• Good afternoon and welcome

• Welcome especially to our special guests

  o Professors Peter Buckskin and Esther May who co-chaired the Reconciliation Action Plan steering group;
  o Professor Robyn Layton, QC, AO a champion of human rights and reconciliation;
  o Mr Mark Waters from Reconciliation South Australia;
  o Aboriginal Elder Dr Alitya Rigney,
  o Ngarrinderjeri Elder Frank Lampard
  o Professor Daryle Rigney, Dean of Indigenous Strategy and Engagement at Flinders University
  o Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Dean, Indigenous Education at the University of Adelaide
  o and representatives of other organisations with Reconciliation Action Plans who have helped us so generously on our journey.

• This day has been a long time coming.

• This afternoon we formally launch the University of South Australia’s Reconciliation Action Plan;
• A plan that gives us a real opportunity to deepen the respect and build and strengthen relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other groups within the university.

• The RAP we launch today is a framework for cultural change,

• change that will support the projects that will deliver better opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students and through them, their communities.

• We are indebted to the Chancellor, Dr Ian Gould, and my predecessor as Vice Chancellor, Peter Hoj who placed the university on the journey towards the development of this plan.

• Professors Peter Buckskin and Esther May co-chaired the steering group which brought the Plan to fruition.

• And it is thanks to those four people - plus an army of other willing participants - who have brought us to this day, a day that marks the beginning of a new era in our reconciliation.
• Today’s achievement is built on a rich history.

• The University of South Australia was the first university in Australia to make a formal commitment to reconciliation.

• Our founding legislation from 1991 documents our commitment to provide the tertiary education programs that we consider appropriate to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

• In 1997 we gave further strength to that commitment as the University sought to respond to the challenges of nationhood and national identity in a way that comprehended the past and gave hope for the future.

• A public forum held at the University in May 1997 was the basis of our commitment to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

• It acknowledged the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as descendants of the oldest living culture of humanity and the original owners of the land.

• It recognised the impact of Colonialism over the sovereignty of their lands, its impact over their
language and culture and the detrimental effects it had on their health and cultural wellbeing.

- It was a commitment to the belief that reconciliation is a prerequisite for Australia to reach a mature nationhood which acknowledges the past, understands the present, and faces the future confidently based on the co-existence of rights.

- It accepted that educational institutions such as ours have a particularly valuable contribution to facilitate the process of reconciliation by educating all Australians about the diverse cultures, languages, history and contemporary experiences of Australia’s Indigenous people.

- And it recognised that the University of South Australia’s special responsibility to provide leadership in the areas of Indigenous research and education by virtue of its founding act.

- This was endorsed by the University of South Australia Council in September 1997.

- In 2001, we developed a full-time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment position;
• we released an Indigenous employment strategy which included the development of the Indigenous Content in Undergraduate Programs (ICUP) program;

• we developed the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research to advance the teaching and research around Indigenous studies;

• In 2011 the UniSA College began providing pathways to tertiary studies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;

• and we began our Indigenous Graduate Trainee program (which I will note is still funded by the Vice Chancellor);

• In 2012 Professor Peter Buckskin became the inaugural Dean: Indigenous Scholarship Engagement and Research; and

• In 2013 we became the first – and currently the only - university in South Australia to join the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) program which aims to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait high school students to complete school and go on to university.
A partnership which has been a resounding success.

With AIME’s help, Indigenous students are finishing school at around the same rate as every other Australian child and entering university at around 6 times the national Indigenous average.

And, on a more personal note, early last year I had the honour of a traditional Kaurna Welcome to Country ceremony held at the beginning of our March graduations.

The first Vice Chancellor in the state to be offered such an honour.

It was an deeply moving experience, not just for me but for the audience who witnessed it.

The connection between people and their land, the connection between race and place, is felt across the globe but that morning, although still a newly arrived foreigner in this country, that ceremony connected me to this land in a way I still can’t quite explain.

It reinforced for me the fact that respect and relationships between people bind and better societies.
• Reconciliation is much more than a word;

• Reconciliation is a culture, a culture that will be nurtured at the University of South Australia so that when we say we plan to be the University of Choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, that’s what we will become.

