

21 November 2025

FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP

COMMUNIQUE

Joint Council members were welcomed to Piyura Kitina/Risdon Cove, Lutruwita Tasmania, by Dewayne Everettsmith. Joint Council paid respects to the Palawa/Tasmanian Aboriginal people, acknowledging their continuing custodianship of the land.

Members discussed the draft Joint Council response to the Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Led Review and recognised the critical role it will have in shaping future implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Joint Council agreed to prioritise finalisation of its response by the end of February 2026. Government members reaffirmed their commitment to progress the response through their own processes.

The Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Australians and the Northern Territory Minister for Aboriginal Affairs departed the meeting early to return to the Northern Territory ahead of the crossing of Tropical Cyclone Fina. South Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs took over as the government Co-Chair. Positions from the Northern Territory will be provided in writing Out of Session.

Joint Council heard presentations on key targets:

- **Target 12:** *Reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.* The Safe and Supported and Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP), alongside the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, outlined opportunities to improve implementation. Members agreed these partnerships will drive action on existing commitments and report regularly to Joint Council.
- **Target 11:** *Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30% by 2031.* The Joint Council Co-Chairs spoke to their recent meetings with jurisdictional Attorneys-General and Indigenous Affairs Ministers on Target 11. The Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, also spoke to work underway by the Commonwealth to improve justice outcomes. The Coalition of Peaks noted that achieving Target 11 requires reorienting the justice system towards prevention and early intervention supported by legislative reforms.



Joint Council discussed the 2027 Productivity Commission Review Terms of Reference, with further consideration required out of session before advice can be provided to the Commonwealth Treasurer on scope for the next Productivity Commission Review.

Members received updates from the Housing and Languages Policy Partnerships. Members noted a progress update on the implementation of the 2024 Productivity Commission Review Essential Actions.

Joint Council agreed its amended Terms of Reference and the 2026 Forward Work Plan, welcoming strengthened elements to improve governance and partnership-based decision-making.

Joint Council acknowledged the historic development in Victoria, with the Statewide Treaty Bill passing the parliament, the state becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to legislate treaty with First Peoples.

Joint Council reflected on key achievements in 2025 and identified 2026 priorities for reporting to National Cabinet.

Joint Council acknowledge Julie-Ann Guivarra as the new CEO of the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

Joint Council also acknowledged this was the Hon Natalie Hutchins MP, Victorian Minister for Treaty and First Peoples last meeting and reflected on her significant achievement.

Name	Representing	Organisation
Dr Scott Wilson	Acting Joint Council Co-Chair and SA	Deputy Lead Convenor, Coalition of Peaks and Lead Convenor, South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON)
Mr Graeme Gardner	TAS	Chairperson, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Mr John Leha	NSW	Co-Chair, New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
Mr Michael Graham	VIC	Co-Chair, Ngaweenyan Maar-oo
Ms Vicki O’Donnell OAM	WA	Chairperson, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia [V]
Mr Maurice Walker	ACT	Chairperson, Australian Capital Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
Ms Catherine Liddle	Education and Families	Chief Executive Officer, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
Ms Donnella Mills	Health and Wellbeing	Chair, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Ms Josie Douglas	Economic Development	General Manager Professional Services, Central Land Council

[V] denotes virtual attendance

ATTENDEES – GOVERNMENT PARTIES

Name	Jurisdiction	Title
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy	Commonwealth	Minister for Indigenous Australians
Hon Bridget Archer MP	TAS	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon David Harris MP	NSW	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty [V]
Hon Natalie Hutchins MP	VIC	Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Hon Fiona Simpson MP	QLD	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
Hon Don Punch MLA	WA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Hon Kyam Maher MLC	SA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Suzanne Orr MLA	ACT	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Steve Edgington MLA	NT	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Cr Darriea Turley AM	Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)	Vice President, ALGA

APOLOGIES

Name	Representing	Organisation
Pat Turner AM	Joint Council Co-Chair	Lead Convenor, Coalition of Peaks
Mayor Matt Burnett	ALGA	President, ALGA
Ms Muriel Bamblett AO	Education and Families	Chairperson, Secretariat for Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
Ms Karly Warner	Law and Justice	Chairperson, National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
Ms Wynetta Dewis	QLD	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service
Mr Jamie Lowe	Economic Development	Chief Executive Officer, National Native Title Council

[V] denotes virtual attendance