



## **Australian Government**

Australian Government response to the  
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit Report  
No. 437

*Review of the Auditor General's Reports  
Nos. 2 to 10 (2012-2013)*

MAY 2014

## *Response to the Recommendations*

### **Recommendation No. 1**

The Committee recommends that the Government examine options and take action to improve Indigenous representation and involvement in decision-making processes in relation to Indigenous service delivery, including the possibilities of a high-level agreement between the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and Executive Government and for the Congress to be consulted during Council of Australian Governments processes on Indigenous issues.

### **Response**

Supported in part

The Recommendation is consistent with the Government's current commitment to improve Indigenous representation and involvement in decision-making processes in relation to Indigenous service delivery.

The Government has established the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, chaired by Mr Warren Mundine. While the Advisory Council is not a representative body it brings a diversity of views and experience, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to the task of ensuring programmes achieve real, positive change in the lives of Indigenous people – changes that can increase participation, preserve Indigenous culture and build reconciliation.

The Advisory Council also supports the Government's strong commitment to turning around the gross disadvantage suffered by Indigenous Australians in fundamental areas of life: that is, school attendance, jobs and safe communities.

The Government is also developing the Empowered Communities model proposed by the Jawun Indigenous Leadership Group which is part of Jawun Corporate Partnerships. This is a non-government organisation that places secondees from over 20 of Australia's leading companies and government agencies to work with Indigenous organisations.

In addition, the Government is going to engage in consultations with Indigenous communities in advancing the Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians.

The Government does not support an agreement with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples for it to be consulted during Council of Australian Governments processes on Indigenous issues. The National Congress is an independent body and not an advisory body to government. The National Congress has a role to play in representing Indigenous Australians and the Government will continue to engage with them in a constructive way. It currently represents around 8,000 members nationally.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that the Prime Minister request the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to undertake a review of leadership and collaboration arrangements in Indigenous affairs for Cabinet consideration; and that the review investigates options for strengthening the authority of the lead agency to better drive changes across departments.

### **Response**

Supported

This recommendation has been addressed by machinery of government changes made by the Government following the September 2013 election.

The Government is consolidating Indigenous policies, programmes and service delivery into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) with the aim of streamlining arrangements, reducing red tape and prioritising expenditure to achieve practical outcomes on the ground.

- The transfer will address some of the structural and logistical problems faced when Indigenous programmes and services are delivered through multiple agencies.
- The bulk of Australian Government staff involved in delivering Indigenous programmes and services in regional and remote locations throughout Australia will remain in their locations but will come together as PM&C staff members.
- PM&C will use its lead agency role to ensure mainstream programmes and services continue to focus on Indigenous Australians and to drive coordination among all Commonwealth Government agencies.

Government initiatives that will strengthen leadership and collaborations in Indigenous affairs include the establishment of:

- A dedicated Indigenous Affairs Minister in Cabinet.
- The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council. The Council will meet three times a year with the Prime Minister and senior ministers and will inform the policy implementation of the Government.

**Recommendation No. 5**

The Committee recommends that FaHCSIA lead the development of an explicit whole-of-government strategy for capacity development in order to provide guidance across departments on the Government's role in supporting capacity development in Indigenous organisations. The strategy should take into account both internal and external influences on the capacity of organisations, and also provide guidance on building the capacity of government agencies working with Indigenous organisations.

**Response*****Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet*****Supported**

The consolidation of Indigenous policy and programmes in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet presents an opportunity to strengthen whole-of-government approaches to capacity building of both Indigenous organisations and government agencies. The Government is considering approaches to strengthen the governance and capacity of Indigenous organisations to reduce the risk of corporate failure and support effective delivery.

***Australian Public Service Commission***

The Australian Public Service Commission supports this recommendation.

The Commission has a role in leading and shaping a unified, high performing Australian Public Service (APS), consistent with its statutory responsibilities under the *Public Service Act 1999*. This includes supporting APS agencies in leadership development, building organisational capability and supporting a diverse workforce. The Commission is responsible for progressing activities that are designed to build the capability of APS employees and agencies in engaging with Indigenous communities and working with, and for, Indigenous Australians. These activities include the following programmes and strategies:

- A whole-of-APS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework (the Framework), currently in development, will establish a benchmark of Indigenous cultural capability for APS employees, managers, leaders and organisations. In addition, the Framework aims to increase employees' understanding, knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous culture—both historic and contemporary—and grow the capabilities required for respectful, constructive engagement with Indigenous Australians and communities.
- The Jawun Indigenous Community Secondment Programme (Jawun) is managed by the Commission on behalf of the APS. Jawun provides APS employees with secondments to work in a range of Indigenous organisations within communities (both urban and remote) across Australia. The programme commenced in 2012, and since its inception a total of 94 APS employees from 22 agencies have undertaken secondments to Indigenous organisations.

- The APS Leadership and Core Skills Strategy (currently being implemented) identifies the foundation, core, and management skills and leadership capabilities where there are existing skill gaps or opportunities to develop capability for the future. Strengthening the skills and capabilities of APS employees within this framework, in connection with Indigenous specific programmes, will have a positive impact on the services being delivered to Indigenous communities.

In addition, in 2012, the senior leadership group of the APS—the Secretaries Board—established the APS Diversity Council, chaired by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and comprising agency heads from nine APS departments and agencies. The Council provides leadership across the APS on workforce diversity issues, and has a dual focus on the employment of Indigenous Australians and people with disability. The Diversity Council’s work in enhancing the capacity of APS agencies to support a strong, high performing Indigenous workforce will improve the APS’s ability to constructively engage and work with Indigenous Australians and communities.

