

**Senate Estimates March 2020**

**National Indigenous Australians Agency CEO Opening Statement**

Good morning Chair and Senators.

[Ngoonawal language]

Dhawura nguna dhawura Ngoonawal

Yanggu ngalamanyin dhunimanyin

Ngoonawalwari dhawurawari Dindi wanggiralidjinyin

[English translation]

This in Ngoonawal Country

Today we are all meeting together on Ngoonawal Country

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Elders

Can I also extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues present this morning.

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

Since our last appearance, the National Indigenous Australians Agency has continued to bed down the work of the Agency, to develop, implement and deliver meaningful programs to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have continued with our organisational reform journey to ensure alignment with our purpose. On 1 December, our Agency's new structure came into effect and we established a new Deputy CEO position, in charge of Operations and Delivery. Ms Letitia Hope was promoted to the role and is now the senior Indigenous woman in the Commonwealth public service. She will lead our three new Regional Groups and the Program Performance and Delivery Group.

We have consolidated our policy divisions and established a small group to focus on the northern Australia development agenda and another small team to focus on organisational performance and capability.

Following Ms Hope's and other recent senior appointments, we are proud of the fact that now more than half of our senior executive staff (Band 2 and above) are Indigenous, this is a significant achievement.

The new three regional groups are already proving to be beneficial with enhanced regional senior stakeholder engagement and greater senior level support to our 12 regional managers and their engagement across their regions.

Our processes and practices are maturing as we evolve as an executive agency and we look forward to positioning ourselves as a reliable and trusted partner, building our influence and fostering the relationships that will enable us to effectively and efficiently deliver the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

2020 has, of course, started with a range of challenges for Indigenous Australians with cyclone activity in the north and west, civil unrest in Aurukun and the bushfires across the country.

We have worked closely with other portfolio bodies such as the three who appeared this morning in lending our efforts to the Whole of Government response in supporting Indigenous communities affected by the bushfires to access services and start their progress towards recovery. Agency staff, including myself and other senior staff, have made 68 visits to 28 fire effected communities and have worked alongside our colleagues from other Departments and Agencies and taken advantage of our footprint in regional Australia to offer additional specialised, on-the-ground assistance to Indigenous people impacted by the fires.

We have provided additional staff on the New South Wales South Coast to ensure our small Batemans Bay team were able to manage a significantly increased workload and provided staff into Bairnsdale to support Indigenous communities and organisations in the Gippsland area.

We have seconded staff to the National Bushfire Recovery Agency as well as embedding a liaison officer to ensure Indigenous perspectives inform their response and recovery activities. We have been an active participant in the broader Government mechanisms to ensure our work complements the wider Commonwealth response to this tragic bushfire season. And we will shortly second an officer to support Commissioner Binskin in his important task in the Bushfire Royal Commission.

I thank the committee and welcome your questions.