

Senate Estimates 11 November 2022

National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun

Opening Statement

Good morning Chair and Senators.

Wanthiwa

[For Hansard: Yindjibarndi for hello]

I'd like to start by acknowledging the Country we are all meeting on today.

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Traditional Custodians of the Canberra area and pay respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging. I extend this respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senators and witnesses here today.

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

The 2022–23 October Budget has provided the National Indigenous Australians Agency with an increase in funding this year and over the forward estimates.

We have received \$2.1 billion this financial year, consisting of \$1.7 billion in Administered funding and \$398.6 million in Departmental funding. This will provide significant tangible outcomes for First Nations people in the areas of – health, justice, safety, housing, infrastructure, and the environment.

This funding includes payments made to the Aboriginals Benefit Account, and following our work with the Interim Board this year, we are pleased the Northern Territory Aboriginal Investment Corporation will shortly commence and give Aboriginal Territorians more say over ABA funding.

The establishment of the NTAIC will see decisions that were before subject to Ministerial discretion, no longer requiring this step – prioritising self-determination for Aboriginal Territorians and greater control over decision-making for the people impacted from those decisions.

Alongside this, the NIAA continues to preference First Nations organisations for grants funding, where all other factors are equal. Currently, around 71% of Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding is provided to First Nations

organisations. This is a substantial increase from 35% of funding going to First Nations organisations pre-IAS.

In addition to our Agency's funding in the October Budget, approximately \$1.2 billion is being provided across the Australian Government – to support initiatives for First Nations peoples. We are aware of 23 First Nations-specific measures in this Budget that will be driven by other departments.

This high commitment to Indigenous Affairs means that our ability to lead and influence across Government is more important than ever to ensure First Nations peoples have a say in all decisions that affect them. It aligns with the Government's expectation that First Nations policy is everyone's responsibility.

This Budget also sees an increase in our average staffing level by 3.7 per cent, or 47 positions, to 1,317 positions. Of our total staff, 23% identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and since our last appearance in April, we've also strengthened First Nations representation in senior leadership positions to 100% at the CEO and Deputy CEO levels – a first time for this Agency.

A key priority for the Agency that we have hit the ground running on is the preparatory work towards a referendum to enshrine an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Constitution – working with the Attorney-General's Department.

We are supporting the newly appointed Referendum Working Group and the Engagement Group and look forward to delivering on our role in bringing a referendum to the Australian people.

This is among the many key priorities of the Government, some of which include:

- continuing to work closely and in genuine partnership with the Coalition of Peaks, states and territories and First Nations representatives to ensure sustained progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- accelerating progress towards justice outcomes through the Justice Policy Partnership
- implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart

- progressing the development of a new remote jobs program that will replace the Community Development Program, and
- continuing to deliver the Indigenous Rangers Program in line with the Government's commitment to double the number of Indigenous rangers by the end of the decade and increase women rangers.

As we mature as an Agency and improve the ways we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we thought it was time to update our vision and purpose statements.

In August, we published our 2022-23 Corporate Plan which reflected our vision that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are heard, recognised and empowered*.

Picking up on *hearing* First Nations people, I have taken time over the last six months to visit some 21 NIAA offices and the communities they serve across every state and territory, and every corner of the country, including the Torres Strait, to hear directly from our staff and the organisations and community members we work with about what we need to be doing to make meaningful change. There are still more visits on the horizon as I make sure to get to all of our locations.

Picking up on *recognising and empowering* First Nations people, our refreshed Agency purpose reflects our commitment to work in *genuine partnership to enable the self-determination and aspirations of First Nations communities*. And that *we lead and influence change across government to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a say in the decisions that affect them*.

It is clear mainstream Departments are doing more to advance the interests and life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and increasingly doing so in partnership with community.

There is a genuine commitment from all Commonwealth entities to do our very best collectively to improve life outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In my final comment, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the challenging and deeply personal work this Agency and its staff do on a daily basis. We often find ourselves supporting communities going through difficult times or in complex circumstances, for example natural disasters, community unrest and other tragedies.

This is no easy task and I would like to recognise the impact this has on our staff and the communities who we are deeply connected to through the work we do.

I thank the Committee and welcome your questions.