



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

### **PRIME MINISTER'S INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT - 2017**

In accordance with the requirement of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council's (the Council) Terms of Reference to report annually to the Government, via letter to the Prime Minister, we are pleased to submit the Council's 2017 annual report.

This report provides an overview of the Council's activities, key areas of advice provided to the Government and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the period 13 February 2017 to 30 November 2017.

#### *Establishment*

We were appointed in early February to provide advice to the Government on Indigenous affairs, and focus on practical changes to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We believe that since then, we have come together as a Council finalising our Terms of Reference and extending our membership to ensure consideration of Torres Strait Islander issues.

We have appreciated the structural changes made to facilitate consideration of the Council's advice on policies being developed for consideration by Government, and the ability to meet with members of Cabinet to speak to our advice.

The Council is committed to encouraging improvements in Government policy approaches and championing the achievement of better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. As a result we developed and agreed our priorities and gave them particular focus based on whether the issues were:

- Nation building, like the Closing the Gap refresh or constitutional recognition
- Significant policy matters such as education or employment; and
- Engagement focussed, including with organisations such as the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples or Empowered Communities representatives

As the Council executes its role in advising the Government on priority policy design, implementation and practice, we felt it important to frame that advice by asking if the policy assisted by:



- Resetting the relationship
- Using strengths-based approaches
- Embracing and enabling local leadership and decision-making
- Ensured better lines of accountability and decision-making for expenditure in Indigenous Affairs and more broadly.

Over the year, we have also come to understand the need for a deeper appreciation by policy makers of what we have come to call the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Governance Operating Rhythm. We have commenced work to explain what is meant by this approach which embraces both engagement and cultural considerations, so people in positions of influence can change policy settings and activate this approach in a meaningful way across programs.

We propose applying this framework in our work over the coming year.

#### Council's Achievements

Our focus on the Government's priority areas over the course of the year is evidenced by the advice provided to you, and relevant Ministers during Council meetings and out-of-session.

During 2017 the Council met a total of eight times. We welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Department in February, March and December to receive briefings across the broad spectrum of Indigenous Affairs. We met with you, with Minister Scullion and with different members of the Indigenous Policy Committee of Cabinet in April, May, August and October to discuss issues within their portfolio responsibilities. We also met out of session in July to discuss advice to be provided on the next steps with constitutional recognition.

At these meetings, Council has discussed and provided advice on reviews, policy development and implementation issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including:

- Constitutional Recognition
- Closing the Gap Refresh
- Remote Housing
- National Disability Insurance Scheme and opportunities associated with the rollout
- Indigenous Grants Policy
- Indigenous Land Council
- Social and Cultural Determinants of Health
- Access to Data
- Culture Policy
- Employment and economic development, including Community Development Program reforms and the development of Northern Australia
- Mainstream programs for families
- Cashless Debit Card and alternate models
- Reframing approaches to embrace Local Leadership and
- Education.

We wanted to highlight below some of the areas of particular focus where we feel a significant impact can be made to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



### *Constitutional Recognition*

The Council appreciates the challenges associated with determining the most appropriate next steps to respond to calls for a voice in parliament, a truth telling process and agreement making process. Whilst we appreciate that the discussion is ongoing, and that a Joint Select Committee will be considering a way forward, we would support consideration being given to the full range of possible options, both constitutional and non-constitutional, to inform the way forward.

### *Closing the Gap Refresh*

The refresh of the Closing the Gap targets is a critical area of policy development. We have welcomed the opportunity to help shape the approach for this work and are encouraged by the joint approach to consultation with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples. We acknowledge the decision of the Council of Australian Governments to extend the timeframe to June, but encourage the Government to ensure time to consult appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community. This will be important as specific targets based on the right data are developed and negotiated, to ensure they are realistic and achievable. We were pleased to have co-hosted a consultation with the Department and key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in early December. We continue to support consideration not only of areas where improvements can be made, but also a celebration and promotion of the many areas of positive achievement.

### *Remote Housing*

Ms Murphy participated in the Review of Remote Indigenous Housing. The Council considers the provision of safe, secure and adequate housing as interconnected with closing the gap and the achievement of positive outcomes across health, education, employment and community safety. We have raised the importance of local engagement on housing design or better ways to deliver property and tenancy management services, the need for productivity targets linked to procurement and investment in local workforce development. We participated in a Redfern Statement Alliance workshop on housing this year supporting calls for the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples to represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing interests and a new national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy, with the aim of improving the housing outcomes for our people across all forms of housing tenure. We continue to believe that good quality housing in remote Australia is the cornerstone of wellbeing and prosperity.

