

# National Agreement on Closing the Gap Ongoing Joint Communications Strategy

AGREED BY THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP JUNE 2023



## PURPOSE

This Joint Communications Strategy fulfils commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement):

### Section 10: ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

132. In order to achieve the objectives of this Agreement, the parties will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take ownership of this Agreement.

133. The parties are committed to ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- to build awareness and ownership of the Agreement to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to talk to governments on how to apply the commitments under the Agreement to communities and organisations across the country, and
- when significant changes to this Agreement are proposed.

135. The joint communications strategy will include a central role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media, in particular community-controlled media, including the promotion and distribution of material and information across a range of mediums to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as to other Australians.

136. All communications under the Agreement should be widely accessible and help to preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

## NATIONAL AGREEMENT PARTNERS

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The parties to the National Agreement and the Ongoing Joint Communications Strategy (The Strategy) are the:

- Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks)
- Australian Governments:
  - Commonwealth Government
  - New South Wales Government
  - Victoria Government
  - Queensland Government
  - Western Australia Government
  - South Australia Government
  - Tasmania Government



- Australian Capital Territory Government
- Northern Territory Government
- Australian Local Government Association

## OBJECTIVES

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The Strategy is designed to:

- Build awareness and ownership of the National Agreement amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Clause 132).
- Support ongoing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations, and communities to build awareness and ownership of the National Agreement, and how to apply its commitments to communities and organisations across the country (Clause 133a).
- Provide for a central role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media, in particular community-controlled media that includes the production, promotion, and distribution of materials and information across a range of mediums to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as to other Australians (Clause 135).
- Ensure all communications under the National Agreement are accessible and work to preserve the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Clause 136).
- Ensure communications are developed and implemented in partnership and with shared ownership between the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments (Clause 17a).
- Proactively deliver clear, timely, relevant, and accessible information about the National Agreement in ways that meet local, place-based needs, and interests.
- Enhance the trust, credibility, reliability, accountability, and reputation of the National Agreement among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.
- Build the positive reputation of the National Agreement by promoting its progress and outcomes to the wider Australian community.
- Encourage and promote community-generated content and communications to further understanding of Closing the Gap.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOVERNANCE

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The following principles guide implementation of this Strategy:

- The National Agreement will be publicly acknowledged when actions are taken to implement its outcomes, so that relevant stakeholders and audiences are well informed (Clause 97).
- Communication in every form must be easy to use, accessible, clear, and understood by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other Australians.



- Communication must be inclusive, purposeful, and timely.
- All communications will prioritise authentic voices and appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
- Place-based approaches and culturally appropriate communications will be prioritised.
- To the extent that the procurement and grant policies of parties allow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations will act as the core suppliers in producing and distributing information relevant to the Agreement to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people and other Australians, their organisations, and communities.
- Communications activities and decisions will be underpinned by the understanding that demonstrating early action that makes a tangible difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is critical to ownership of the Agreement and its accountability.
- All parties acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people understanding and taking ownership of the National Agreement are critical to its successful implementation.

To ensure success and consistency:

- The Strategy will be agreed by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap and Partnership Working Group will receive updates on key issues in its implementation six-monthly.
- Each party is responsible for implementing communication actions in line with the Strategy and outlining these as part of Implementation Plans, including reporting on their communication actions as part of their annual reporting on implementation.
- In line with the National Agreement, the Strategy is a dynamic document that will be reviewed and revised as needed to ensure relevancy and best practice.

## AUDIENCE

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The Strategy has been developed with a primary and secondary audience in focus:

- The primary audiences for this Strategy are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their organisations, and communities.
- The secondary audience is the wider Australian community, particularly to improve awareness of the issues and inequalities facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the importance of the National Agreement and its historic partnership approach, and to ensure strong systemic engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

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The Strategy involves a wide number of stakeholders, with various responsibilities in relation to disseminating information and circulating key messages.

Broadly, this includes:

- Government Parties (Commonwealth, State and Local)
- Coalition of Peaks members and their members in turn
- Other community-controlled organisations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled media organisations and outlets
- Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets
- Mainstream media – metro and regional
- Wider Australian community

Priority order will vary according to communications initiative/message. A core component of this Strategy is that it asks all stakeholders to be actively engaged in and contributing to its success.