• So this is the day that we formally change our aspirations into actions with a reconciliation plan that has clear goals with realistic and measurable targets.

• All the details are laid out in the Reconciliation Action Plan brochure that you will receive this afternoon, but just to outline a few goals we have to achieve before the end of this year:

  o We will install an official Acknowledgement of Country on each campus to complement the existing reconciliation stones;

  o We’re commissioning a Kaurna shield to use at graduations, taking a medieval university tradition and looking at it through a uniquely UniSA lens;
• We are in the process of building an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alumni community;

• We will establish deeper working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional organisations;

• We’ll update our Indigenous Employment Strategy to outline how the university will reach its 2% employment target; and

• We will become a greater user of Indigenous suppliers – in fact the great food that we are serving this afternoon comes from Wattle Bush Catering who won the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business of the Year Award at NAIDOC last year.

• Our Reconciliation Action Plan was developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and leaders.

• It is a living document that will be continually updated and evaluated. It is measurable and it is part of a movement that has been decades, indeed centuries in the making for the people who have needed it most.
• People looking for justice, and for the rights and opportunities freely given to all other Australians.

• The names and dates that resonate through recent history have brought us to this day:
  
  o the 1965 Freedom Ride;
  o the 1966 Wave Hill Walkoff for better wages/conditions;
  o the 1967 referendum;
  o the Aboriginal tent embassy which was established in 1972;
  o in 1975 the return of some Gurindji lands;
  o in 1976 the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, the first land rights legislation in Australia;
  o in 1992 the Mabo Decision meant Native Title was recognised in Australia for the first time;
  o in 2001 the beginning of the formal process of reconciliation;
  o in 2008 the apology to the Stolen Generations.
• It is entirely appropriate that this initiative should be a core value of this university because through education we help change humanity.

• Education is not only an intellectual adventure but a vehicle for change, a way to open minds and embed fresh ideas.

• And only when we know each other’s stories will we find common ground to share an understanding.

• Education is vital.

• In this belief we have much in common with the traditional owners of the land on which we have built our city campuses.

• The Kaurna people have always valued education and are recognised throughout Australia for it.

• According to Kaurna Elder Uncle Lewis Yerloburka O’Brien, it was a traditional for Kaurna males to spend 25 years being educated by male Elders

• they went through 5 initiations before it was considered they had acquired the skills to manage their affairs.
• Only then were they deemed ready for marriage.

• Kaurna females were educated by female Elders for similar life goals.

• Kaurna people ran panpapanpalayas – the Kaurna word for conferences – on their land for thousands of years;

• these conferences would last for two moons (two months) and knowledge, expertise and wisdom were shared between the attending nations.

• It is, according to Uncle Lewis, how culture endures for 60,000 years.

• This is a cultural experience and heritage that should now be brought into the broader community and through education, shared.

• Now we have a plan that not only puts the transformative power of education to work to improve the life opportunities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders,
• but it also instils in non-Indigenous people a knowledge of the richness and vibrancy of Indigenous culture and history.

• In our strategic action plan for the University, *Crossing the Horizon*, we commit to creating ‘a complete and safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to grow and contribute to their communities and to Australian society more broadly.

• The environment we are creating will be a safe place to learn and grow and define the future;

• A future that acknowledges and respects and learns from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom and celebrates the pursuit of knowledge in all its guises.

• I know you will all join me in working towards making the implementation of our Reconciliation Action Plan a great success,

• not just for Indigenous staff, students and members of the community,
• but for **all of us** in this university community whose lives will be made that much richer for knowing stories other than our own.

• As you linger here this afternoon, take a close look at the painting in the lobby outside this room,

• It is a tribute to the painting *Spirit of the Campus* by the artist Rikurani.

• The tribute was painted by staff and students last year during Reconciliation Week.

• There were many hands that worked on this painting;

• There were students, staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, even the odd passer-by who was attracted by the colour and movement;

• My bit is in the blue and green bands at the top left.

• I hope it becomes a metaphor for how many eager and willing – and different - hands we will bring to bear on our Reconciliation Action Plan.

• Thank you all for your efforts so far,
• but this day,

• this day of May 1st 2014, is just the beginning.