', 'social inclusion', and 'unity' without any direct reference to Indigenous difference. Statements such as '[b]y working together we can provide more opportunities and pathways now and in the future' (Northern Pride RLFC) and goals to 'build and create future relationships and opportunities in Australia that will be characterised by trust, unity and prosperity' (Port Adelaide FC) evoke a shared, collective future. Visually, this theme is represented through photographs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people smiling together at important events or in triumphant moments, or photographs in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are hard at work together.

In the theme 'walking and working together', clubs and sports pledged to create opportunities for dialogue with Indigenous people. A 'minimum element' shared across all sports organisations is creating a RAP working group, an internal body that meets at least quarterly to discuss progress towards RAP targets with a requirement for mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous membership. For example, the Ipswich Jets RLFC's goal is to form a 'RAP Working Group with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and stakeholders and non-Indigenous staff, and with executive support'. In addition, each of the four sport governance bodies pledged to set up or to continue at least one Indigenous advisory group.[12] Other actions related to 'walking and working together' include that 'all new staff and players complete cultural awareness training as part of their induction' (Essendon FC) and providing 'a welcoming environment for current players, their families, and Community' through invitations to a family induction and the AFL Indigenous Round (Geelong Cats).

Social & Economic Change

The Howard government (1996–2007) promoted the idea that reconciliation should be 'practical' rather than 'symbolic'. RAPs concede something to this emphasis in a thematic category that

includes eight codes that envision reconciliation through 'social and economic change' in the organisation's local community or in Australia more generally. Sixteen organisations use the RAP program's language to specify creating opportunities for Indigenous people, with 13 vision statements referring to positive social change in general, such as North Melbourne FC's pledge to 'bring about positive lasting benefits locally'. Nine organisations use the language of the national 'close the gap' campaign, including the Melbourne Storm RLFC: 'an Australia where there is no gap between the life opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians'. The idea of social change through talent and career development for Indigenous players and employees is also mentioned by 10 RAPs. Finally, a small number of RAPs refer to socio-political ideals in their vision statements: six RAPs mention the theme of equality while two reference fairness and justice.

Images and text in sports organisations' RAPs frequently portray aid to Indigenous individuals and communities. Whether in introductions written by executives or in 'case studies', organisations take pride in presenting their current involvement in initiatives such as mentoring students or contributing to community development programs. For example, the Brisbane Broncos partnered with the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health to sponsor the 'Deadly Choices' program to promote 'to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices' in which 'specially designed jerseys are used to incentivise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to visit their local doctor for preventative health checks to prevent chronic diseases rather than the common reactive approach'.[13] Alongside a description of the program featuring praise from Oxfam, the Broncos' RAP displays two full-page pictures of excited Indigenous children wearing the special jersey and standing next to players in uniform. Other RAP actions related to social and economic change include pledges to hire more

Indigenous staff, to advertise positions in Indigenous communities, to ensure culturally sensitive human resource policies for current staff and to procure goods and services through Indigenous business.

The invocation of Indigenous difference in this thematic category tends to cast Indigenous people and communities as underdeveloped and in need of assistance to rise to the standards of other Australians. The phrases 'creating opportunities', 'partnerships' and 'two-way relationships' used by RA emphasise Indigenous agency in the reconciliation process, but language in sports organisations' RAPs often slips into identifying Indigenous people not as actors but as objects in development, as in Subiaco FC & District's pledge to 'achieve a significant improvement to the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal population within our district Zone'. In fact, eight RAP vision statements make reference to improving or enriching the lives of Indigenous people in addition to nine that reference the 'close the gap' campaign. The combination of such direct statements as well as the more subtle implications of organisations' focus only on contributing to Indigenous causes and communities (at least within the pages of the RAP document) thematises Indigeneity as deficit (Fforde et al. 2013). Lawrence Bamblett calls attention to the way that this 'deficit discourse' in sport limits representations of Indigenous individuals and their many agentic victories (2013, p. 14, and in this book).

Sports Organisations as Responsible Social Actors

Finally, a prominent theme in the RAP vision statements is that sports organisations are important social actors with a responsibility to promote reconciliation. More than half of the vision statements affirm the influential role of sport in Australia and pledge that the organisation will use its role to promote reconciliation. Ten organisations explicitly link their RAP actions to a national effort or agenda in their reconciliation vision statements. Additionally, vision

statements position organisations' RAP participation as evidence of their participation in social change: ten organisations position the RAP as a demonstration of formal commitment to national reconciliation and five suggest their adherence to the RAP program's method of setting goals and measuring outcomes is further proof of commitment to the cause.

