



Understanding the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls

a joint project with the Australian Human Rights Commission

CONTEXT

The Australian Government is committed to understanding the issues facing both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men to ensure they have the best chance to achieve their full potential.

Recognising the critical needs of women and girls, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs has commissioned the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Ms June Oscar AO and her team of staff at the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission), to work with Government to give voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' perspectives on the critical factors impacting on their security and success.

Commissioner Oscar, a proud Bunuba woman from Fitzroy Crossing, is the first female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. Ms Oscar is a strong advocate for Indigenous languages, social justice, women's issues, and reducing the incidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

About Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) 'Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future'

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) 'Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future' project seeks to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls across the country through a strength-based consultation process to better understand the issues that have the potential to effect positive change in their personal security, socio-economic security and cultural security.

The Project will build on the 1986 *Women's Business* report, and reflect on the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls over the last 31 years, with the key objectives to:

- 1) Capture the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls with respect to their cultural, socio-economic and personal security, their key priorities, and the principles that they believe would contribute to long-lasting change.
- 2) Elevate the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls through a human-rights-based process which is accessible and relevant to their lived reality, and contributes to their empowerment.
- 3) Provide credible evidence and set out clear guidance for governments to improve their capacity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls as active citizens and positive change makers, and the best-practice considerations that need to be established throughout government policies and programs.

The Project proposes a human-rights based framework that incorporates a strength-based approach, drawing on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Reflecting these international frameworks, the project will be carried out in a manner consistent with the best interests of the children and young people, and its guiding principles will be:

- self-determination
- participation in decision-making and free, prior and informed consent
- non-discrimination and equality
- respect for and protection of culture.

Consultation and governance

The Commission will lead an extensive consultation process from December 2017 and over 2018. Face-to-face consultations will be led by Ms Oscar and her team across major cities and selected regional and remote locations. Consultations will seek to build connections with Indigenous women and girls and provide a safe forum for them to describe what is important to their cultural, socio-economic and personal security, along with their aspirations and perspectives on the empowerment of Indigenous women. A website, social media presence and online submissions process will also be established.

A project advisory group will work with Commissioner Oscar and her team and provide regular advice on the development of the project. This group will be made up of strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women representing important sectors such as government, justice, health, education, community development and business.

Findings will inform the development of a positive Government agenda to support the safety and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, and inform key policies and programmes such as the Closing the Gap refresh, future investment under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and development of the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*.

How you can get involved

The consultation process is part on the ongoing process to drive positive change for Indigenous women, girls and their families. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will work closely with Commonwealth agencies, and State and Territory Governments to ensure feedback received during the consultations is regularly provided to agencies help to inform policy and program development, and implementation priorities.

The Commission has noted that systemic change will not come about as a result of consultation and reporting in isolation. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has therefore proposed that, pending the availability of resources, this project will form the first phase of a longer process. Subsequent phases could potentially focus on capacity-building within communities, government departments and non-government organisations, and the development of community-centred and human rights-based partnership, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.