### *National Disability Insurance Scheme*

The Council hosted a roundtable on 10 August 2017 to discuss the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Redfern. Stakeholders such as Indigenous Allied Health Australia, First People's Disabilities Network, and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation discussed the employment and economic opportunities the NDIS presents to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations into the future.



Separately, Ms Mason delivered the Kenneth Jenkins Oration in December 2017 and discussed how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community can best operate within the NDIS, the need for services to respond to the unique needs of communities and the importance of being aware of the barriers that may hinder those in community from accessing NDIS services.

#### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Governance Operating Rhythm*

This year the Council has discussed the importance of culture as a critical thread that should run through all the work that is being progressed by government, linking back to people and country. We have noted the need to build understanding by decision makers about what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is and what it means, to change misconceptions so policy settings can be structured in a more meaningful way, and more consistent with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Governance Operating Rhythm. This Operating Rhythm can be seen coming through in some policy areas such as the Indigenous Procurement Policy and Native Title, but needs to be understood and applied more broadly so it can connect with the non-Indigenous Operating Rhythm to impact positively on the lives of First Australians. Council also supports Government staff building their cultural capability to be able to work more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

#### *Employment*

The Council believes that a holistic approach to training and employment across jurisdictions is necessary to build on the achievements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Developing a strong new Community Development Program model, looking at pathways to connect schools and TAFE's and re-examining the role of VTECs to support prior recognition of skills and attainment, linking training to planning around major infrastructure projects, including the development of the north, are all important areas for focus. The Council also highlighted the need for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment representative body. The Council is encouraged by reforms proposed through the Indigenous Business Sector Strategy, the Indigenous Employment and Supplier Use Infrastructure Framework and Indigenous Business Australia, noting the importance of these to building the business acumen of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, supporting a culture of entrepreneurship particularly with women and youth and providing opportunities for employment. It will also be important to address planning constraints that limit development opportunities on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander freehold land. The Council also sees improved training for people in the justice system, including remandees, and improved parole conditions, as important to support employment opportunities post release.

#### *Education*

The Council considers it critical that a strengths based approach to providing positive educational pathways for children is used, agreeing that to aspire to greatness, each stage and transition must be safe, supported, with family and community systems, education and strength of culture. Ensuring students are equipped with the essential skills required for the modern world including problem solving, collaboration and critical thinking, and the role families and community need to play in supporting the learning experience of their



children are important areas of focus. We raised the value of strong cultural relevance and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history within the Australian Curriculum and cultural training in professional development in the local community, by the local community. Council recognises the challenges in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational attainment, the importance of the first years of life for future success in education, teacher preparedness and professional development, including increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and the critical role of the Deans of Education in shaping the teacher workforce. The Council also notes the absence of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education representative body.

#### Consultation and Engagement

The Council has engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including existing advocacy bodies such as the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and the Redfern Statement Alliance, to ensure that the Government has access to a diversity of views. We see continuation of this engagement and working side by side with them as particularly important as the Redfern agenda is progressed and we continue to build and strengthen Government's commitment to listening to and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Our broader engagement has occurred through speaking engagements and attendance at conferences, forums and workshops conducted by representative and advocacy groups, peak bodies, academic and research institutions; through Council members' own professional and social networks; and through the media, including social media, print, television and radio.

By way of example, the Co-Chairs collectively have participated in approximately 81 out-of-session events and meetings including with state and territory governments, academics, community representative bodies and individuals. Other council members have participated in at least 56 other out-of-session engagements.

From 8 February 2017 to 30 November 2017, over 100 items of public correspondence were received by Council. Around 50 were requests for meetings and invitations to forums, conferences and events. Of the approximately 50 invitations and meetings accepted by Council, most related to cultural events such as the *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters Exhibition* or celebrations of significant anniversaries in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. Correspondence matters ranged from health (19%), housing and community safety (19%), culture (24%), children and youth (15%), education (12%), and economic development and employment (2%). The remaining correspondence (9%) was of a general nature.

#### Approach for 2018

During 2017 we were consolidating as a Council and learning how we each like to work. We were establishing our relationships with Government Ministers aligned to our specific areas of interest or expertise. While this is effective to an extent, our sense is it may be easier to ensure issues are progressed inter-sessionally if we revisit our operating structure. The establishment of Working Groups may enable us to draw in external expertise and advice on key issues as we formulate our advice to government. We anticipate discussing what groups we might establish in the year.



Australian Government

## PRIME MINISTER'S INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Our priorities for 2018 include Closing the Gap, constitutional recognition, development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Governance Operating Rhythm, the response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, economic development, education and investigating strengths based alternatives to the cashless welfare card.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Government into the future so that we can make significant progress on initiatives to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

We commend the Council's report to you.

Yours sincerely

Ms Andrea Mason  
Co-Chair

Professor Chris Sarra  
Co-Chair

Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council  
29 January 2018