



The Hon Scott Morrison MP  
Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

## **PRIME MINISTER'S INDIGENOUS ADVISORY COUNCIL - ANNUAL REPORT - 2018**

In accordance with the requirement of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council's (the Council) Terms of Reference to report annually to the Government, via letter to the Prime Minister, the Council is pleased to submit its 2018 annual report.

The report provides an overview of the Council's activities, key areas of advice provided to the Commonwealth Government and the Council's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians for the period 1 December 2017 to 31 December 2018.

### *The Council's operation during 2018*

In 2017 the Council's members were getting to know one another, understanding how we each prefer to work and understanding each other's strengths, areas of expertise and interests. In 2018 we feel we have embedded our operating rhythm as a Council, and in addition to providing the Commonwealth Government with advice on a range of issues throughout the year, the Council has identified key areas of focus in which we believe we can make the most impact. These areas of focus have been incorporated into the Council's forward work plan and are identified under '2019 priorities' towards the end of this report.

Throughout 2018 the Council has continued to consider its advice to government through a strength-based, trauma informed and evidence based framework that includes the following elements:|

- Strengthening relationships;
- Using strengths-based approaches to policy development and service delivery;
- Enabling and embracing local leadership and decision-making ; and
- Developing better lines of accountability.

At the Council's meeting on 27-28 June 2018, Professor Chris Sarra resigned from his position as Co-Chair following his appointment to the position of Director-General of the Queensland Government Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. At this meeting, the former Prime Minister welcomed Mr Roy Ah-See as Co-Chair of the Council.



Following Professor Sarra's resignation, the Council has continued to operate with one less member, which has significantly increased members' workload. The Council put forward nominations to the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion's, Office in July. The Council recommends appointing additional members to facilitate more in-depth analysis of Indigenous policy. The Council also recommends appointing a youth member/s, and a member with expertise in the education field to compensate for loss of Professor Sarra's expertise in this field.

#### *The Council's relationship with the Indigenous Policy Committee of Cabinet*

The Council's working relationship with the Indigenous Policy Committee of Cabinet (IPC) has continued to evolve throughout 2018. The Council is working with the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) to explore ways in which the Council can further strengthen its engagement with the IPC, with a specific focus on optimising the value the Council can add to the IPC's deliberations.

#### *The Council's Achievements*

During 2018 the Council has formally met a total of six times. The Council has received briefings across the broad spectrum of Indigenous Affairs from PM&C, representatives from Commonwealth Departments and representatives from external agencies and organisations. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs has attended each of the Council's meetings, and the Council was delighted to meet with you at its October and December meetings.

At these meetings, Council has discussed and provided advice on reviews, policy development and implementation issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, including:

- Constitutional Recognition
- Closing the Gap Refresh
- Royal Commission into youth detention in the NT
- Amendments to the Native Title Act
- Immediate critical responses and long-term approaches to support communities in distress, including:
  - Community and child safety
  - Child development, wellbeing and early childhood
  - Youth through care
- Wiyi Yani Thangani (Women's Voices) Project
- Healing Foundation's Report to Government on the Contemporary Needs of the Stolen Generations
- Remote Indigenous housing
- Cashless Debit Card
- Indigenous Procurement Policy
- Indigenous Employer and Supplier Use Infrastructure Framework
- Employment services reform
- Indigenous Business Hubs
- Review of the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*



- Indigenous Education
- Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework
- Inauthentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander style products
- National Disability Insurance Scheme
- Indigenous Research Exchange

The Council's Co-Chairs met with the IPC twice during 2018, in January and April, to provide the Council's feedback on several items to be considered by the IPC. The Council looks forward to further strengthening its relationship with the IPC throughout 2019.

In addition to Council meetings, the Council has held three policy roundtables; Indigenous youth (February); Indigenous incarceration and early childhood development (May); and childhood development (October).

#### *Indigenous Governance Operating Rhythm*

Over the year, the Council has also come to understand the need for a deeper appreciation by policy makers of what we have come to call the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business and Governance Operating Rhythm. We have commenced work to explain what is meant by this approach which embraces both engagement and cultural considerations, so people in positions of influence can change policy settings and activate this approach in a meaningful way across programs.

