



20 JUNE 2025

FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP

COMMUNIQUE

Members of Joint Council on Closing the Gap gathered in Garramilla Darwin and received a Welcome to Country from Larrakia Elder James Parfitt-Fejo. Joint Council paid respects to Larrakia Elders, acknowledging their continuing custodianship of the land.

Joint Council welcomed new members the Honourable Don Punch MLA (WA) and the Honourable Fiona Simpson MP (QLD).

Joint Council Co-Chairs spoke about the recent deaths in custody in the Northern Territory and the hurt and pain being experienced by their families and communities. Co-Chairs agreed greater action and effort is required by all jurisdictions to address the systemic issues that continue to contribute to the high number of deaths in custody and incarceration of First Nations people across the country.

Joint Council members discussed the critical need to drive greater progress towards Target 11 of the National Agreement. The Target, to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30 percent by 2031 is not on track to be met. Joint Council members acknowledged that holistic approaches and actions that operate across government portfolios and sectors are what is needed to drive progress towards Target 11 and broader justice system reform. Joint Council members agreed that Joint Council Co-Chairs will meet with the Attorney-General, Minister for Indigenous Affairs and other relevant Ministers from each State and Territory government to discuss priority national and jurisdictional actions to drive progress towards Target 11 in 2025.

Joint Council members also discussed the need for greater progress towards Target 12 of the National Agreement. They acknowledged the drivers of out of home care and that actions to address these are required across multiple portfolios. Joint Council members agreed to invite representatives from Safe and Supported and Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) to jointly provide an overview of the opportunities and barriers to implementing the actions under the Safe and Supported national framework and the priorities of the ECCDPP for consideration at the November 2025 Joint Council meeting.

Joint Council noted the findings and recommendations of the Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Led Review (the Review) Final Report, and thanked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities for their time for engaging in the Review. Joint Council discussed the key findings and recommendations, noting alignment with recommendations from the Productivity Commission Review



on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the need to work in partnership to improve implementation of the National Agreement. Joint Council will formally respond to the Report at their meeting in November 2025.

Joint Council members reflected on the Recommendations and Essential Actions in the Productivity Commission's three-yearly review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Productivity Commission Review) that was released in 2024. Joint Council agreed to publish its response to the Productivity Commission Review; Queensland noted the recommendation and advised the matter was under consideration.

Joint Council members present for the discussion endorsed the Data Policy Partnership, the sixth Policy Partnership established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement). The Data Policy Partnership immediate priority will be to focus on the scoping of options to establish a Bureau of Indigenous Data for consideration later in 2025.

Joint Council members present for the discussion agreed in principle to formalise an Inland Waters Target in the National Agreement by embedding a new Target 15c. Parties noted that state and territory governments would develop jurisdictional targets and indicators, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks and other parties in their jurisdictional partnership arrangements for Joint Council endorsement no later than end 2026. Target 15c will read as follows:

"By 2035, state and territory governments increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations' access to, ownership of, and management of water inland from the coastal zone (not sea water), as agreed through jurisdictional partnership arrangements".

Further information on Closing the Gap can be found here: [Home | Closing the Gap](#).

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ATTENDEES – COALITION OF PEAKS REPRESENTATIVES

Name	Representing	Organisation
Scott Wilson	Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations	Joint Council Co-Chair; Acting Lead Convenor, Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations
Michael Graham	VIC	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Wynetta Dewis	QLD	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition (QATSIC)
Vicki O'Donnell OAM	WA	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)
Sharif Deen	NSW	New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO)
Geraldine Atkinson	SA	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC)
Graeme Gardner	TAS	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)
Maurice Walker	ACT	ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ACT ATSIEB)
Dr John Paterson	NT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT)
Muriel Bamblett AO	Education and Families	SNAICC - National Voice for our Children
Donnella Mills	Health and Wellbeing	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Jamie Lowe	Economic Development	National Native Title Corporation (NNTC)
Nerita Waight	Justice	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)

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ATTENDEES – GOVERNMENT PARTIES

Name	Jurisdiction	Title
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy	Commonwealth	Minister for Indigenous Australians
Hon David Harris MP	NSW	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
Christine Couzens MP	VIC	Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Hon Don Punch MLA Left the meeting at 11:30am and was not present for Data Policy Partnership and Inland Waters discussion.	WA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Fiona Simpson MP Left the meeting at 11:30am and was not present for Data Policy Partnership and Inland Waters discussion.	QLD	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
Hon Kyam Maher MLC	SA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Suzanne Orr MLA	ACT	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Hon Matthew Kerle MLA	NT	Assistant Minister for Corporate and Digital Development
Cr Darriea Turley AM	ALGA	Vice President, Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)

APOLOGIES

Name	Representing	Organisation
Pat Turner AM	Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations	Joint Council Co-Chair; Lead Convenor, Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations
John Leha	NSW	New South Wales, Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO)



Name	Representing	Organisation
Karly Warner	Law and Justice	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)
Hon Jacquie Petrusma	TAS	Tasmania, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Natalie Hutchins	VIC	Victoria, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Hon Steven Edgington	NT	Northern Territory, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Mayor Matt Burnett	ALGA	President, Australian Local Government Association