



# MESSAGE STICK

## Michael McLeod

- **Chief Executive Officer – Message Stick**
- **Chairman – Supply Nation**
- **Co-Chairman – CareerTrackers**
- **Chairman – Indigenous Defence & Infrastructure Consortium (iDiC)**



## Personal Life

Michael McLeod has been described by a senior Federal politician as one of Australia's most valuable sons. Michael and his family are part of Australia's stolen generations. At the age of two, Michael and his siblings were taken from their parents – never to be reunited as a family. Michael grew up on his own in State ward homes and foster homes. He first met his mother at his father's funeral. By his mid-twenties, he was a chronic alcoholic and heroin addict. By his early thirties Michael was homeless and living on the streets of Sydney. A successful rehabilitation program has seen Michael clean and sober for fifteen years. Michael didn't want to be the typical Aboriginal man, dependent on Government social handouts or welfare. He refused employment benefits and Aboriginal housing benefits and chose to do it the hard way – he started his own niche telecommunications business. Today Message Stick is a growing multimillion dollar business and has no debt. The business paid back the initial start-up capital in its third year.

## Message Stick Group

Message Stick is a unique business in that it is owned by Aboriginal Australians. The company was started in 2003 to show that Aboriginal Australians can own and manage a services business that engages with large corporations and Government agencies. The business does not seek any sponsorship, donations or social grants whatsoever. They seek only the opportunity to prove themselves and to be treated as worthy business partners.

The principals of Message Stick believe that business ownership, asset ownership, wealth creation and personal accountability are the key features for ending poverty and welfare dependency of Indigenous Australians. Most Indigenous Australians who have a dream to own their own business would not have the confidence to approach corporate Australia and ask for business opportunities. Michael McLeod and his Message Stick business model are trying to show that corporate Australia will give Aboriginal business a fair hearing.

Message Stick has two core competencies; Unified Communications (comprising of Audio, Video and Web Conferencing services), and Professional Services (including SAP Consultants and services).

Message Stick's customers include Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, Leighton, KPMG, Goldman Sachs, Gilbert + Tobin, Lend Lease, BUPA, Allens Linklaters, Qantas, Accor Hotels, Clayton Utz, Salmat, Compass Group, Staples and Johnson & Johnson. Michael is particularly proud of his numerous NSW state and Federal Government customers who include Prime Ministers and Cabinet, FaHCSIA, AusAID, IBA, DRALGAS and Reconciliation Australia.

Message Stick is also working closely with the Federal Government, the Chamber and the Business Council of Australia to change Government policy approach to Indigenous Australians – with significant success. The Government is now shifting from a complete welfare and subsidy based focus to developing policies around supporting real economic development, including business ownership and entrepreneurialism.

## **Supply Nation (formerly AIMSC)**

Supply Nation has over 430 corporate and government members and over 1,900 certified or registered Indigenous suppliers, covering all industries and states/territories. Between them they have facilitated over \$6bn of contracts. These contracts provide wealth creation to the Indigenous business owners and therefore intergenerational wealth, which in turn will facilitate 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian's.

## **Building Supply Nation**

After building Message Stick in to a shining example of how an Indigenous business can engage with large corporates and Government, Message Stick were being regularly asked "*What do you give back to the community?*" Michael and Message Stick's firm conviction has always been to reject handouts, as this simply serves to perpetuate the welfare cycle. Instead Message Stick decided to give back the most valuable commodity it had – it's Intellectual Property.

Message Stick had proven that the idea of Indigenous businesses engaging with corporates and Government would work, now it just needed to share that knowledge with other Indigenous businesses. Message Stick researched what other western nations (with socially and economically marginalised Indigenous minorities) had done in the area of Indigenous economic development. Whilst researching, they came across the USA experience of supplier diversity. They then contacted the National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC) in New York and asked if they would be willing to support their efforts to learn about the USA experience. These discussions started in 2006 and only in 2008 did things start to take form.

The timing of Kevin Rudd's 2008 'Apology' speech raised awareness and acknowledged that the Federal Government were serious about 'Closing the Gap'.

Message Stick took on the project of formalising business plans and funding submissions and on the 18th of September 2008 were joined by their American supporters who flew into Canberra to assist. These supporters included Ms Harriet Michel (then President of NMSDC) and Mr Ronald Langton (National Director of Minority Business Development Agency, US Department of Commerce). This influential group attended various meetings with key government agencies with the goal of obtaining government funding and support for the set up of an AIMSC pilot.

One year later on the 1st of September 2009 the Minister for Employment Participation, Senator the Hon Mark Arbib and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP announced that the Government would invest \$3 million to pilot AIMSC over 3 years.

Message Stick along with their many other supporters had finally achieved their goal of acquiring the governments support in creating Australia's first ever minority supplier development council. The next year saw the development and planning phase of AIMSC and on the 15th of September 2009 at Mural Hall in the Australian Parliament House in Canberra the official launch of AIMSC was held.