CLOSING THE GAP

6 November 2026

SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP

COMMUNIQUE

Joint Council Co-Chairs acknowledged the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and surrounding region and acknowledged other people and families with a connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

In their opening address, the Co-Chairs noted important national and international discussions on rights, racism and accountability, including the significant community response to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into racism, hate and violence directed at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Co-Chairs shared reflections on their meeting with Dr. Albert K. Barume, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Canberra this week. Co-Chairs reiterated Closing the Gap is the responsibility of all Cabinets of every Parliament.

Members discussed the impact of global instability on fuel and energy security in remote communities, with Co-Chairs reporting back on this week's Clause 64 Working Group meeting on Fuel, Energy and Food Security in Remote Communities. Members also raised the need to increase the Remote Area Allowance, with Co-Chairs committing to raise with the Commonwealth Government.

Joint Council members considered updates provided from each jurisdiction with a Place Based Partnership. The Commonwealth Minister for Social Services, the Hon Tanya Plibersek MP, attended the meeting for this item and provided an update on the new national Place Partnership Model to deliver better outcomes for children and families.

Joint Council members received an update from the Commonwealth Co-Chair of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership (SEWB PP) and noted the provision of their written update.

Joint Council also received an update from the Coalition of Peaks Co-Chair of the Languages Policy Partnership and commended the efforts of the Languages Policy Partnership on its development of the Languages Sector Strengthening Plan. Ministers agreed to consider implementation options.

Productivity Commissioners Selwyn Button and Angela Jackson provided an update on the 2027 Productivity Commission Review, including early insights emerging through consultation.

Joint Council members discussed the proposed Terms of Reference for the second Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led Review. The Review is important to provide independent advice to the Joint Council of ongoing work to close the gap.

The Coalition of Peaks led discussion on Priority Reform Four, with the support of Data Policy Partnership Co-Chairs. Joint Council members heard updates on the activities of the Data Policy Partnership.

Joint Council considered the draft Annual Report to National Cabinet and discussed the key achievements of the forum in 2026 and key priorities for 2027.

The 2027 Forward Work Plan for Joint Council was discussed, and members agreed to finalise the Work Plan out of session and prepare it for publication to the Closing the Gap website.

Joint Council agreed on three further Partnership Actions through the Joint Council response to the first Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Review (Partnership Actions 7, 9 and 11).

Joint Council Co-Chairs congratulated Pat Turner AM on being named NAIDOC Person of the Year, and her contribution to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Joint Council thanked and acknowledged the Hon David Harris MP, NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty since 2023, who has announced he will leave NSW Parliament in March 2027.

Joint Council members agreed the next meeting will be held in in 2027.

[V] denotes virtual attendance

ATTENDEES – COALITION OF PEAKS REPRESENTATIVES

Name	Representing	Organisation
Ms Donnella Mills	Coalition of Peaks 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
Mr Sharif Deen	NSW	Co-Chair, NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
Mr Maurice Walker	ACT	Chairperson, Australian Capital Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
Ms Christine Thyer	SA	Co-Convenor, South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network
Ms Donna Ah Chee	NT	Chairperson, Aboriginal Peak Organisation Northern Territory
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
Ms Josie Douglas	Economic Development	General Manager of Professional Services, Central Land Council

[V] denotes virtual attendance

ATTENDEES – GOVERNMENT PARTIES

Name	Jurisdiction	Title
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy	Commonwealth Co-Chair	Minister for Indigenous Australians
Minister the Honourable Bridget Archer MP [V]	TAS	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Minister the Honourable David Harris MP [V]	NSW	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty
Mr Terry Garwood PSM	VIC	Deputy Secretary, First Peoples – State Relations, Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Minister the Honourable Fiona Simpson MP	QLD	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
Minister Don Punch MLC	WA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Minister the Honourable Kyam Maher MLC	SA	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Minister the Honourable Steve Edgington MLA [V]	NT	Minister for Aboriginal Affairs
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA	ACT	Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Mayor Matt Burnett	Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)	President, Australian Local Government Association

[V] denotes virtual attendance

APOLOGIES

Name	Representing	Organisation
Minister the Honourable Natalie Hutchins MP	VIC	Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Ms Kaley Nicholson	VIC	Co-Chair, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Mr Phillip Brooks	QLD	Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Limited
Ms Nerita Waight	Justice and Law	Chair, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services