



Brief: Consultation on Indigenous skills and employment program (NIAA)

Date Wednesday 1 September 2021

Key Points

What are the key opportunities in your region that are not currently being addressed?

- 1. Training and skills investment needs to be better targeted to the job opportunities of the region.**
 - It is not clear whether investment to build up regional skills are targeted to the employment opportunities that exist within the region.
 - Gumatj has developed its own training and skills programs to support its operations, such as mining, construction, timber, etc. but there are still gaps within the local Indigenous workforce that Gumatj struggles to fill.
- 2. Training and skills investment is required now to support the employment opportunities from the departure of Rio Tinto Alcan's operations.**
 - The closure of the Rio Tinto Alcan refinery and eventual closure of their mining operations present significant opportunities for the region to use infrastructure and land assets to create new business and job opportunities.
 - Investment is needed now to help smooth out the negative impacts of the transition away from mining.
 - New business opportunities to provide logistics services, mining, agriculture (timber other agricultural products), and associated services, could support new job opportunities for Aboriginal people in this region.
 - Training and wrap around services are required to build up the skills required to support future employment outcomes.

What can the federal government offer?

- 1. Long-term partnerships are required to ensure investment supports the full pathway to real employment**
 - This is an opportunity for the federal government to take a wholistic approach to creating real jobs in the region. A wholistic approach could involve developing long-term partnerships with training providers and local businesses, as well as wrap around service providers to ensure the support

services exist to sustain employment in the long-run (for example, ensuring appropriate housing is available). Aboriginal corporations, like Gumatj, are key to these partnerships as they already provide a wholistic approach to social and economic development (with its wide range of business and social enterprises, and joint venture partners).

- Partnerships could involve:
 - ... long-term funding and support from the federal government
 - ... coordination across governments to ensure other programs support the outcomes of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (see below)
 - ... funding to go to Indigenous-led organisations that understand the local economy and culture
 - ... government to support gathering evidence to ensure program funding is effective.

2. Coordinated strategy to Indigenous employment

- Governments need to ensure that its broader policy frameworks (housing, welfare, education, industrial relations etc.) support Indigenous employment in the region.
- Flexibility is required for business to be able to offer workplace incentives that work with the cultural context of the local Indigenous population. The NIAA should, as part of this program invest in understanding the barriers that exist for businesses to be able to successfully operate in an Indigenous cultural and economic environment.
 - ... This work could complement work under priority reform 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Transforming Government Organisations. [A commitment to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.]
- Without the normal economic incentives working effectively to attract employment, regional businesses will continue to struggle to maintain local Indigenous jobs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to lead the development of such a strategy. Gumatj would be well placed to support such work given its experiences.