

New program win-win for Indigenous Australians and Defence

By Gai Brodtmann

Indigenous Australians have played a significant role in our military history, but more needs to be done to encourage them to serve and remain in the ADF.

According to the last Defence Census, 1.4 percent of the ADF are Indigenous Australians. But a new ADF Indigenous Recruitment Strategy and directorate focused entirely on Indigenous matters aims to improve on this, and will encourage more Indigenous members to identify their cultural background on PMKeyS.



Smoking ceremony, NAIDOC week celebrations

The tri-Service strategy and Directorate of Indigenous Affairs were launched at the Australian War Memorial prior to this year's NAIDOC Week memorial service by the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, to improve Indigenous participation in Defence, particularly the ADF.

The recruitment strategy aims to change perceptions, create specialised pathways and provide ongoing support to Indigenous ADF members through a range of initiatives.

New directorate

The Directorate of Indigenous Affairs will be Defence's central agency for Indigenous matters and implementing the strategy.

The Directorate which will be linked to a Defence Reconciliation Reference Group, will build a national team of Indigenous Engagement and Indigenous Recruitment Officers and develop regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks to ensure that all Indigenous members of the ADF and Australian Public Service have access to the mentoring and support programs currently under development. The Directorate comprises a diverse team of ADF and APS members, with representation from many regional areas.

As the whole-of-Defence agency on all Indigenous matters, the Directorate will:

- oversee the implementation of the Defence Reconciliation Action Plan and the new recruitment and retention strategy;
- engage with Indigenous communities, especially on job opportunities for Indigenous Australians, now and in the future;
- advise Defence on Indigenous cultural protocols;
- develop and manage whole-of-Defence Indigenous policy; and
- advise on relevant media and public affairs opportunities.

‘Our aim is to make sure all Australians have the pathways and support to be recruited and retained in the ADF, and Defence more broadly,’ said Director of Indigenous Affairs, Soozie Parker.

‘But we’re not just about increasing Indigenous numbers into the ADF or APS. We’re about ensuring we represent Australia as it is. That’s why we are keen to encourage and support greater Indigenous participation in the defence of the nation, while ensuring Defence recognises the existing Indigenous cultural contribution as part of everyday business.

‘We’re also here to provide a whole-of-Defence approach to Indigenous matters, and a central link between Defence and other important external stakeholders.

'The Directorate's approach is based on the New Zealand Defence Force bi-cultural model, which prides itself on incorporating cultural elements in military ceremonial events, the use of Maori members at public relations and recruiting events and the employment of Maori cultural advisors by each Service Chief.

'There is a lot of work to be done, and it will take time,' said Ms Parker.

Win-win

At the launch of the recruitment strategy and the new directorate in July, Mr Snowdon said the range of programs that Defence will introduce over the coming years represent a win-win for all involved.

'[[It's] a win for Defence who will benefit from a new pool of recruits in a challenging and tight labour market, each of whom will bring unique skills to the Service,' he said.

'And a win for the individual and their communities who benefit from employment, health and education opportunities offered by Defence, and skills transfer,' said Mr Snowdon.