

## **Opening statement – Minister McCarthy**

I would like to acknowledge that we come together on the lands of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and pay respects to elders past and present. I would like to acknowledge that Senator Wong is not here today with the passing of her father on Tuesday. We know sorry business is very sacred business.

I would like to make some remarks about Senator Wong's work as Foreign Minister over the past twelve months.

Within her first year in office, Senator Wong has visited 29 countries, five of those more than once, and has visited every member of the Pacific Islands Forum and all ASEAN countries except Myanmar. She has renewed many of our closest relationships, made major progress in stabilising our relationship with our largest trading partner, and is making Australia stronger and more influential in the world by ensuring we invest in all elements of our statecraft including diplomatic power, trade and development.

Senator Wong puts great emphasis on telling Australia's full story to the world: a land that is home to the oldest continuous culture on the planet, and to people from more than 300 ancestries.

Not only does this make us stronger, by enabling us to build on common ground with people around the world, it is also right. All Australians should be included in the story we tell about ourselves.

As a Yanyuwa woman from Northern Australia, I appreciated the long overdue recognition of First Nations people as this land's first diplomats and traders, when Prime Minister Albanese went to Makassar and talked about the centuries of trading between people of what is now Indonesia and the Garrwa people and people of northern Australia and across to the west and to the east.

Senator Wong has made it a priority to elevate the practices and experiences of First Nations people in our international engagement.

She has ensured that the world sees First Nations people through our diplomacy.

She sent me as her representative to the Pacific Women Lead meeting in Fiji in October, where I secured permanent Australian First Nations representation on the board.

Senator Dodson was part of her delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in September.

With her colleagues she has helped ensure Australia has Indigenous parliamentary representation at some of the world's pre-eminent fora, including Dr Gordon Reid MP as the head of Australia's Delegation to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in April, and myself leading the Australian delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March.

And along with her colleagues she has also ensured that First Nations engagement has featured prominently in the program of incoming ministerial visitors to Australia. It was an important moment when Minister Burney hosted the US Secretary of the Interior, Deb Haaland, the first Native American woman to serve as a cabinet secretary.

Senator Wong has appointed Mr Justin Mohamed as Australia's inaugural Ambassador for First Nations People – the first appointment of its kind in the world.

Ambassador Mohamed will lead efforts to help grow First Nations' trade and investment, enhance our engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by fostering cooperation on shared interests and advance Indigenous rights globally.

I want to place on record my appreciation for the way Senator Wong, as someone who is not Indigenous, seeks to approach this area with both curiosity and respect.

She has been quick to understand the centrality of traditional custodianship, customs and leadership to the Pacific way as being something Australia should respect in our regional engagement, and something we can be sharing with the Pacific family.

Elevating perspectives and voices of First Nations people across communities helps Australia build stronger connections across the Blue Pacific and beyond, with the many countries on their own journeys of reconciliation.

I thank the Committee.