

Senate Estimates 27 October 2023
National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun
Opening Statement 9am

Good morning Chair and Senators.

Wanthiwa

[For Hansard: Yindjibarndi for hello]

I wish to begin by acknowledging the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples and Traditional Owners across the country. I pay my respect to the Elders past and present.

I would also like to extend my respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senators and witnesses appearing today.

Chair, thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

I'm proud to lead the National Indigenous Australians Agency and work with more than 1,400 public servants in 37 locations around the country.

In fact, 41 per cent of the Agency's staff work outside of Canberra, including regional and remote areas –

Listening to communities, their needs and aspirations, and tailoring our approach to support the locally-led, self-determined solutions. Because no two communities are the same, as we know.

The NIAA is delivering an ambitious agenda to empower First Nations peoples and communities, across Australia.

Our national presence, including here in Canberra, allows the Agency to lead and influence across Government.

We work closely with First Nations people, state, territory and local governments, Commonwealth departments, Peak organisations, service providers and other stakeholders:

to ensure that First Nations policies, programs and services are delivered where, when and how, they're needed.

Since our appearance before this committee in May, we've delivered positive outcomes for First Nations communities and progressed the Government's priorities.

The NIAA continues to make a difference as we coordinate the National Agreement on Closing the Gap across governments.

In July, the Productivity Commission released its draft review that covers the first three years of implementation of the Agreement.

This draft review shows that all partners have to do better. It reiterates the importance of the Priority Reforms in driving improvements in socio-economic outcomes.

I am working with my colleagues across the APS.

Recently the Secretaries Board agreed strategic leadership to support accelerated action to consistently embed the Priority Reforms throughout the APS.

I'd like to take this opportunity to update the committee on major programs that are making a practical, tangible difference to First Nations communities.

Over the past 12 months, the NIAA has been progressing the Government's commitment to deliver real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions, and making tangible progress through a combination of trying practical solutions and consulting on new ideas to help build a new jobs program in remote Australia.

We completed a first phase of consultation in June 2023, which included hearing from 2,250 people in over 100 remote communities.

There are three trials underway to test new approaches to securing real jobs for participants.

In July, the second phase of the Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs trials commenced. Early success has seen over 1,500 participants directly placed in jobs and overall job placements for CDP increasing by 14% since the first trial began in November 2022.

We know that jobs and economic independence are essential in closing the gap, and achieving better life outcomes.

One of the NIAA's largest and most successful programs, is the Indigenous Rangers Program.

The chance to recognise and share traditional land management skills, learn new technology, while maintaining connection to Country and culture – is boosting social, education and economic outcomes.

1,900 Indigenous Rangers are working around Australia, and we are on-track to double the workforce by 2030 and include more women and young people.

Today, 5 Junior Ranger Programs are actively offering students on-Country learning and activities.

We know that being an Indigenous Ranger, is more than just a job.

The NIAA is investing \$1 million to develop Australia's Indigenous director and board member pipeline with world-class training opportunities.

Just this week, applications opened for First Nations Director Scholarships via the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

A total of 135 scholarships over the next 3 years to empower current and future Indigenous leaders.

We continue our leadership of the Commonwealth's plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*.

We lead across the Commonwealth, working closely with the NT Government, the Central Australian Regional Controller and the Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group.

We are seeing the investment is having an impact.

Including the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation’s Community: its Night Patrol giving young people a safe ride home.

Lhere Artepe now employs around 40 community patrollers, made up of respected Elders, leaders and role models with cultural authority, doing this important work.

I am particularly proud of NIAA’s work in administering the Territories’ Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.

Since commencement in March 2022, the Scheme has paid over \$56 million in redress and healing payments to 696 applicants.

The scheme operates on the basis of trauma-informed, cultural competency and safety for all involved, and assists in healing the trauma arising from removal from family.

Over the last 18 months, the NIAA has played a lead role in assisting the Government to deliver its commitment to hold a referendum.

Referendums are historic and momentous occasions for our country, and an important feature of our democratic process.

Our work to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are heard, recognised and empowered remains as important as it ever has been.

Finally Chair, I note, there are a number Indigenous portfolio bodies appearing today at the committee's request.

These organisations are established under different Acts and perform varied and important roles.

Some have travelled a very long way and they're looking forward to presenting to you.

Chair, Senators: I welcome your questions.