

The 2024 Tri-Academy Partnership on Indigenous Engagement: Research Summit on Cultural Heritage in an Era of Reconciliation

Frank Deer, Tom Calma, Carwyn Jones

Former Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) Murray Sinclair recently wrote that “education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it”.

By “this mess”, Mr. Sinclair appropriately evokes the history of research and scholarship in a colonial enterprise during which scholars and scholarly institutions were complicit – sometimes actively, often implicitly – in a systematic marginalization of Indigenous voices, both within Canada and in countries with analogous histories such as Australia and New Zealand.

In Canada, Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation are among more recent societal acknowledgments of our difficult history that offer the opportunity for us all to recommit to truth as the necessary precursor to reconciliation.

As Indigenous Members of scholarly Academies in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, we have observed evolving practices at the individual and institutional level that serve as inspiring examples of engaging with Indigenous peoples, premised on the simple and vital principle of respect that infuses the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In Canada, for example, Professor Val Napoleon’s contributions to the field of Indigenous legal orders have evolved the study and practice of law in Canada. Dr. Sara Goulet at the University of Manitoba is engaging with Indigenous communities with a view to closing the gaps in health outcomes for Indigenous peoples. And Professor Peter Leavitt, a biologist at the University of Regina, studies inland aquatic ecosystems in the traditional territories of the Indigenous peoples of the Canadian Prairies.

Unsurprisingly, given the parallels of our histories, similar developments are occurring in Australia and in New Zealand.

In Aotearoa (New Zealand), the reconciliatory journey has been closely tied to, amongst other things, academic discovery. The research sector in Aotearoa has recognised that investment in research by, with, or for Māori is disproportionately low. In response, it has been proposed that research, science and innovation policy should be designed to enable opportunities for Indigenous knowledge, Māori researchers and Māori-led research to deliver on Māori aspirations.

In Australia, reconciliation formally commenced in 1991 when *The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* presented its final report and recommended to the Australian Parliament that a process of national reconciliation should be undertaken. In response, the academic community of Australia has enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scientists to engage in in the scientific community in meaningful ways.

As a component of our collective journey toward reconciliation, the Royal Society of Canada, the Australian Academy of Science and the Royal Society Te Aparangi are now committed to working together in order to improve our understanding of how Indigenous perspectives on the sciences, social sciences, humanities and other areas of scholarly endeavor are not only amplifying voices but leading to important change within our communities of scholarship and research.

The first of three conferences co-organized by our three Academies between now and 2026 occurred in November 2024 on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliwəta+/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) nations (commonly known as Vancouver, British Columbia) in Canada.

At the inaugural conference, Indigenous delegates including students from multiple universities in Canada as well as Members our Academies with expertise in social sciences, Indigenous Water Science, Mathematics and Fluid Dynamics, Social Epidemiology, Freshwater Ecology, and Wastewater Treatment contributed to conversations on the future of Indigenous engagement in our Academies.

In coming together as Academies, we had (and will continue to have) three objectives: (1) to establish an international, Indigenous-led research agenda with the goal of impacting public policy to benefit Indigenous communities; (2) to incorporate Indigenous student voices and meaningful international mentoring contexts in the convenings and research agenda; and (3) to advance thought leadership in how post-secondary institutions can innovatively partner with Indigenous communities.

We are optimistic that, in our collective pursuit of truth, we will contribute to next steps in reconciliation.

For more information on the Tri-Academy Partnership on Indigenous Engagement, please visit <https://rsc-src.ca/en/events/tri-academy-partnership-indigenous-engagement-research-summit-cultural-heritage-in-era>.

Frank Deer is President of the College of the Royal Society of Canada

Tom Calma is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science

Carwyn Jones is a Fellow of the Royal Society Te Aparangi, New Zealand