

Senate Estimates 21 March 2023
National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun
Opening Statement

Good evening 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 and would like to formally acknowledge the recent passing of Ngunnawal Elder, Aunty Agnes Shea who was well known to the Canberra community.

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.

Today is Harmony Day and a good reminder to all of us of how important it is to celebrate and recognise the benefits diversity brings to Australia and for individuals to have a sense of belonging.

I am proud to inform the committee of changes to our senior executive that I did flag at the last hearing in February, but note they are now in place.

Mr James Christian PSM has started with the Agency in the role of Deputy CEO, Operations and Delivery and Ms Julie-Ann Guivarra is in the role of Deputy CEO, Policy and Programs – bringing First Nations representation to the forefront of our senior leadership team.

I welcome them both and will table our latest organisational chart.

Since the last appearance, I have travelled to Alice Springs again with officials from Commonwealth Departments including the Secretaries of the Attorney-General's Department, Department of Health, Services Australia, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Department of Infrastructure. Bringing Senior decision makers together ensures that they can take the authority and action in their respective departments and enhance policy making as well as reinforcing their obligations under the priority reforms of the Closing the Gap Agreement. This visit facilitated valuable conversations through meetings with the Northern Territory Government, the Central Australian Regional Controller, Ms Dorrelle Anderson, service providers and most importantly community members. It also allowed people across Government to better understand the issues in Alice Springs and surrounding communities and see what working in partnership with First Nations people looks like.

The NIAA will continue to work in partnership with First Nations communities to implement the Government's Central Australian response which currently consists of a \$48.8 million to improve community safety and \$250 million towards a plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*.

Alongside this, the NIAA continues to work closely with the Central Australian Regional Controller to ensure the \$250 million investment announced by the Government includes the views of First Nations communities in the Central Australian region.

Over the past six weeks, the Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller has been consulting with a broad range of community members, non-Government organisations, Aboriginal organisations and service providers and the NIAA is participating in these engagements. There have been over 80 engagements and a number of remote communities visited.

The Agency also continues to build ongoing relationships with other state and territory counterparts to assist with responses to immediate challenges.

This had been made evident by the floods in Western Australia which have recently expanded into the Northern Territory and Queensland. The NIAA continues to play a critical role – connecting Commonwealth and State agencies to key local community members and Aboriginal Community Controlled Services. We have been able to support this more effectively thanks to our established networks in regional communities, who continue to provide on-the-ground support, including monitoring the emergency response and remaining in contact with affected First Nations communities and residents.

Looking forward, we are preparing for the forthcoming referendum on recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution through a Voice and working across the APS to coordinate and support government processes.

The Referendum Working Group continues to consider their advice to Government on the Constitution Alteration Bill, including on the wording of the change to the Constitution and the question on the ballot paper and the Referendum Engagement Group has continued their discussions on how to engage with the community on the referendum process. The Government is continuing to work closely with both groups on the path forward to the referendum and the NIAA will continue to support implementation of this important work.

As we move closer to the referendum, we continue to work with the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) to provide coordinated advice and support across the public service and reminding public servants on their role in being impartial throughout this process. Advice has recently been provided to the

APS via the APSC Commissioner on this very topic. My recent comments to ANZSOG were entirely consistent with this advice. NIAA will continue to support government policy of providing factual information on the role of the Voice.

In the coming months, the Government will deliver a fact-based civics awareness program to raise awareness about the Constitution and referendum proposal to ensure Australians have the facts to make an informed decision. The NIAA will co-ordinate delivery of this program.

I thank the Committee and welcome your questions.