



**Zachariah Matysek**  
**Ag Chief Executive Officer**  
**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association**

**Senate Standing Committees on Economics**  
**PO Box 6100**  
**Parliament House**  
**Canberra ACT 2600**

**Subject: Submission to Inquiry into a National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024**

Dear Committee members,

I am writing to you today with a profound sense of urgency and responsibility.

As the Ag Chief Executive Officer of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA), I have witnessed firsthand the systemic challenges and persistent inequities faced by our Indigenous communities in the realm of housing and homelessness.

The enclosed position statement articulates a compelling case for the development and implementation of a distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan. This document is not merely a policy recommendation; it is a call to action grounded in the lived experiences of our people and backed by the expertise of NATSIHA. The historical context, inefficiencies in resource allocation, and the pressing need for a culturally informed approach demand immediate and decisive action.

Our position statement outlines key elements of a strategic approach, emphasising the need for increased funding, community-led solutions, capacity building, partnerships, and rigorous monitoring and accountability. These principles are essential for achieving equitable and adequate housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For over 65 years, conventional policies and administrative frameworks have failed to close the housing gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The persistent disparities in housing outcomes reflect deep-seated systemic issues that can no longer be ignored. Our communities deserve a strategy that prioritises their unique needs and rights, and that is driven by those who possess the cultural understanding and community trust necessary to effect meaningful change.

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 provides a crucial opportunity to reshape the future of housing policy in Australia. By adopting a human rights-based approach, ensuring collaborative development, and establishing independent oversight, this legislative framework can pave the way for substantial improvements in governance, accountability, and outcomes. Moreover, the bill must explicitly recognise international standards, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to uphold our commitment to the rights of all Australians, especially our most vulnerable.

The time for a new approach is now. I urge you to accept the enclosed position statement with the gravity it warrants and to join us in advocating for a housing strategy that truly addresses the needs of our communities. Together, we can create lasting positive change and work towards a future where every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person has access to safe, adequate, and culturally appropriate housing.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I look forward to your support and collaboration.

**Yours sincerely,**



**Zachariah Matysek**  
**Ag Chief Executive Officer**  
**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA)**



### Recommendations In Summary:

**Recommendation 1: For the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) into the NHHP, noting the ICESCR was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966. Article 11 of this covenant specifically imposes obligations on state parties, including Australia, to ensure the realisation of the right to adequate housing.**

**Recommendation 2: For the adoption the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into the NHHP. This comprehensive declaration outlines the rights of Indigenous peoples globally, including the right to enjoy their own housing and land in a manner that is culturally appropriate and consistent with their traditional practices.**

**Recommendation 3: Commission the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association to develop a comprehensive National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan in collaboration with communities nationwide. It is recommended that all levels of government endorse and implement this plan.**

### Position Statement:

There is a critical and urgent need for a distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan. The ongoing housing and homelessness crisis among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a deeply rooted issue, entrenched in decades of systemic inequality and policy failures. To effectively address these substantial disparities, it is imperative that a dedicated, Indigenous-specific plan is developed and endorsed. Such a plan must transcend the limitations of existing frameworks, recognising the unique cultural, social, and economic contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This plan must be spearheaded by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA), an organisation that stands as the National Peak for Housing, Homelessness, and Enabling Infrastructure. NATSIHA's leadership is paramount, as it brings unparalleled expertise, cultural competence, and a profound understanding of the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As the Co-chair of the National Housing Policy Partnership, NATSIHA is uniquely positioned to lead this initiative, ensuring that the development and implementation of housing policies are directly informed by those most affected.

The proposed plan must encompass a comprehensive and culturally responsive approach to housing and homelessness. It should address the specific needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, integrating their voices and perspectives at every stage of the process. This includes extensive consultation with community leaders, Elders, and other key stakeholders to ensure that the plan is deeply rooted in cultural knowledge and respects traditional practices.

Moreover, the plan should outline clear objectives and measurable outcomes, focusing on significantly improving housing affordability, quality, and accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It must prioritise long-term, sustainable solutions that not only address immediate housing needs but also contribute to the overall well-being and self-determination of Indigenous communities.

The implementation of this plan requires a firm commitment to substantial and sustained investment in Indigenous housing programs. Adequate funding is essential to support the construction,



maintenance, and management of culturally appropriate housing. Additionally, the plan must include robust strategies for harnessing the existing strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver these programs, fostering long-term economic opportunities and local employment.

