HOW WE DO IT

Supporting our business

Our staff

The Registrar was supported by 65 staff at 30 June 2008.

ORIC's focus is on building staff skills and aligning systems and processes with the new CATSI Act.

ORIC's staff and contractors continued to work very professionally and in flexible ways to suit our Indigenous clients and support the commencement of the new legislation.

ORIC has a charter for good service which provides detailed standards to guide staff and contractors. ORIC also has an in-house training program to develop the skills of ORIC staff.

Our new systems and processes delivered more client-responsive services while allowing for increased productivity by the office and provided more time for staff to provide specialist assistance and advice to corporations.

ORIC employed 11 Indigenous staff (17 per cent), compared with the average of 2.1 per cent Indigenous employees across the Australian Public Service (*State of the service report 2006–07*), six staff with a disability (nine per cent), compared with the APS average of 3.3 per cent and seven staff from a non-English speaking background.

Above: Tarshi Secombe and Amelia Russin at the launch of ORIC's reconciliation action plan.

Right: Joshua Kirk, Michael Strecker and Masepah Banu at ORIC's sports afternoon with Aboriginal Hostels and the Department of Health and Ageing.

Top right: Therese Colosimo at a training workshop.

Our administration

In 2007–08 ORIC's finance and administration staff supported the Registrar by managing ORIC's finances, procurement and contracts (including ORIC's panel of consultants), human resources, property and equipment, records and risk management, and other general administrative support to the office.

ORIC started a tender process during the period to establish a new Regulatory (Examinations and Special Administrations) Panel of experts. The following panels established under RFT04/57 were extended for an additional period of one year:

- Panel 1—Incorporation support
- Panel 2—Regulatory (Investigations only)
- Panel 3—Training (accredited and non-accredited training, registered training organisations (RTOs), community agents)
- Panel 4—Legal services

To ensure we provide accommodation that meets the needs of our staff and business we completed a relocation to new premises in Canberra in early December 2007 with a smoking ceremony in May 2008 for the official welcome.

Pat Chapman and Katherine Oldfield at the ORIC smoking ceremony.

Our clients

Our clients include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, groups and corporations

- people accessing the public Register of Indigenous Corporations

- the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and agencies supporting the minister

- the Australian Government and state and territory governments

- agencies with interests in funds and/or assets controlled by Indigenous corporations

- other agencies regulating the Indigenous corporate sector, e.g. the Australian Taxation Office, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and state and territory incorporating agencies

- Indigenous peak bodies in critical sectors such as medical, housing, land holding and legal.

Our services

ORIC offers a range of support to Indigenous corporations and responds to their special needs and risks.

Our key services are:

- providing accessible information about corporations registered under the CATSI Act on the public Register of Indigenous Corporations

- assisting groups that are considering registration and supporting them through the process

- assisting groups once they are registered, including support for dispute management, helping with meetings and answering queries about corporate governance

- assisting with concerns or complaints about corporations and taking action when necessary

- delivering training and learning materials to clients

- monitoring compliance of corporations with reporting requirements under the CATSI Act

- examining corporate governance 'health'

- intervening where necessary

- deregistering where necessary

- referring or conducting matters against individuals and corporations.

Case study

Launch of ORIC's reconciliation action plan

ORIC's reconciliation action plan (RAP) outlines it's commitment towards the national goal of closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. It identifies actions and targets in the key areas of relationships, respect, creating opportunities and tracking progress and reporting. It is also an expression of ORIC's ongoing commitment to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of Australia.

The process of developing ORIC's RAP was started by setting up a working party of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. This group met regularly, devised and ran a consultation process, gathered peoples' views and responses to reconciliation and drafted the RAP. We consulted people who run or are members of Indigenous corporations, and people in agencies and business who work with us or for Indigenous corporations, such as special administrators or examiners. We also talked to other agencies that have a RAP to learn from their experience, all ORIC staff and Reconciliation Australia.

The Registrar launched ORIC's RAP in Woden Town Square on 10 July during NAIDOC week. Special guests were Ms Barbara Livesey, Chief Executive of Reconciliation Australia; Mary G, ORIC's official ambassador and Aunty Ruth Bell, who provided the welcome to country. This celebratory event was attended by staff from various government departments and members of the public. A fitting way to launch our first RAP underlining the process of its development—encouraging the opportunity for conversation about what reconciliation means to us on an individual and agency level.