## **BUILDING OWNERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED CONTENT DEVELOPMENT**

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Building understanding, support, and ownership from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations involved in Closing the Gap and implementing the National Agreement is best supported by commissioning, encouraging, and promoting community-led content that is distributed through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled media.

The below ideas are examples of community-led content to spread key messages about the National Agreement.

- *Community-controlled interviews or community profiles* – engage mainstream and local media to host interviews that are community-led. Feature pieces, guided and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – particularly young people – that appear on mainstream community broadcasters and media outlets can profile different communities, their families, their friends, or community-based activists. This will allow for young people to act as spokespeople for their communities on Closing the Gap or for activists to submit their opinion editorial pieces.
- *Case studies* – a series of case studies highlighting best practice and tangible ways in which the National Agreement has been implemented well and benefited community could be developed in partnership with jurisdictional peaks.
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander influencers and activists on social media* – influencers and activists could be engaged to share messaging about the National Agreement with their audiences. A toolkit would need to be developed to support this.
- *Engagement with jurisdictions* – all parties could engage with their jurisdictional peaks to hear about community priorities and support development of appropriate and responsive National Agreement messaging.
- *Closing the Gap communications toolkit* – develop a toolkit that includes relevant content, branding, imagery, etc. so that all peaks, jurisdictions, and media outlets have the up-to-date and readily accessible information when discussing Closing the Gap.

## FOCUS ON THE PRIORITY REFORMS AND PARTNERSHIP ACTIONS

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A key focus of the Strategy is communication of activities and outcomes of the National Agreement's Priority Reforms. Under the Strategy, communities and community-controlled organisations could be commissioned by governments to tell their own stories of the importance of the Priority Reforms and show their implementation and associated partnership actions in practice.

For example, the implementation of each place-based partnership action – the community data projects and place-based partnerships – could be documented from the communities' and organisations' perspectives over a three-year period. The same story telling model could be adopted for the work and implementation of the sector strengthening plans and the policy partnerships, as well as on the funding for Priority Reform Two.

## CENTRAL ROLE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY CONTROLLED MEDIA

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The National Agreement commits that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media, particularly community-controlled media, will have a central role in the delivery of the Strategy. To give effect to this commitment, to the extent that the procurement and grant policies of parties allow. Parties should undertake direct or limit tenders to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media and communications organisations, including community-controlled organisations, for the development and distribution of content developed under the Strategy.

To provide additional support to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled media, parties could identify and consider opportunities to undertake promotional activities following Joint Council meetings or significant events related to Closing the Gap. Parties could also identify and consider opportunities to promote their work to implement the Priority Reforms and their work on the National Agreement through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations.

## DIRECT ENGAGEMENTS WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

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The communications actions alone will not be sufficient to build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to take ownership and engage with governments on implementation of the National Agreement. They should be supported by a series of face-to-face engagements between the Coalition of Peaks, in partnership with governments, and community-controlled organisations and communities. The face-to-face engagements, occurring in each state and territory, should focus on supporting organisations and communities to build confidence in interacting with, and understanding the meaning and implications of the commitments in the National Agreement.

## BUILDING AWARENESS AND SUPPORT FROM OTHER AUSTRALIANS

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The Strategy is primarily focused on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the reforms and activities of the National Agreement. However, broader awareness and support from other Australians is also important to ensure that all Australians are supporting Closing the Gap in their own workplaces and lives. To truly close the gap, support and effort from all Australians will be required. Additional tools and materials are included in this Strategy to support this aim.



## COMMUNICATIONS ACTIONS

The following sets out key actions that will be undertaken by parties to implement the Strategy, as part of their respective Implementation Plans.

Communication medium	Actions	Responsibility
<b>Commissioning of local content and stories on the Priority Reforms and partnership actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The implementation of each place-based partnership action, the community data projects and place-based partnerships could be documented from the communities' and organisations' perspectives over a three-year period.</li> <li>The same story telling model could be adopted for the work and implementation of the sector strengthening plans and the policy partnerships, as well as on the funding for Priority Reform Two.</li> <li>A toolkit will be developed to support this storytelling.</li> </ul>	All governments to prioritise commissioning community-controlled organisations.
<b>Face-to-face engagements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake a series of face-to-face engagements in each jurisdiction with key community-controlled organisations and communities to support their understanding and interaction with the National Agreement.</li> </ul>	Lead by the Coalition of Peaks, in partnership with governments.
<b>Social media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop social media content calendars to plan activity, track movements, and ensure that platforms are active.</li> <li>Develop a consistent tone and content for social media platforms, when disseminating key messages about the National Agreement. This should be added to the Closing the Gap visual identity guide to create an overall identity guide / toolkit.</li> <li>Develop social media tile and graphic templates relevant to milestones and encourage audiences to re-share.</li> <li>Use social media channels to engage and encourage feedback from the wider community.</li> </ul>	All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations could be engaged as a priority to assist with the development of social media tiles and other graphics.