We propose applying this framework to the Council's work throughout 2019.

#### *Constitutional Recognition*

On 17 September 2018, the Council submitted a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2018 (JSCCR). In the Council's submission to the JSCCR, we acknowledged the long and enduring tradition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in all its major forms including, representation; leadership; research and evaluation; and institutions that play a significant role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

The Council continues to encourage the Commonwealth Government to embrace the full strength and spirit of the recommendations contained within the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

There is an urgent need to future-proof our place in this Nation. The Council agrees that in regards to constitutional recognition, the Voice is not just a body, but a system that holds within it the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences. The national Voice should complement existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance operating rhythms and representative structures and, in doing so, release the Voice from bureaucratic burden.



### Closing the Gap Refresh

The Council has played a key role in providing advice to the Commonwealth Government on the approach to develop a balanced set of measures, indicators and strategies to support the refresh of the Closing the Gap targets and ongoing work on the Closing the Gap initiative.

On 8 February 2018 members of the Council attended the Closing the Gap Refresh Special Gathering of Prominent Indigenous Australians (Special Gathering) with the former Prime Minister and First Ministers. Members participated in several interactive sessions, including informing priorities for the Closing the Gap Refresh (the Refresh); and identifying actions, accountability and responsibility for key priorities. On 9 February 2018, former Co-Chair, Professor Chris Sarra (as a representative of the Special Gathering delegation) met with the Council of Australian Governments to present a statement on the refreshed Closing the Gap agenda.

Members of the Council were also in attendance for the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap Statement to Parliament on 12 February 2018.

Members of the Council have participated regularly in Refresh Design Team meetings to ensure the Council's advice on the Refresh is relayed to government representatives.

### National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The Council has discussed the employment and economic opportunities the NDIS presents to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and organisations into the future.

- The Council agrees that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Australians with disabilities should have representation at the highest executive levels in the NDIA and NDIS;
- Indigenous run organisations know best how to deliver services, however the cost of NDIS quality assurance is prohibitively expensive and this blocks both establishing and established Indigenous organisations delivering services;
- the issue for clients is that there are a lack of assessment services in regional and remote communities which leads to services not being delivered; and
- greater flexibility in pooling funding for groups of clients and in service delivery locations is required.



### *Consultation and Engagement*

The Council has engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and existing advocacy bodies, including the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, to ensure that the Commonwealth Government has access to a diversity of views. The Council's broader engagement has occurred through speaking engagements and attendance at conferences, forums and workshops conducted by representative and advocacy groups, peak bodies, academic and research institutions; through Council members' own professional and social networks; and through the media, including social media, print, television and radio.

The Council's Co-Chairs have met, via teleconference, with the Special Envoy for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Tony Abbott MP. Mr Abbott has agreed to engage regularly with the Council and put forward his ideas for increasing school attendance and performance to the Council for consideration, prior to furnishing you with his first report.

The Council's Co-Chairs collectively (including former Co-Chair, Professor Sarra) have participated in approximately 67 out-of-session meetings and engagements, including with Commonwealth Government departments and agencies, academics, community representative bodies and individuals. Other members of the Council have participated in at least 32 other out-of-session engagements, including meetings with State and Territory Ministers, during 2018.

From 1 December 2017 to 30 November 2018, approximately 105 items of correspondence were received by Council. Around 69 items were requests for meetings and invitations to forums, conferences and events. Of the approximately 69 invitations received by the Council, most related to cultural events or celebrations of significant anniversaries in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. Items raised in correspondence received from the Council related to community safety (28 percent), land and culture (eight percent), health and wellbeing (six percent), Closing the Gap Refresh (three percent), education (three percent), economic development (three percent). The remaining correspondence (50 percent) was of a general nature.

Three members of the Council attended the 2018 Garma Festival from 3-6 August 2018. Members attended alongside approximately 20 Senior Australian Public Service officials who attended the festival as part of a whole of government delegation. The Council acknowledges the positive opportunity this experience provided to enhance engagement across mainstream Commonwealth Departments.



*2019 priorities*

The Council's priorities for 2019 include:

- development of the Indigenous Governance Operating Rhythm;
- National Early Childhood Development Strategy
- