



Media Release

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CULTURAL RECOGNITION PROMOTES ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians could play an important role in closing economic opportunity gaps between Indigenous and other Australians, says Business Council of Australia (BCA) President Tony Shepherd.

Welcoming the release of the report by the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, Mr Shepherd said BCA members increasingly recognise cultural understanding and respect as essential ingredients in supporting Indigenous employment and economic development.

“Recognition of heritage and culture is part of building the kind of relationships that allow us to work together to improve outcomes for Indigenous colleagues and the nation as a whole,” said Mr Shepherd, whose firm Transfield Services is heavily involved in Indigenous employment and training.

“The report released today highlights the importance of taking the time to achieve community and political consensus. In responding to the panel’s recommendations, we would encourage the government to establish a process and a timeframe that maximises the chance of success.

“A divisive public debate would be highly damaging to the gradual process of building better relationships, as would the failure of a referendum and the disappointment, blame and despondency that might follow.”

Mr Shepherd said the Business Council had taken a keen interest in the work of the expert panel, not least through the participation of its then president, Graham Bradley, as a panel member.

He explained that as part of its Indigenous engagement agenda, the council conducts an annual survey of initiatives undertaken by member companies to provide employment, and other professional and economic development opportunities for Indigenous people and enterprises.

The most recent survey, released last November, attracted a record 74 per cent response rate from BCA members. More than 80 per cent of respondents have formal Indigenous engagement initiatives in place.

“A consistent message in the survey is that a fundamental ingredient of success is building relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that are based on mutual trust and respect,” he said

“Like the national apology in 2008, constitutional recognition of Australia’s first peoples should contribute to better outcomes and a more confident Australia,” said Mr Shepherd.

“It’s a goal which is undoubtedly worth getting right. We congratulate the panel on what it has achieved and wish the government well in advancing this historic reform.”

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