

# Law firm takes step towards reconciliation



Left: PIC Tarwirri executive officer Aislinn Martin, barrister and guest speaker Munya Andrews, Maurice Blackburn Social Justice Practice Indigenous and Land Rights Sub-Committee member Janet Van der Kolk and Maurice Blackburn trainee lawyer Kaylene Hunter at the launch of the law firm's Aboriginal Reconciliation Action Plan on Close the Gap Day.

Story and image provided by Kate Findley

National law firm Maurice Blackburn has chosen 'Close the Gap' Day to launch its first Reconciliation Action Plan.

The plan was officially launched by prominent Aboriginal barrister Munya Andrews at the firm's head office in Melbourne, with staff

from Sydney participating in the momentous occasion via video link.

"It is marvellous to see a high tiered law firm use 'dirty words' such as 'reconciliation' and 'respect'," Ms Andrews said.

She particularly welcomed the work that Maurice

Blackburn is involved with for Aboriginal people not consulted about a nuclear waste dump at Muckaty Station in the Northern Territory.

"It's great to have policies but they have to have practical measures," Ms Andrews said.

Maurice Blackburn Chief

Executive Greg Tucker said the firm had been dedicated to Aboriginal issues for many years.

"Australia has a reputation as a developed country where there's a fair go for all," Mr Tucker said.

"Unfortunately, the reality falls vastly short - 17

years short. That's the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, and it's the reason why we chose national Close the Gap Day to launch our Reconciliation Action Plan.

"We developed our plan in consultation with Reconciliation Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative bodies including the Aboriginal Law Students and Lawyers Association of Victoria, Tarwirri.

"This plan is about action, not lip service. It's a plan that we will continually work towards and update as we progress.

"Maurice Blackburn strongly supports reconciliation and we have long been committed to working to overcome division and inequality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

"We have a long history of fighting for social change and justice, and we value fairness and equality.

"As well as our Muckaty Station work, we have also helped members of the

Stolen Generation make applications for compensation and Freedom of Information for records relating to their removal and housing.

"Doris Blackburn, the wife of the firm's founder Maurice, was an office bearer of the Aborigines Advancement League from its inception in 1957 and through most of the 1960s, and the firm played a central role in the 1966 Aboriginal stockman's case, which was about equal pay and conditions.

"The priorities we have set out in our plan are:

- to promote and provide access to justice
- to provide enhanced employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- to facilitate positive cultural change within and outside Maurice Blackburn
- to develop and extend our relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, representative bodies and businesses." The plan will be reviewed and revised annually.