Without being explicit about the nature of Indigenous difference, statements in this category evoke sports organisations as responsible and progressive national actors. Even local sports clubs recognise their national standing, as in the Parramatta Eels RLFC's statement '[a]s one of the most recognised sporting brands in the country and the biggest in Western Sydney, the Eels aim to use our influence to promote respect and a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, both national and in our local community' and in the Sydney Swans FC's commitment to 'playing an active role in Australia's reconciliation journey'. The sport governance organisations describe their own roles in unabashedly grandiose terms, such as '[o]ur purpose as a sport is to unite and inspire Australia, and there is a no more important endeavour to bring our nation together than that of reconciliation' (Cricket Australia) and '[f]rom the outset, Rugby League has been a game that challenged social barriers to include everyone who loved sport' (NRL). The many mentions of the Close the Gap campaign also link sports organisations' RAP actions to a well-established 'national agenda', in the words of the Essendon FC vision statement.

Conclusion

As the Goodes affair demonstrated, the public can be polarised when the topic of racism is raised. The reconciliation discourse in these 34 vision statements does not explicitly name racism as an obstacle to reconciliation, although sports organisations, particularly those in the AFL,

have begun to implement policies for handling discriminatory and racist incidents as part of their RAP actions. Indeed, politics and the related themes of justice and truth, the most prominent topics of debate in other nations' reconciliation processes (Bloomfield 2006; Gibson 2002; Radzik & Murphy 2015; Rotberg & Thompson 2000), are all but absent from these vision statements – only two (6%) mention the themes of fairness and justice.

Thus, the social responsibility and public leadership embraced by RAP organisations is quietly circumscribed to private, non-policy realms. The thematic category of social and economic change, and its close relationship to practical reconciliation, emphasise voluntary commitments of corporate and community organisations to achieve the goal of closing the gap rather than changing funding structures and resource distribution at the political level. While symbolic actions such as plaques recognising Traditional Owners, Welcome to Country ceremonies and the display of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flags may be read by some as political statements, they are not actions that change legislative or legal frameworks. The RAP program's many references to organisations' local 'spheres of influence' does not demonstrate hostility to political elements of reconciliation – but neither does it encourage organisations to think of themselves as political actors. The one exception is support for RA's 'Recognise' campaign for constitutional recognition, pledged by six organisations, including the Richmond Tigers FC, the only organisation to explicitly mention constitutional recognition as part of a reconciliation vision statement in a previous RAP. Overall, the RAP program positions Indigenous difference as an object for private voluntary action rather than public political obligation.

This brief case study cannot comment on the many reasons sports organisations join the RAP program, nor can this study distinguish authentic from instrumental reasons for joining the

RAP program. However, it can put forward the observation that RAP adoption across sports is highly uneven: of the dozens of sports with significant participation and spectators in Australia, only five sports are represented as RAP participants. The football codes most engaged with the RAP program, the AFL and NRL, attract some of the largest television and in-person followings in the country (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010; Australian Sports Commission 2016; Roy Morgan Research 2012, 2014). However, the RAP engagement of cricket, also one of the most viewed sports, is low. Soccer, tennis, horse-racing, golf, and swimming are among some of the most watched and played sports in Australia, but they have not engaged with the RAP program.[14] Evidently, national popularity alone does not compel sport governance bodies and clubs to develop RAPs, so future research could explore the factors driving RAP adoption.

Furthermore, I do not make claims about the effects of joining the RAP program, that is, the extent to which the RAP program is the cause of changes in organisations' inclusivity, cultural practices or social contributions. To consider the efficacy of sports organisations' RAPs presents difficulties similar to investigating a jogging exercise plan prescribed to a patient. Whether the patient loses weight, suffers injury or improves their performance would require a much deeper study of each patient's unique conditions and trajectory – and even then it could be difficult to isolate jogging as a causal factor producing particular outcomes given the impact of diet, sleep, genetics and social networks. Nonetheless, I am confident in saying that the RAP program's requirements make certain differences to any sports organisation that achieves the required executive sign-off and RA approval. To return to my analogy: simply from the nature of jogging we know that the patient will experience a temporary increase in heart rate, blood circulation and metabolism, the release of endorphins, and some degree of impact stress on the knees and ankles.

