



22 May 2026

## SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP

### COMMUNIQUE

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Joint Council members were welcomed to Dharug Country by Steve Trist and paid respects to the Dharug people, acknowledging their continuing custodianship of the land.

Members expressed concern about the diphtheria outbreaks in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland, acknowledging the particular risks for First Nations communities. Minister McCarthy outlined the Commonwealth's \$7.2 million response package and members acknowledged the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Health Organisations in the response.

Members observed a moment of silence for Kumanjayi Little Baby. Members also acknowledged the recent passing of Professor Peter Buckskin, a respected leader in Aboriginal education.

Members heard from WA Minister Don Punch about the importance of community-led healing after the alleged terror attack in Boorloo, Perth. He also affirmed the WA Government's commitment to truth-telling after this immensely traumatising event.

Minister McCarthy noted the parliamentary inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was established in the wake of the attacks in Perth and at Camp Sovereignty in Melbourne and that submissions have been extended until June 1.

Members reaffirmed the need for action from all levels of government, for tangible results under the National Agreement and shared accountability for outcomes.

Members acknowledged the retirement of Ms Pat Turner AM and reflected on her legacy and impact as former Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks.

The Commonwealth updated members on fuel supply work under the National Fuel Security Plan. Co-Chairs also updated members on the establishment of the Working Group on Fuel, Energy and Food Security in Remote Communities under Clause 64 of the National Agreement. Members discussed the disproportionate impact of high cost of fuel, energy and food on First Nations people in regional and remote communities and the need for coordinated action to improve affordability, reliability, long-term security and community resilience.

Members heard updates from the Justice Policy Partnership and Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership, including initiatives relating to Targets 11 and 12. Members also noted evaluation findings, including what is working well and areas for strengthening. In relation to justice, members



noted the commitment by Health Ministers to improve health outcomes for First Nations people in prisons with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation leading work to increase ACCHO-led care in prisons and establish standards of care.

The Joint Council response to the Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Review was discussed. The majority of members agreed to implement 11 Partnership Actions to drive system reform under the National Agreement and agreed to publish the response after the meeting. Members committed to working through remaining Partnership Actions to find an agreed approach to this work as soon as possible, taking into consideration some jurisdictions are further progressed.

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**ATTENDEES – COALITION OF PEAKS REPRESENTATIVES**

| <b>Name</b>            | <b>Representing</b>            | <b>Organisation</b>   |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Ms Donnella Mills      | Coalition of Peaks<br>Co-Chair | Lead Convenor, Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, Chair, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation |
| Ms Rebecca Digney      | TAS                            | Chief Executive Officer, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre [V]  |
| Cr Charles Lynch       | NSW                            | Co-Chair, NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations [V]  |
| Mr Michael Graham      | VIC                            | Chief Executive Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo  |
| Mr Maurice Walker      | ACT                            | Chairperson, ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body   |
| Mr Phillip Brooks      | QLD                            | Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Limited   |
| Dr Scott Wilson        | SA                             | Lead Convenor, South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network  |
| Ms Theresa Roe         | NT                             | Chairperson, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory [V]   |
| Ms Muriel Bamblett AO  | Education and Families         | Chairperson, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children   |
| Dr Dawn Casey PSM FAHA | Health and Wellbeing           | Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation   |
| Mr Jamie Lowe          | Economic Development           | Chief Executive Officer, National Native Title Council  |

[V] denotes virtual attendance

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**ATTENDEES – GOVERNMENT PARTIES**


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

[V] denotes virtual attendance

**APOLOGIES**


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| Name                     | Representing | Organisation  |
|--------------------------|--------------|---|
| Ms Vicki O'Donnell OAM   | WA           | Chairperson, Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia |
| Minister Suzanne Orr MLA | ACT          | Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  |