

Eleventh Meeting of the Joint Council on Closing the Gap

Communique

Joint Council members were welcomed to Naarm (Melbourne), by Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Di Kerr OAM who provided a Welcome to Country focused on the pride and strength of Aboriginal culture in creating thriving communities. Aunty Di encouraged all members to maintain the strength of their leadership efforts whilst noting that progress on Closing the Gap remains slow.

Joint Council paid respects to Elders of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, and their good neighbours the Bunurong Boon Wurrung Elders, acknowledging their continuing custodianship of the traditional lands of the Kulin Nations.

Joint Council members observed a moment of reflection recognising the life, leadership and legacy of the long-standing Chair of the Northern Land Council, Dr Bush-Blanasi. Another Elder lost far too young. He will be missed sadly.

Joint Council met for the first time since the referendum on 14 October 2023. Though the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice proposal did not pass, the referendum highlighted there was significant public support for more actions to be taken to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Joint Council members have strengthened their resolve to take actions in collectively implementing the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap and National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The underlying premise for the National Agreement is that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in control of policy and services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved.

On this basis, Joint Council members agreed to greater prioritisation of efforts across the Partnership on key areas associated with both the Priority Reforms and the socio-economic outcomes and targets.

The objective of the National Agreement is to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians.

Whilst the 19 socio-economic targets enable a high degree of transparency and accountability in measuring progress to close the gap, the foundation of the National Agreement are the four Priority Reforms that change the way governments work to accelerate improvements in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



The four Priority Reforms are:

- Priority Reform One – Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- Priority Reform Two – Building the community-controlled sector
- Priority Reform Three – Transforming government organisations
- Priority Reform Four – Shared access to data and information at a regional level

Joint Council members shared updates from their respective jurisdictions, organisations and communities.

Joint Council members also noted the commitment by National Cabinet on 3 February 2023 to the implementation of the National Agreement and to re-sign the National Agreement.

Joint Council discussed the next steps required in 2024 to implement key structural reforms and time-critical commitments in the National Agreement including:

- Establishing independent mechanisms to support, monitor, and report on the transformation of mainstream agencies and institutions
- Ensuring a clear plan towards the new inland waters target and
- Responding to the upcoming Final Report on the first Productivity Commission Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement and enabling the first Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led review.

Policy Partnerships for Early Childhood Care and Development, Housing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages were discussed, including opportunities to work collaboratively to maximise the impact of the partnerships

An update was also provided on the commitment to train 500 First Nations health workers, with more than 130 students entering the First Nations Health Workforce Traineeship Program with more expected to grow next year.

In addition, Better Renal Services for First Nations Peoples continue to be delivered with the first six sites to receive dialysis units announced earlier this year and continuing to be implemented. Advice is being prepared to assist with the selection of the remaining 24 sites for dialysis units.

An announcement was made on the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to doubling Indigenous Rangers from 1,800 to 3,600 by the end of the decade. A grant round will open shortly providing for a minimum of 30 new ranger positions in each jurisdiction.

Joint Council noted expenditure reviews received from Government Parties and committed to strengthen efforts to identify reprioritisation opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations, as required by the National Agreement.

Together, we remain committed to the realisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.



We stand side by side with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in respect and solidarity, strengthened by all the obligations to action and reform through the National Agreement.

We will continue to work in partnership towards a better future for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Structural change in the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remains what is needed to close the gap and Joint Council will look to enable this change.

Attendees – Coalition of Peaks Representatives

Name	Representing	Organisation
Mr Scott Wilson	Acting Joint Council Co-Chair	Deputy Lead Convenor, Coalition of Peaks
Mr John Leha (Virtual)	NSW	Co-Chair, New South Wales Coalition of Peak Organisations
Ms Lisa Briggs	VIC	Co-Chair, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Ms Wynetta Dewis	QLD	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition
Ms Vicki O'Donnell OAM (Virtual)	WA	Chair, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
Mr Graeme Gardner	TAS	Chair, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Ms Paula McGrady	ACT	Deputy Chairperson, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
Dr John Paterson	NT	Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
Ms Christine Thyer	Education and Families	Executive Officer, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
Ms Donnella Mills	Health and Wellbeing	Chair, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Mr Jamie Lowe	Economic Development	Chief Executive Officer, National Native Title Council
Ms Karly Warner	Law and Justice	Chief Executive Officer, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Aboriginal Legal Service

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Attendees – Government Parties

Name	Jurisdiction	Title
Hon Linda Burney MP	Commonwealth	Joint Council Co-Chair, Minister for Indigenous Australians
Hon David Harris MP	NSW	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Natalie Hutchins MP	VIC	Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Hon Leeanne Enoch MP	QLD	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
Hon Dr Tony Buti MLA (Virtual)	WA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Kyam Maher MLC	SA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Roger Jaensch MP	TAS	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA	ACT	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Hon Chansey Paech MLA	NT	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Ms Karen Chappel AM (Proxy)	Australian Local Government Association	Vice President

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Apologies

Name	Representing	Organisation
Ms Pat Turner AM	Coalition of Peaks	Joint Council Co-Chair, Coalition of Peaks
Ms Catherine Liddle	Coalition of Peaks	Deputy Lead Convenor, Coalition of Peaks
Ms Muriel Bamblett AO	Coalition of Peaks	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency
Mr Michael Graham	Coalition of Peaks	Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
Cr Linda Scott	Government Parties	Australian Local Government Association