Communication medium	Actions	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build social media collaborations with relevant parties / influencers / activists could be secured and encouraged across Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, and LinkedIn.</li> </ul>	
<b>Websites</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All key messages and communications to be housed and easily accessed on the Closing the Gap website and regularly checked for accuracy / updates.</li> <li>Social media channels to encourage website visits.</li> <li>Website to act as a key channel for updates, resources, and relevant information.</li> <li>All collaborators to develop landing pages on their respective websites to share information about the National Agreement. Through these websites, audiences will be directed to the Coalition of Peaks for further information on the organisation.</li> </ul>	All
<b>Email</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quarterly e-newsletter to stakeholders about work and progress under Agreement to be developed.</li> </ul>	All
<b>Productivity Commission Dashboard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The dashboard will be used to provide updates on progress against the Closing the Gap targets, including the Priority Reforms.</li> <li>Media releases should be distributed following each dashboard update.</li> </ul>	Productivity Commission. All – including distribution through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets.
<b>Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media releases by individual parties for key announcements regarding progress on the Priority Reforms and Targets and key milestones.</li> <li>Reactive media opportunities to be identified where possible, with existing narratives to be leveraged and linked to current initiatives under the Agreement.</li> </ul>	All – including distribution through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets. First Nations Media Australia.





Communication medium	Actions	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case studies to be generated if local community members are involved in a communications initiative describing implementation of the National Agreement, so that the media can accurately represent them.</li> </ul>	
<b>Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop an annual calendar of events where the National Agreement could be profiled i.e., Garma, Barunga, conferences, specific celebrations etc.</li> <li>Develop materials that tell the story of the National Agreement and its achievements for use at events i.e., infographics or leaflets to be shared, including digital versions.</li> <li>Coalition of Peaks and Government Parties to offer communication materials promoting the National Agreement at relevant events where they have a presence. Further, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and businesses should be involved in the creation and design of such products where relevant.</li> <li>Develop an engagement calendar for briefing major stakeholders on progress, such as elected representatives and staff of Commonwealth Government, agency heads, business groups, NGO sector etc.</li> </ul>	All
<b>Communications materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Posters, leaflets, infographics, flyers etc. should be created for distribution, in line with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community centres to offer language translations.</li> <li>Community service announcement scripts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media to be developed to use when approaching mainstream and local news.</li> </ul>	All



## COMMUNICATING MILESTONES

The following sets out suggested communication milestones that parties should build into their Implementation Plans to provide an opportunity for joint communications.

Milestone	Timeframe	Government action	Peaks action	Comments
<b>Implementing Priority Reforms</b>	Ongoing	<p>Publicise commitments to achieving Priority Reforms as made by governments.</p> <p>Engage communities and organisations involved in the implementation of the Priority Reforms to develop stories of their experiences.</p> <p>Identify and consider opportunities to regularly promote the implementation of the Priority Reforms through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets.</p> <p>Develop Implementation Tracker to enable easy identification of progress.</p>	<p>Inform organisations about the Priority Reforms and associated government commitments.</p> <p>Promote demonstration of the Priority Reforms in practice.</p>	<p>The promotion of the implementation of the Priority Reforms is the key focus of all communications.</p> <p>Priority Reform Two received strongest support in community engagements.</p> <p>Development of community data projects and identifying locations for place-based partnerships.</p>
<b>e-newsletter</b>	Ongoing	<p>Media through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations and mainstream organisations – opinion editorials (op-ed), radio, social media about progress on achieving Priority Reform and Socio-economic targets etc.</p>	<p>Peaks members to develop joint communications plan with government to demonstrate progress under targets.</p>	<p>Progress on all targets – particularly when implementation tracker and annual compilation data released.</p>



