

Budget Estimates Opening Statement – 7 June 2024

National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun

Good morning Chair and Senators

Wanthiwa [For Hansard: Yindjibarndi for hello]

I wish to begin by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on and acknowledge the Ngambri people and other families with connection to the lands of the ACT and surrounding region.

I extend that respect to Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and to First Nations Senators or witnesses appearing here today.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the unprecedented number of women who have lost their lives to domestic and family violence this year. First Nations women in particular experience disproportionately high levels of domestic and family violence.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) continues to work with communities, providers, and government counterparts to deliver critical family and child safety services. From July 2023 to 30 April this year, we have invested through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy more than \$60 million to support First Nations families impacted by family, domestic and sexual violence.

Through our collaboration with the Attorney-General's Department, we also saw an uplift in funding of \$8.6 million in 2024-25 for 16 Family Violence Legal Prevention Service providers – this funding will enable providers to recruit and retain a specialised workforce to support First Nations people impacted by domestic and family violence or child protection.

Accelerating progress in Closing the Gap

The 2024-25 Budget reinforces the Commonwealth's commitment to address the entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage of First Nations people and accelerate Closing the Gap. The NIAA is continuing to think innovatively about how we work more effectively under this framework.

I will continue to work closely with my Secretary counterparts, their departments, state and territory governments and Coalition of Peaks partners to ensure the National Agreement works to drive transformation of government agencies and empower First Nations communities.

The Productivity Commission's Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap has highlighted the need to harness opportunities across governments to collectively make sustainable, generational change. Governments are working with the Coalition of Peaks to finalise the Joint Council's Response to the Review. I look forward to the opportunity it will bring to increase governments' focus on the transformation of mainstream systems and culture.

Housing

Housing remains a key priority for the NIAA. Outcome 9 of the National Agreement is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing secure, appropriate and affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and needs. The Commonwealth and Northern Territory (NT) Governments have committed to a 10-year, \$4 billion joint investment to improve housing and reduce overcrowding in remote NT communities.

The NIAA is currently negotiating an agreement with the NT Government, which will support delivery of:

- Up to 270 houses per year over 10 years, aiming to halve overcrowding in remote communities in a decade, and
- Property and Tenancy Management activities, including a cyclical and preventative maintenance program to improve the quality of existing houses.

To inform the development and implementation of this historic investment, we are working with the NT Government, land councils and Aboriginal Housing NT to develop a Partnership Agreement. The Partnership Agreement will embed shared decision-making and ensure Aboriginal voices and organisations are part of implementation.

This is in addition to existing investment in NT housing and homelands, which has seen for example, more than 15 houses on homelands receive much needed upgrades and works are well underway in more than 20 homelands to repair more houses and key infrastructure - including power, water and sanitation infrastructure.

Remote Jobs

Our efforts in working in partnership with First Nations people to design and implement the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program (RJED) are ongoing, and this new program will start in the second half of 2024.

Under the New Jobs Program Trial, as at 16 May 2024, the NIAA has seen 26 applications for jobs in hospitality, horticulture, retail, community service and tourism. So far 19 applications have been successful, which has resulted in 163 jobs secured for First Nations people. The

2024-25 Budget provides an additional \$7.1 million to increase the number of jobs funded under the Trial to 300, to support the demand.

I would like to share with the Committee how these trials have made a meaningful difference in our communities.

Jadewyn Nelson is a young Anmatjere man living in North West Alice, who has a passion for sport. He had been looking for opportunities to turn this passion into an employment opportunity. The Trial created a job for him running sporting activities for children in his community.

Jadewyn was nominated to join a 'Youth Round Table' advising how governments can better engage with youth in Central Australia, he has been offered opportunities with Basketball NT, and is now employed directly by a local college as a house parent, guiding and supporting the young boys boarding there.

A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia

The NIAA will continue to lead the implementation of the Commonwealth's plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia* (Central Australia Plan).

Since my last update in February, we have seen some improvements in community safety. For the first quarter of 2024, police activity related to property offences was down by 18 per cent compared to the same period in 2023.

However, crime and anti-social behaviour are still at unacceptably high levels. Addressing these issues and improving community and family safety remains a key priority. We will continue to support local decision-making with communities, and throughout the remainder of 2024 this approach will be applied through projects including:

- \$18 million over 2 years for a capital works fund to build new and improve existing boarding school facilities for First Nations students from remote communities.
- \$30 million allocated for a Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership, which will fund regional planning and delivery approaches to address family and community safety needs. This project, being managed by the Department of Social Services, will see communities guide the responses to family and domestic violence that will be implemented.
- \$30.2 million to support Remote Training Hubs in up to 7 remote locations in Central Australia to provide community-identified skills and training opportunities. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is working with communities and the NT Government to deliver two hubs in Ntaria and Yuendumu to provide the skills training that communities have identified as being needed for real jobs.

Maintaining Critical Services for Remote First Nations Communities in the NT

Maintaining critical services for remote First Nations communities in the NT will continue to be a priority over the coming year. We will invest \$111.1 million to improve the delivery of essential services under the National Partnership on NT Remote Aboriginal Investment.

This investment directly funds over 570 jobs, including more than 278 First Nations jobs in early learning, family support and education. This funding is critical to improving health, education and community safety outcomes.

SES100

As part of the Government's Boosting First Nations Employment initiative, the NIAA is leading, with the Australian Public Service Commission as a co-sponsor, to deliver the SES100 initiative.

SES100 aims to boost First Nations representation in senior leadership positions across the Australian Public Service (APS) to 100 positions by the end of June 2025. The first of 2 planned recruitment processes has been conducted resulting in a merit pool of high-quality individuals. The NIAA has placed 3 First Nations people in SES roles, with a further 10 appointed across the broader Public Service. Two years ago there were 44 First Nations SES in the APS, now we have around 80.

Other notable priorities the NIAA will be implementing over the coming year include:

- The Youpla Support Program, which will commence on 1 July 2024 to provide a resolution for people impacted by the collapse of the funeral insurance provider Youpla.
- The APS-wide Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data, which was endorsed by the Secretaries Digital and Data Committee and published on 26 May 2024. The Framework will support the commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination by improving the accessibility, relevance, interpretability and timeliness of government-held data.
- The Indigenous Rangers Program Expansion Round One grant opportunity, which closed on 26 February 2024. This initial grant round is the first step to doubling the number of Indigenous rangers to 3,800 by 2030. Over 250 applications were received and are currently under assessment. This round will fund up to 1,000 new full-time, part-time and casual positions.

Based on the program you have asked for today, I'm really excited to see a large group of First Nations leaders coming up to the table including young leaders that are our future.

I welcome your questions.