In summary, the development of a distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing and Homelessness Plan is a matter of urgent necessity. By placing NATSIHA at the forefront of this initiative, we can ensure that the unique needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are prioritised and addressed. This dedicated approach promises to create lasting positive change, close the housing gap, and achieve true equity in housing for all Indigenous Australians.

### **Historical Context**

For over 65 years, policies and public administration have consistently failed to close the housing gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The persistent disparities in housing outcomes reflect systemic issues that cannot be rectified by the current approach. The time has come for a completely new strategy that can only be effectively led by NATSIHA in partnership with our Indigenous networks nationally, to ensure that the unique needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are prioritised and addressed.

The historical context of housing policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is marked by a series of missteps and inadequacies. Despite numerous governmental initiatives and programs, the housing gap has not only persisted but, in some cases, widened. The root causes of these disparities are deeply embedded in the systemic inequities and discriminatory practices that have characterised public administration for decades. Efforts to address housing issues have often been piecemeal, short-term, and lacking in cultural sensitivity, leading to outcomes that do not align with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the lack of genuine engagement and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the policy-making process has resulted in solutions that are not only ineffective but also, at times, detrimental. The failure to incorporate Indigenous voices and perspectives has meant that housing policies have been out of touch with the realities on the ground, further entrenching disadvantage.

The systemic nature of these issues requires a fundamental shift in approach. Incremental changes within the existing frameworks have proven insufficient. What is needed is a bold, innovative strategy that places Indigenous leadership at its core. NATSIHA, with its deep cultural understanding and established trust within Indigenous communities, is uniquely positioned to spearhead this new approach. By working in close partnership with Indigenous networks across the nation, NATSIHA can ensure that housing policies are not only responsive to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but also empower these communities to take control of their own housing futures.

This new strategy must go beyond addressing immediate housing needs. It should aim to dismantle the systemic barriers that have perpetuated housing inequities and work towards long-term, sustainable solutions. This involves recognising and respecting the traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and governance structures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It also means securing adequate and sustained investment in Indigenous-led housing initiatives, fostering economic opportunities, and building capacity within these communities to manage and maintain their housing stock.

The historical context of housing policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a testament to the urgent need for a radical transformation in approach. The persistent housing disparities reflect deep-seated systemic issues that cannot be remedied by minor adjustments within the current system. A completely new strategy, led by NATSIHA in collaboration with our national Indigenous networks, is imperative to ensure that the unique needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are finally prioritised and addressed.

### **Resource Allocation and Efficiency**

The existing complex and expensive governmental machinery continue to significantly hinder the effective use of public funds. As highlighted by Professor Peter Yu of the Australian National University, only 30 cents of every dollar reaches the ground when services are delivered through the government. In contrast, a sector-led model led by NATSIHA would ensure that a significantly larger portion of funds would directly benefit the communities in desperate need. This approach promises far greater public value for money, it is a more culturally responsive service delivery, and it will have a focus on the development of local sustainable industries, economic participation and job creation.

The inefficiency of the current governmental system in managing and distributing resources for housing and homelessness services is a critical concern. Bureaucratic layers, administrative costs, and a lack of targeted strategies have resulted in a significant portion of allocated funds being absorbed before they can reach the intended beneficiaries. This inefficiency not only wastes valuable resources but also undermines the effectiveness of the programs designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Moreover, the centralised nature of government service delivery often fails to account for the unique cultural and local contexts of Indigenous communities. Standardised solutions that do not consider these factors lead to suboptimal outcomes and further entrench disparities. The inability of government systems to adapt to the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples highlights the need for a fundamentally different approach.

A sector-led model, driven by NATSIHA, offers a promising alternative. NATSIHA's deep-rooted connections within Indigenous communities and its understanding of their unique needs and aspirations enable it to design and implement more effective and culturally appropriate programs. By reducing bureaucratic overheads and focusing resources directly on community needs, NATSIHA can ensure that a significantly higher proportion of funds reach the ground, where they are most needed.

This model also promotes greater public value for money. By streamlining processes and eliminating unnecessary administrative costs, more funds can be directed towards tangible outcomes, such as the construction of housing, maintenance of infrastructure, and provision of essential services. This ensures that the financial investments made are translated into real, impactful improvements in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Furthermore, a NATSIHA-led approach fosters the development of local sustainable industries. By empowering Indigenous communities to take control of housing projects, it encourages the growth of local economies and the creation of job opportunities. This not only addresses immediate housing needs but also contributes to long-term economic development and self-sufficiency. Local industries can provide ongoing maintenance and support services, ensuring the sustainability of housing solutions and the continued well-being of the community.

