

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

National Indigenous Australians Agency CEO Opening Statement

13 May 2020

Good morning Chair and Senators.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia from where we all happen to be joining.

In Canberra, this is Ngoonawal Country.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Elders.

I also extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues present this morning.

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

The National Indigenous Australians Agency, like most of the Australian Public Service, has committed significant resources to help protect Australian lives and livelihoods.

We have been working closely with the Department of Health, State and Territory Governments, and many Indigenous organisations across the country to reduce the risk of an outbreak of coronavirus, particularly in remote Indigenous communities, and as far as practicable, limit the non-health impacts on Indigenous people and businesses.

We have used our national footprint to collect information, escalate identified issues, and coordinate across Departments, Agencies and jurisdictions to achieve the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Key to keeping the virus out of our remote communities has been the remote travel restrictions implemented by jurisdictions through the Biosecurity Act framework.

We've been working locally and nationally with store managers, wholesalers and suppliers, supermarkets, and state and territory governments to make sure essential supplies have continued.

There has been a consistent focus on the recovery phase by putting in place measures to support funded organisations, Indigenous communities and connect Indigenous business to the broader economic support mechanisms in place.

To support the broader Government effort, 62 staff members have been seconded to other Departments, primarily to Services Australia (as well as the Department of Health, Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, and Indigenous Business Australia), to help respond to the significant increase in Australians seeking essential services and support.

The collaborative effort across the Commonwealth, jurisdictions and key Indigenous stakeholders has been excellent and this spirit of cooperation continues today.

I thank the committee and welcome your questions.