The immediate effects of RAPs are to popularise a discourse of reconciliation in which Indigenous difference is identified, marked, and celebrated as part of an expression of local and national unity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Strong, collaborative relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are put forward as a way to achieve positive social change and RAPs link sports organisations to a national agenda for social change and bolster sports organisations' public and self-images as public leaders with social responsibilities.

At the same time, the RAP program associates Indigenous difference closely with deficit through its focus on socio-economic inequality and closing the gap. The RAPs produced by sports organisations do not lend much space to discussing the violent and racist policies of the Australian state that led to current inequalities, nor do they associate reconciliation with structural political change such as land rights, Indigenous sovereignty or treaty. Although increasing numbers of RAPs condemn and make provisions for addressing racism and supporting players who experience racial vilification, reconciliation visions statements and the majority of RAP documents employ highly positive, collaborative and unifying language, avoiding even the mention of polarity or contention that other discourses, such as anti-racism, tackle directly.

In fact, RAPs promote understandings of reconciliation and Indigenous difference that may leave organisations and their members ill-equipped to understand persistent sources of conflict in Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations, particularly those stemming from Indigenous aspirations for social change that would have to be driven by structural political reform rather than by voluntary gestures from the private sector. While RAPs have undoubtedly helped sports and other organisations improve in the areas of building relationships, showing respect and creating opportunities for Indigenous people, these documents must not be understood as

containing the essential ingredients of national reconciliation on a smaller organisational scale. Ultimately, reconciliation efforts by organisations must be contextualised within a challenging, violent past and present of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and an imminently political struggle to appropriately recognise Indigenous difference – and all the power-sharing and resource distribution such recognition might entail.

Appendix A: Professional sports organisations in the RAP Program – 2006 to 2018

Name	State/Territory	Type	Sport	League	No. of RAPs	Current Level	Year Joined	Last Year Active
AFL	[national]	governing body	Australian football	–	1	Innovate	2014	2014
AFL Queensland	QLD	governing body	Australian football	–	1	Reflect	2017	2017
ARU	[national]	governing body	rugby union	–	2	Innovate	2013	2016
Cricket Australia	[national]	governing body	cricket	–	1	Innovate	2014	2014
Netball SA	SA	governing body	netball	–	1	Innovate	2017	2017
NRL	[national]	governing body	rugby league	–	4	Stretch	2008	2014
Queensland Rugby Union	QLD	governing body	rugby union	–	1	Innovate	2017	2017
West Australian Football Com.	WA	governing body	Australian football	–	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Adelaide FC	SA	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Aquis Gold Coast Titans	QLD	team	rugby league	NRL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Brisbane Broncos	QLD	team	rugby league	NRL	3	Stretch	2012	2016
Brisbane Lions AFC	QLD	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Reflect	2018	2018
Brumbies Rugby	ACT	team	rugby union	Super Rugby	1	Reflect	2017	2017
Carlton FC	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Reflect	2015	2015
Cronulla Sharks	NSW	team	rugby league	NRL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Essendon FC	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	3	–	2009	2013
Fremantle Dockers	WA	team	Australian football	AFL	1	–	2013	2013
Geelong Cats	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	2	Stretch	2013	2014
Gold Coast SUNS	QLD	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Ipswich Jets	QLD	team	rugby league	QRL	1	–	2012	2012
Melbourne FC	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Melbourne Storm RLFC	VIC	team	rugby league	NRL	1	–	2011	2011
North Melbourne FC	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	1	Reflect	2016	2016
Northern Pride RLFC	QLD	team	rugby league	QRL	1	–	2010	2010
Parramatta Eels	NSW	team	rugby league	NRL	1	–	2014	2014
Penrith Panthers	NSW	team	rugby league	NSWRL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Port Adelaide FC	SA	team	Australian football	AFL	2	Stretch	2014	2017
Richmond FC	VIC	team	Australian football	AFL	4	Elevate	2011	2018
South Sydney Rabbitohs	NSW	team	rugby league	NSWRL	1	Innovate	2018	2018
St George Illawarra Dragons	NSW	team	rugby league	NRL	1	Innovate	2017	2017
Subiaco FC & District	WA	team	Australian football	WAFL	2	–	2011	2013

