



Submission to the Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians

With reference to: Item 2 of the Terms of reference

Impediments to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support economic prosperity in the long term, including barriers to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support industry and business to expand and create jobs.

We are a majority owned Indigenous business. We have been in operation since 2016. Our experience of the Indigenous business sector has been terrible. The only representative body is supply nation who treat us as nothing more than a product and have been spoken to with total lack of respect on a number of dealings with them. They are non-Indigenous, government funded and, as such, are an untouchable entity who are accountable to no one. Even when we've asked the NIAA for support, their position is that they are "an independent organisation, and the NIAA is not in a position to impose requests for remedial action".

The Indigenous Chambers of Commerce are grossly under funded and ineffective in supporting the sector.

The University of Melbourne's Indigenous Business Snapshot Study is heavily funded by Mining and Resources companies and the language and cherry-picking of statistics reflects a sector that is run by the vested interests of big non-Indigenous business. The whole thing is a façade. Its comparing data for millions of businesses (i.e. all registered businesses in Australia) to a completely inadequate dataset which is focused on the top end of the Indigenous business sector servicing the mining and resources sector. It's the same as supply nation used to come up with its stat that '[Across the five Certified Supplier businesses the SROI averaged \\$4.41 for every dollar of revenue](#)'. These reports with terrible data and comparisons are informing Government and other First Nations related decisions and it is irresponsible. As a software company we would be laughed out of town if we did benchmarking and public reports based on such miniscule and targeted (i.e. biased) data sources.

I mean, have a look at where they're trying to tell us the majority of Indigenous businesses are:

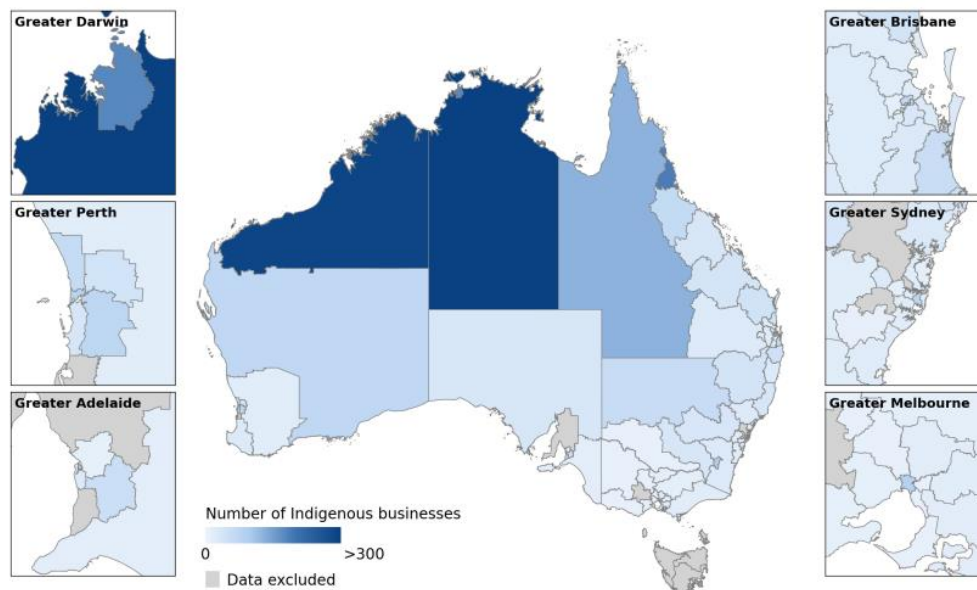


Figure 1 - Source: Indigenous Business Sector Snapshot 1.1

The IPP is a good concept but was never advanced to start providing opportunities for smaller businesses so they are great for the large, super rich Aboriginal businesses but there's nothing for the other 99% of Indigenous businesses.

The set asides are rarely if ever used by government agencies because of the amount of work they say is required to put it in place.

Until the Indigenous business sector, and reconciliation for that matter, are run by a properly funded Indigenous body (with adequate knowledge and experience of data analytics) that is accountable and transparent to the Indigenous business sector, it will continue to be a façade and remain 'untapped' and unsupported (apart from the ones already who are already substantially wealthy). This explains why we had Reconciliation for over 20 years and still failed in the referendum. Its all symbolic, box-ticking and focused on Government and big business looking like they're our white saviours while the reality is that we're struggling to survive.

I'm not saying that successful Indigenous businesses are not a good sign of progress but, until I see our Communities being able to stand on their feet and that, as some of the first real generations of Indigenous business owners, we are really demonstrating the reported \$4.41 of social return on investment, then the job is not done and its too soon and the wealth is not trickling down to Communities.

As someone with lived experience of growing up on an Aboriginal Mission, we were raised that the struggle and the fight continues until its done. The sacrifices our parents generation and theirs before them and before that made to achieve fair

treatment as a minimum for all our people and future generations cannot just be withered away because of the hidden agendas of these non-Indigenous organisations in cahoots with Government and big business.

We can see that its about not giving mob what they deserve for the illegitimacy of the claim to this Country) and treatment we've received since but, instead, throwing crumbs, providing no regulation or protection from greed and corruption, while churning out rubbish reports with pretty dot artwork on the cover – so everyone can grab these dodgy stats and statements to make themselves, their partners and, by extension, the world's eyes believe that its all going well and that they should pat themselves on the back.

This is not a problem with First Nations people or businesses, it is a problem with the lack of genuine intent and how that lack of genuine intent seeps into every nook and cranny and the money flows to everyone except the Communities. It is same old, same old – we are not fooled and anything that comes from this Inquiry will prove that this too is another example of reinforcing the façade. It looks more and more like the referendum wasn't a mistake but a carefully orchestrated 20+ year plan with reconciliation as the mechanism to throw enough symbolic gestures as possible into circulation and, while in reality, society and Community rots and leads to a genuine swing against First Nations people. Congrats on that.

This is the new era of stealth assimilation. Keep squeezing us, waiting for those with less Community lived experience or newly discovered Aboriginal heritage to swoop in with their self-focused western way rather than Community way and all the mob that need the most opportunities keep believing the façade is real and have horrible experiences that do not provide great examples to any of their Communities to want to aspire too because its not worth it and it drains your soul. Just look at the increases in suicide for our mob vs the rest.

But keep going down this path, soon you'll have it as you want:

- All mob will act just like everyone else,
- the dot artwork will look pretty but have no soul,
- mob will continue to be your hole diggers, artists & entertainers, and of course RAP consultants,
- it will always be a great political weapon when you need to stir up the hate machine, and
- Culture will be gone.

Shame!