The inefficiencies and inadequacies of the existing governmental machinery necessitate a shift towards a sector-led model for resource allocation and service delivery. NATSIHA, with its expertise and community trust, is ideally positioned to lead this change. By ensuring that a larger portion of funds directly benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this approach promises greater public value for money, more culturally responsive service delivery, and the development of local sustainable industries. Such a strategy not only addresses immediate housing and homelessness issues but also lays the foundation for long-term community empowerment and economic growth.

### **NATSIHA's Leadership Role**

NATSIHA, in its role as the National Peak for Housing and Homelessness and as the Co-chair of the National Housing Policy Partnership, possesses unparalleled expertise, deep cultural understanding, and a profound level of community trust that are essential for leading this initiative. As the recognised national peak body, NATSIHA is uniquely positioned to spearhead a transformative approach to addressing housing and homelessness issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

By placing NATSIHA at the forefront of this initiative, we can ensure that the development, implementation, and administration of housing programs are directly informed by those who are most affected and possess the lived experiences necessary to guide effective and meaningful solutions. NATSIHA's leadership guarantees that these programs are not only designed with a keen awareness of the specific needs and challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but are also executed with cultural sensitivity and respect.

NATSIHA's role encompasses more than just oversight; it involves a deep engagement with communities to understand their unique contexts and requirements. This engagement ensures that housing strategies are tailored to reflect the diverse and complex realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By integrating Indigenous perspectives at every stage of the process, NATSIHA can address issues that are often overlooked by traditional systems, such as the importance of cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and local governance structures.

Moreover, NATSIHA's leadership fosters an environment of collaboration and empowerment. By working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, NATSIHA not only promotes a more inclusive approach but also builds trust and strengthens relationships between stakeholders. This collaborative model enhances the effectiveness of housing programs by ensuring that they are developed and delivered in partnership with those who have a vested interest in their success.

In addition to its cultural and community expertise, NATSIHA brings a wealth of experience in managing complex housing and homelessness initiatives. This experience enables NATSIHA to navigate the challenges and intricacies of program implementation while maintaining a focus on achieving tangible and sustainable outcomes. The organisation's proven track record in advocacy and policy development positions it as a leader capable of driving significant improvements in housing conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NATSIHA's leadership role is critical to the success of any new housing and homelessness initiatives. By placing NATSIHA at the helm, we ensure that housing programs are shaped by those who understand the needs and realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of these programs but also ensures that they are culturally appropriate, community-driven, and capable of delivering real, lasting change



## Adopting International Standards

The bill should explicitly call for the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966. Article 11 of this covenant specifically imposes obligations on state parties, including Australia, to ensure the realisation of the right to adequate housing. This international standard establishes a clear framework for ensuring that all individuals, including those from marginalised groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have access to adequate housing that meets their needs and supports their well-being.

By incorporating the ICESCR into domestic legislation, the bill will align Australian housing policy with global human rights standards, reinforcing the commitment to uphold the economic, social, and cultural rights of all Australians. This adoption will not only enhance the legal foundation for housing rights but also provide a robust basis for advocating and enforcing the right to adequate housing within Australia.

In addition, the bill should fully adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This comprehensive declaration outlines the rights of Indigenous peoples globally, including the right to enjoy their own housing and land in a manner that is culturally appropriate and consistent with their traditional practices. Adopting UNDRIP in its entirety will ensure that housing policies are developed and implemented in a way that respects and incorporates the rights, cultures, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The inclusion of both the ICESCR and UNDRIP within the bill will signify a strong commitment to international human rights standards and demonstrate Australia's dedication to addressing housing inequalities. It will establish a legal and moral imperative for the government to prioritise the needs of Indigenous peoples in housing policy and to ensure that their rights are protected and upheld. By adopting these international standards, Australia will not only improve its domestic housing policies but also enhance its standing in the global community as a nation committed to human rights and social justice.

In summary, the bill's adoption of the ICESCR and UNDRIP is essential for aligning Australia's housing policies with internationally recognised human rights standards. This move will provide a solid foundation for ensuring the right to adequate housing for all, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and will reinforce Australia's commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of its Indigenous populations. In the absence of both Housing and Indigenous people being in the Australian Constitution adopting such covenants and declarations into domestic legislation is imperative.