Far left: Mary G and Registrar, Anthony Beven at the RAP launch.

Left: ORIC staff with Mary G at the RAP launch.

Our relationships

MINISTER

The minister responsible for ORIC is the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Jenny Macklin, MP.

ORIC reports to the minister through FaHCSIA's annual report, briefings and submissions.

RELATIONSHIP TO FaHCSIA

ORIC and its staff are part of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The staff report to the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations—an independent statutory office holder.

Funding for ORIC was $10.188 million for 2007–08, and actual expenditure was $9.447 million, coming within the FaHCSIA appropriation.

The Registrar and ORIC's placement within the department, is consistent with the Uhrig report recommendations (http://www.finance.gov.au/governancestructures/index.html). This report, conducted by John Uhrig and released by the government in August 2004, recommended a broad template of governance principles and arrangements that the government could extend to statutory authorities and office holders. It sets out measures for ensuring the boundaries of responsibilities are better understood and clarifies the relationship between Australian Government authorities, ministers and portfolio departments. The Registrar has negotiated with the minister a statement of expectations and statement of intent as part of the Uhrig recommendations.

The Registrar liaises with FaHCSIA through the corporate leadership group and other forums. ORIC is committed to contributing towards the broader Indigenous agenda, especially in the area of encouraging greater economic participation and improving the governance capacity of Indigenous Australians.

As recommended by the Uhrig report, ORIC provides information to the secretary of FaHCSIA when it is provided to the minister. However, this undertaking is subject to the Registrar's independence, and other legislative requirements, which may limit the ability to provide such information to FaHCSIA.
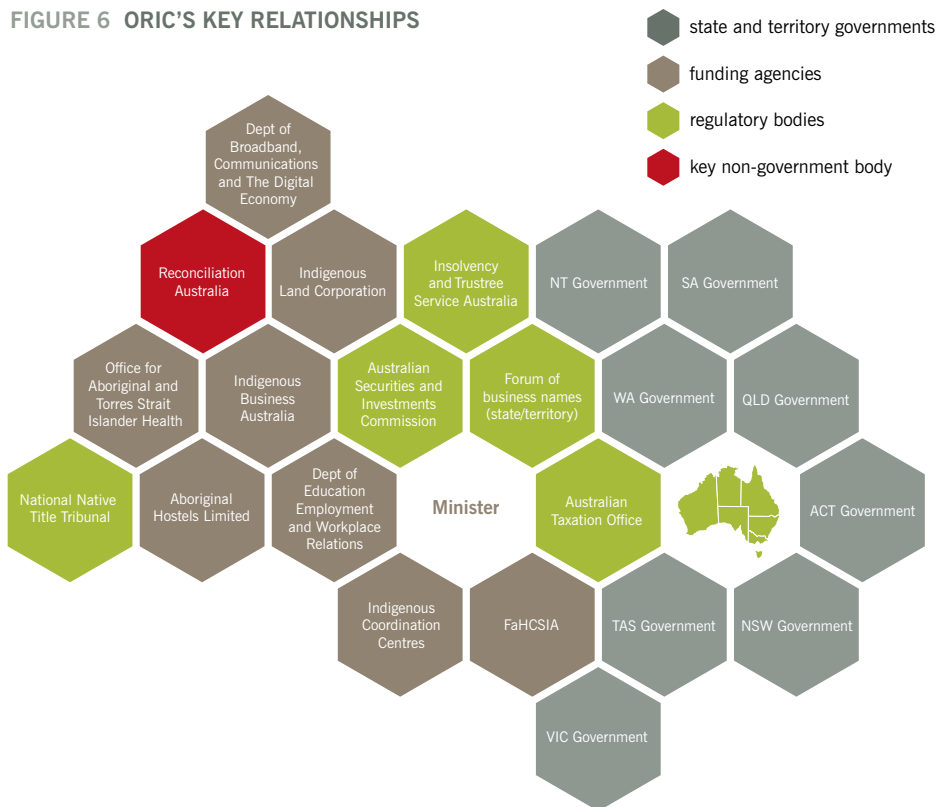
RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER AGENCIES

ORIC's primary clients are individuals, groups and corporations linked to the CATSI Act and also users of the public Register of Indigenous Corporations maintained by ORIC. ORIC builds close working relationships with agencies that have an interest in the funds and/or assets held by corporations. ORIC also works with state and territory government agencies to improve outcomes for Indigenous people across Australia (see figure 3).