Swan Districts FC	WA	team	Australian football	WAFL	2	Innovate	2013	2016
Sydney Roosters	NSW	team	rugby league	NRL	1	Reflect	2018	2018
Sydney Swans	NSW	team	Australian football	AFL	2	Stretch	2014	2016
West Coast Eagles FC	WA	team	Australian football	AFL	3	Stretch	2014	2017
Wests Tigers RLFC	NSW	team	rugby league	NRL	1	Innovate	2017	2017

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[1] In 2018 there have been inconsistent reports regarding whether the RAP program has surpassed 1,000 member organisations. For instance, an 18 December 2018 media release by RA on the Australian Labor Party's RAP states "almost 1,000" RAPs (https://www.reconciliation.org.au/alp-becomes-first-political-party-to-launch-reconciliation-action-plan/) whereas RA CEO Karen Mundine's introduction to BP's 2018-2020 RAP references "over 1,000" RAPs (https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp-country/en_au/environment-society/reconciliation/RAP.pdf).
[2] According to an independent database of RAP adoptions compiled by the author, of 459 organisations that published their initial RAP before 2014, 263 (57.3%) had not published a second RAP by the end of 2015. In the 2014–2015 period, 381 (83%) of organisations did not publish any RAPs. The average time between RAP publication for the 196 organisations that published more than one RAP was 2.3 years. Taken together, these statistics suggest that many RAP organisations follow a 'one and done' pattern of RAP adoption (Lloyd 2019).
[3] On May 25, 2013, Adam Goodes tweeted: 'Just received a phone call from a young girl apologizing for her actions. Lets support her please #racismitstopswithme #IndigenousRound' (@adamroy37).
[4] The 'Racism: It Stops with Me' campaign began in 2012 after the Australian government commissioned a 'National Anti-Racism Strategy' to be implemented from 2012–2015 (AHRC 2012, 2015b).
[5] Goodes' statement in the AFL RAP praises 'Indigenous Australians and the AFL not taking each other for granted' as a consequence of recent developments (2014).
[6] All four current RAP templates, published for the first time in 2013, contain the same 'Our Vision' prompt across the four Reflect, Innovate, Stretch, and Elevate levels. The original 'RAP Toolkit' published by Reconciliation Australia in 2008 used a similar prompt formatted as a question: 'What is your vision for reconciliation? How does it relate to your business?'
[7] I created an independent database based on the RA website and additional research of all RAPs adopted by organisations with approval from Reconciliation Australia. In total, I identified 36 professional sport teams and governing bodies with approved RAPs recognised on RA's website between November 2011 and December 2018.
[8] Of the 36 professional sports organisations, only 1 did not provide a vision statement (Sydney Roosters' 2018 Reflect RAP). Two RAP documents were unavailable: the Penrith Panther's 2017 Innovate RAP and the Swan Districts Football Club's 2016 Innovate RAP. In the latter case, the vision statement from the Swan District Football Club 2013 RAP was used in the sample instead of the most recent RAP. Therefore a total of 34 vision statements were analysed.
[9] Sports organisations' RAPs tended to have high production quality, with the majority of the RAPs appearing to be professionally designed, replete with high-quality photographs, striking colour schemes, and clean layouts.
[10] The Geelong Cats FC's RAP states: 'We recognise and value all cultural backgrounds but also understand the special place that Aboriginal people have in the history of our nation and our game.'
[11] Over the past decade, these competitions have included: the Indigenous Round, Indigenous All Stars, and Dreamtime @ the G (AFL); the Ella 7s Tournament (ARU); the Indigenous Round, Indigenous All Stars, Close the Gap Round and 'Reconciliation Cup' (NRL); the National Indigenous Cricket Carnival and the Imparja Cup (Cricket Australia).
[12] These Indigenous representative bodies include: the National Indigenous Advisory Group (AFL); the Australian Rugby League Indigenous Council and the Indigenous Players Reference Group (NRL); the National Indigenous Rugby Reference Group and the Lloyd McDermott Rugby Development Team (ARU); state and territory Indigenous cricket advisory committees and 'high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation' on the National Cricket Advisory Committee (Cricket Australia).

[13] In fact, concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and health is a common theme in RAP vision statements: 12 (35%) make direct reference to Indigenous health and wellbeing and 7 (21%) mention children or youth as specific target groups for reconciliation initiatives.

[14] At least several of these sports do support programs designed to encourage Indigenous participation, according to a 2007 report 'What's the score? A survey of cultural diversity and racism in Australian sport', by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.