Milestone	Timeframe	Government action	Peaks action	Comments
<b>Implementation Plans</b>	Annually	<p>Publish annual reports with clear implementation tracking to enable easy identification of progress.</p> <p>Publication on Closing the Gap website and jurisdictional websites.</p> <p>Promote implementation plans and milestone achievements through a range of mediums.</p>	<p>Publication on Coalition of Peaks website.</p> <p>Promote Implementation plan and milestone achievement through a range of media.</p>	<p>Report progress as part of public annual reports on implementation plans.</p> <p>Timed to coincide with the anniversary of the apology to the Stolen Generations (February each year).</p>
<b>Joint Council meetings</b>	Biannual	<p>Communique for each published on Closing the Gap website and linked to on jurisdictional websites.</p> <p>Promote on social media.</p> <p>Parties to liaise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations for follow-up stories.</p>	<p>Publish link to communique on Peaks website.</p> <p>Photos and key points on social media.</p>	<p>Official photographer needed at every Joint Council meeting to ensure high quality photos that can be used throughout the year by all parties, to be arranged by government parties organising each meeting.</p>
<b>Productivity Commission Dashboard</b>	At least annually	Includes updates for media reporting on website.	Publish and distribute media release on dashboard details.	



Milestone	Timeframe	Government action	Peaks action	Comments
<b>Annual reports and tabling in Parliament (including any statements)</b>	Annually	Follow-up media through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations – op eds, radio, social media on the annual reports etc.	<p>Publish on Coalition of Peaks website and promote through social media.</p> <p>Provide media briefings outlining progress and challenges (on request).</p> <p>Annual update for Peaks member organisations.</p>	
<b>Productivity Commission Review</b>	Triennial	Promote outcomes of review and Joint Council response.	Promote outcomes of review and Joint Council response.	Complements the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review.
<b>Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander-led review</b>	Triennial (post PC)	<p>Develop promotional collateral and content through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media.</p> <p>Update on Closing the Gap and government websites.</p> <p>Link on Closing the Gap website to report published on the Coalition of Peaks website.</p>	<p>Engagement opportunities promoted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations.</p> <p>Report to be published on Coalition of Peaks website.</p>	Within twelve months of Productivity Commission reviews.
<b>Response by Joint Council to reviews</b>	Within 6 months of each review	Follow-up media through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations – op eds, radio, social media on Joint Council response etc.	Develop a set of key messages / actions / issues / highlights and promote through media and to Peaks Members.	

## RESOURCES AND PRODUCTS

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Governments will develop communication actions in the Strategy in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks and outline these as part of their Implementation Plans. This includes reporting on their communication actions as part of their annual report.

Development and distribution of resources and communication products to support the communication actions and activities, to the extent that the procurement and grant policies of parties allow, will include a central role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media organisations.

The Coalition of Peaks will develop additional resources specific to their memberships and communities.

All resources will be co-branded under the Closing the Gap logo.

Resources and communication products should be available on each Parties' websites. These should be stored on the lead Parties' website and linked to from other Parties' websites, to ensure consistency and avoid out of date content remaining when updates are required.

Parties are encouraged to share materials with each other, for use or learnings for their own communication products. Parties are also encouraged to share communications products across platforms and cross promote on Peaks members' and Government social media whenever possible.

## ENSURING SUCCESS – RESOURCING AND REPORTING

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To ensure a successful implementation of the Strategy, Peaks and Government Parties must contribute to its roll-out, monitoring, and assessment. In particular:

- Implementing the communication actions will require resourcing from governments.
- Updates on key issues with implementation of the Strategy will be provided to PWG six-monthly.
- All parties will report on communication actions as part of their annual implementation updates through their Annual Reports and contribute to the six-monthly discussion at the Partnership Working Group on progress.
- The Strategy is a living document that is routinely reviewed and adjusted, when necessary, to take into account new opportunities for development and delivery.

To ensure and measure success of the Strategy, parties should:

- Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relevant meetings, engagement, and feedback sessions.
- Track and analyse general feedback from audiences and the wider community, using these to further communications tactics.
- Provide advanced notification of interviews about the National Agreement, so that departments can properly prepare so that departments can properly prepare.
- Identify recognition and acceptance of the National Agreement among stakeholders through surveys, in meeting feedback and anecdotally.



- Measure website hits and traffic through website data and analytics.
- Record overall communications activities as part of Joint Council papers and communique.