## Strategic Approach

This strategic approach must include the following key elements:

1. **Increased Funding:** Allocate substantial, long-term funding directly to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing sector. This funding should be safeguarded from reallocation to other programs and must be sufficiently robust to address the chronic underfunding that has plagued housing for Indigenous communities for years. Ensuring that this funding is substantial and secure is critical to providing stable, lasting solutions to the housing crisis affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. **Community-led Solutions:** Direct funding towards community-led housing solutions that deeply respect and incorporate cultural practices, traditional knowledge, and local governance structures. It is essential to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to take the lead in designing, managing, and implementing housing projects. This empowerment ensures that housing solutions are tailored to meet the unique needs and aspirations of these communities, and that they reflect and preserve Indigenous cultural values and practices.
3. **Capacity Building:** Invest in comprehensive two-way capacity-building initiatives (government and community) that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in developing, managing, and sustaining housing projects. This investment should include extensive training and resources aimed at enhancing governance, financial management, and technical skills within all organisations. Strengthening the capacity of Indigenous-led organisations is crucial for the successful implementation and management of housing programs and for fostering long-term sustainability and self-determination.
4. **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Foster and strengthen partnerships between government agencies, non-government organisations, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Creating a coordinated and integrated approach to housing involves encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing among all stakeholders. By leveraging the combined resources, expertise, and perspectives of these diverse partners, we can develop more effective and comprehensive housing strategies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by Indigenous communities.
5. **Monitoring and Accountability:** Establish clear, robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation and impact of the housing strategy. It is vital to ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and utilisation of funds. Additionally, involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives (with equal authority as government) in the oversight process to provide a critical perspective and to ensure that the strategy is meeting its intended goals and making a meaningful difference in the communities it aims to serve.

---

**For Noting:**

**Legislative Framework:** We note the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024 outlines a comprehensive approach to improving governance and accountability in national housing policy. We note the key aspects including:

**Human Rights-Based Approach:** We note the bill mandates the development of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan that adheres to a human rights-based approach, ensuring that every individual in Australia has access to adequate housing.

**Collaborative Development:** We note the Bill requires a collaborative process involving expert advice to develop the Plan, ensuring that diverse perspectives and expertise inform its creation.

**Independent Oversight:** We note the establishment of the National Housing Consumer Council and the National Housing and Homelessness Advocate to provide independent monitoring and consumer perspectives, ensuring transparency and accountability.

**Specific Objectives:** We note the objectives include ensuring adequate housing for all, preventing and ending homelessness, improving housing affordability and quality, and



*involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in housing program development and administration.*

---

**Conclusion:**

We acknowledge and appreciate the thoughtfulness and efforts reflected in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024. The Bill outlines a comprehensive approach to improving governance and accountability in national housing policy, emphasising key aspects such as a human rights-based approach, collaborative development, independent oversight, and specific objectives aimed at ensuring adequate housing for all, preventing and ending homelessness, and improving housing affordability and quality.

However, it is critical to recognise that the current and historical systems and structures of government have consistently failed our communities. These entrenched ways of doing things have perpetuated significant disparities and inadequacies in housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The ongoing failure of these systems underscores the urgent need for a fundamentally new approach to addressing these issues.

We assert that the establishment of an independent National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Plan, led and owned by Indigenous communities, is the only viable solution to this critical issue. An Indigenous-led system ensures that housing policies and programs are developed and implemented in ways that genuinely reflect and respect the unique needs, rights, and cultural contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By placing leadership and ownership in the hands of those directly affected, we can ensure that the solutions are not only more effective but also more aligned with the values and aspirations of our communities.

A dedicated, Indigenous-led system, spearheaded by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA), promises to bring about meaningful and transformative change. NATSIHA's deep cultural understanding, extensive expertise, and profound community trust position it as the ideal leader for this initiative. Through a culturally informed and dedicated strategy, we can work towards closing the housing gap and achieving true equity in housing for all Indigenous Australians.

In conclusion, while we support the concept of the legislative framework proposed in the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Bill 2024, we emphasise the necessity of establishing an independent, Indigenous-led system to truly address the housing and homelessness crisis facing our communities. This new approach is essential to rectify the systemic failures of the past and present, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to adequate, culturally appropriate housing.