In recent years ORIC has developed a relationship with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) and the state/territory incorporation and regulation agencies to foster better coordination nationally of incorporation and regulation services and responses. ORIC and ASIC have agreed in principle to a memorandum of understanding, which is yet to be finalised.

ORIC's focus is on identifying and targeting key systemic issues that undermine the viability of Indigenous corporations and has been building closer relationships with the following agencies for this purpose: the Australian Taxation Office, agencies linked to the Council of Australian Government (COAG) working group on Indigenous reforms, individuals and agencies involved in corporate governance training, and state/territory government agencies, particularly in South Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia.

FIGURE 6 ORIC'S KEY RELATIONSHIPS

state and territory governments

funding agencies

regulatory bodies

key non-government body

Dept of Broadband, Communications and The Digital Economy

Reconciliation Australia

Indigenous Land Corporation

Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia

NT Government

SA Government

Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

Indigenous Business Australia

Australian Securities and Investments Commission

Forum of business names (state/territory)

WA Government

QLD Government

National Native Title Tribunal

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Dept of Education Employment and Workplace Relations

Minister

Australian Taxation Office

ACT Government

Indigenous Coordination Centres

FaHCSIA

TAS Government

NSW Government

VIC Government

Gagandeep Bhatia, Edison Hui and Carmel Collins at the ERICCA launch.

Systems

ERICCA project

ORIC completed development of a new system—the Electronic Register of Indigenous Corporations under the CATSI Act (ERICCA). ERICCA aligns with the CATSI Act and ORIC's strategic objectives, such as improving services and accessibility of information to the public.

Background

ERICCA is the new IT system that replaces the former Electronic Register of Indigenous Corporations (ERIC) system. The review of ORIC's information technology systems started in 2003 and re-scoping work on the ERICCA system started in January 2007 following an external review of system options in November 2006.

Improving key processes

The purpose of the ERICCA system is to facilitate and support the effective administration of the CATSI Act by the Registrar, including: improving key processes completed by ORIC staff in managing CATSI corporations; implementing a new online public register to allow the general public access to ORIC's corporation data, such as an online Register of Disqualified Persons; and allowing corporations to manage the operation of their own affairs through online processing of the documents that corporations are required to lodge with the Registrar.

A related electronic 'rule book tool' has also been developed to assist corporations with transitioning their rules to the CATSI Act by 30 June 2009.

ERICCA was fully released into production on 19 July 2008 and formally launched on 8 August 2008.

Accountability

Freedom of information

One request was made under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2008. The applicant was notified of applicable charges, and was taken to have withdrawn the request when there was no response. There was no request for a review of the decision to impose charges.

Complaints about ORIC staff and contractors

ORIC endeavoured to respond to complaints about its staff and contractors promptly, thoroughly, and with sensitivity towards all involved. In 2007–08 ORIC received three complaints.

Commonwealth Ombudsman

In 2007–08 ORIC received one section 9 letter from the Commonwealth Ombudsman under the *Ombudsman Act 1976* in which the ombudsman requested information to assist in the investigation of a complaint. The issues raised in the letter were responded to within the specified timeframe and the Commonwealth Ombudsman advised that no further action would be taken.

Environmentally sustainable development

ORIC implemented an environmental management system (EMS) at its new premises in Canberra. It covers recycling of waste, toner cartridges, paper and cardboard products; water, paper and electricity saving mechanisms, computer power management and sustainable transport.

ORIC, as part of FaHCSIA, is aligned with the department's environmental performance goals and indicators. For a more detailed account of FaHCSIA's environmental performance, please go to: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/ sustainabilityreport/2007/p8.htm.