

**Senate Estimates 16 February 2024**  
**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. I extend that respect to other language groups in the region, as well as Traditional Owners across the country. I pay my respects to the Elders past and present, and extend my respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senators and witnesses appearing today.

I want to inform the committee of a recent change to my executive.

I'd like to congratulate Mr Kevin Brahim, who was promoted to Deputy CEO, Operations and Delivery group, in November last year. Kevin has cultural ties to the Bunuba people in Fitzroy Crossing and brings a wealth of experience working across government and with communities on the ground to the role.

I'd like to acknowledge the recent passing of Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue. Dr O'Donoghue dedicated her life to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In her various roles as Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, as an Australian of the Year, as the Chair of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and as the Patron of the Lowitja Institute, Dr O'Donoghue left a lasting legacy for this country.

She was an inspiring and passionate leader who paved the way for generations of Indigenous leaders. Dr O'Donoghue's passing is a loss for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and all Australians; she

was indeed a National Living Treasure. My deepest sympathies are with her family and friends.

As you know, this week marked the anniversary of the National Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples. I'm particularly proud of the work of the NIAA in administering the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme since it commenced in March 2022. The Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme is one mechanism to provide truth telling and healing on an individual level. Over 1,400 survivors have already applied to the Scheme in nearly 2 years and whilst redress payments are critical, most importantly Stolen Generations survivors are invited to tell their own stories of displacement in the trauma-aware and supported environment of the Scheme. Survivors who have participated in this process (known as a Personal Acknowledgement) have said that they have a sense of being unburdened, having shared their story with someone from government who really listened to them.

To date, almost 900 applicants have been found eligible for redress and 844 survivors have received a redress payment equating to a total \$67,048,666.

As I've mentioned at previous Estimates hearings, my mother was part of the Stolen Generations. For me, this time of year is a time of reflection, both personally and in my role leading the National Indigenous Australians Agency. We need to acknowledge the ongoing impact and trauma of many Stolen Generations survivors, their families and communities. This is not just about numbers, but about real people and their healing, and the NIAA and I continue this journey with them.

## **Accelerating progress in Closing the Gap**

This week the Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and 2024 Implementation Plan were tabled in Parliament.

The Annual Report outlines significant work undertaken by the Commonwealth in 2023 to improve life outcomes for First Nations people.

Notable achievements over the last 12 months include:

- Under the Agreement with the Northern Territory Government, we are ahead of schedule to deliver 157 houses to remote Northern Territory communities with extreme levels of overcrowding.
- The Indigenous Rangers Program Expansion Round One grant opportunity opened 11 December 2023 and will close on 26 February 2024. This is the first step to doubling the number of Indigenous rangers to 3,800 by 2030. The first stage of this will provide work on country for up to 1,000 people.
- The Indigenous Girls STEM Academy has reached its target of supporting over 600 young women from high school, through university, and into graduate careers in STEM (as at December 2023). They are now aspiring to 1,000 participants with additional sponsors. The Academy's Teachers of STEM initiative is also mentoring 58 new STEM specialised, female, First Nations teachers, and is on track to reach its target of 99.

However, as the Prime Minister said in his address this week, while we are seeing some improvement in 11 of 19 socioeconomic targets we must find a better way to improve outcomes for First Nations people.

The 2024 Implementation Plan identifies the Commonwealth's strategic priorities and actions to close the gap over the next 12 months.

It includes new measures to increase Indigenous jobs and improve justice outcomes, while continuing to progress implementation of the priority reforms.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency continues to play a key role in leading and influencing across government. The need for governments to increase focus on transforming mainstream systems and culture was a key finding of the Productivity Commission's Final Report for the first Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, released last week (7 February 2024).

I'm continuing to work with my Secretary colleagues, their departments, and my state and territory counterparts to drive stronger mainstream accountability.

The NIAA is working with the Australian Public Service Commission as a co-sponsor to deliver the SES 100 initiative to boost First Nations representation in senior leadership positions across the Australian Public Service (APS). We received a good number of applications and have recently finished the interview stage. We're excited to see so many incredible senior First Nations leaders engage in this process who are eager to work across all areas of the APS to make a difference for First Nations people.

I'd like to now quickly touch on a couple of the new measures and key programs.

## **A new jobs program and economic participation**

Real jobs pave the way for improving social and economic participation, strengthening communities and are linked to better health and education, housing and community safety outcomes.

The new Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program, which will commence later this year, is part of the Government's commitment to replace the Community Development Program (CDP). It will build on the three remote jobs trials that have been underway for some time, and be informed by community consultations.

The Government announced this week that it will invest \$707 million to develop this program, to create 3,000 new jobs over the next three years, with proper wages and decent conditions in remote communities.

The NIAA will continue working with remote communities, CDP providers and participants and other key stakeholders during the design phase to ensure the new program is tailored and informed by community needs.

## **Central Australia Plan**

In the Northern Territory, we continue to lead the implementation of the Commonwealth's plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*.

Working closely with the NT Government, the Central Australian Regional Controller and the Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group, we are seeing investments starting to have a real impact in communities.

Compared to the same period last summer, Northern Territory Police are reporting a significant improvement in rates of anti-social behaviour, assaults and property damage.

Despite some improvements, crime and anti-social behaviour are still at unacceptably high levels. Addressing these issues and improving community and family safety remains a key priority. The NIAA is focused on supporting and investing in communities across Central Australia to achieve long term change.

We're continuing to support local decision-making with communities across Central Australia to deliver on commitments, including the recent \$6.5 million investment to improve Wi-Fi and digital connectivity in 18 Central Australian communities, as part of the Regional Connectivity Program through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

### **Floods support and recovery**

Finally, I'd just like to acknowledge the many communities and families affected by floods and severe weather events over recent months, particularly in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia; and recognise NIAA staff and funded providers that have been working really hard to support these communities

The NIAA has a strong presence across Australia, including in regional and remote areas, with around 45 per cent of the NIAA's total staff located outside of Canberra. This regional network has been working on the ground with First Nations communities, and providing critical advice to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG) to inform response and recovery efforts.

For example, in North Queensland, NIAA staff are working to support recovery efforts in Wujal Wujal, the most impacted First Nations community in the region.

The NIAA has funded Jabalbina Eastern Kuku Yalanji Indigenous rangers \$489,000 to support recovery in Wujal Wujal through activities including environmental restoration such as replanting and habitat restoration as well as operational tasks such as cleaning and supporting local efforts.

The NIAA is also funding Deadly Inspiring Youth Doing Good (DIYDG) to support displaced families in Cairns, who are living in short-term accommodation, with a focus on engaging and supporting youth.

I am really proud of the contribution we have made here and in other affected communities – real practical help to people in need.

The work of NIAA is making a difference to the lives of First Nations people and we look forward to continuing to deliver for First Nations people in 2024.

Finally Chair, I note, there are a number Indigenous portfolio bodies appearing before the committee.

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.

I welcome your questions.