**Senate Estimates 17 February 2023**

**National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun**

**Opening Statement**

Good afternoon Chair and Senators.

Wanthiwa *[For Hansard: Yindjibarndi for hello]*

I wish to begin by acknowledging the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples and Traditional Owners across the country. I pay my respect to the Elders past and present.

I would also like to extend my respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senators and witnesses appearing today.

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

Firstly, I would like to inform the committee of future changes to our senior executive.

In March this year, Ms Letitia Hope will commence a new role as Deputy Secretary, Families and Communities in the Department of Social Services and Mr Sam Jeffries will retire from the APS. I would like to thank both of these officers for their extensive contributions to the communities, NIAA and this committee.

I would also like to congratulate Ms Julie-Ann Guivarra, a proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman, along with Mr James Christian, a proud Wiradjuri man on their recent promotions to the Deputy CEO roles within the Agency. Mr James Christian will start on the 6 March 2023.

The start of this week marked the 15th Anniversary of the National Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples. As the daughter of a member from the Stolen Generations, this time of year is deeply personal and provides an opportunity to reflect on both how far we’ve come, and how far we have to go.

I am pleased that the National Indigenous Australians Agency has such a central role and continues to administer the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme which provides recognition for survivors in the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory, prior to their respective self-government, or the Jervis Bay Territory.

Officers would be happy to provide details throughout the committee hearing on how this Scheme is going, which opened for applications on the 1 March 2022.

This week was also the release of this Government’s first Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. This whole-of-government plan outlines the Commonwealth’s strategic priorities and efforts to close the gap over the next 12 to 18 months, outlining specific and tangible actions to improve life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I will continue to work with my Secretary colleagues across the Commonwealth on this plan.

A package of $424 million announced in conjunction with the plan will be designed and delivered in line with Priority Reforms and through engagement and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.

The NIAA also continues to play a supportive role in implementing the Government’s policy to hold a referendum on an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice later this year.

This role includes supporting the Minister for Indigenous Australians and Special Envoy for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart in their leadership roles.

As part of that, the Agency supports the Referendum Working Group, Referendum Engagement Group and Constitutional Expert Group as they meet and continue their deliberations and provide advice to the Government ahead of the referendum.

NIAA will also continue to work across the public service, through a range of fora, to provide coordinated advice and support on matters related to the Voice and referendum. It is important to remind public servants on their role in being impartial throughout this process and we need to support our staff in providing accurate advice.

Alongside these strategic priorities, the Agency has also responded to urgent challenges, including the floods in the Kimberley and more recently the challenges facing Alice Springs and the Central Australian region.

These responses highlighted the benefit of our regional footprint, the strong relationships our teams have developed and our ability to quickly activate teams to provide support on the ground when and where it is needed.

Over the last few months, NIAA has supported communities by working with the National Emergency Management Agency and the WA State Government, led by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, to connect to remote Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Connecting Commonwealth and State agencies to key local community members and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services was critical in the response process and NIAA’s longstanding local presence in Derby with outreach to Fitzroy Crossing provided a foundation for this engagement.

NIAA will continue to support the communities of the Kimberley through recovery.

In the Central Australian region, the NIAA have been assisting the community in Alice Springs and the surrounding areas by providing additional staff to support implementation of delivery to the Government’s recent commitments.

This includes the commitment of $48.8 million to improve community safety, and an additional $250 million to provide a priority response through a Central Australian Plan. The Commonwealth is working closely with communities, service providers and the Northern Territory Government to ensure solutions are made in partnership with the local community. The NIAA is taking the lead on this work on behalf of the Commonwealth, and I will continue to work with my colleagues to deliver cross-agency solutions that work for people on the ground.

To support this response, we have staff in the recently established Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller. Together, our staff have already commenced discussions with community members and providers and we expect to settle a broader consultation plan in the coming weeks. As the Prime Minister has announced, it is really important that these packages are community led.

In referring to both of these events, I’d like to formally acknowledge the efforts of NIAA staff in our regions. Responding to issues like these are never easy and I am mindful that many of those involved are often directly impacted or had their families impacted by those circumstances.

Since the last committee, I’ve travelled to Tasmania, Brisbane, Rockhampton, Woorabinda, Yuendumu, and two trips to Alice Springs on separate occasions. I have been extremely fortunate to visit each state and territory during my time as the CEO to meet with various providers, connect with communities and work with our wonderful staff.

I thank the Committee and welcome your questions.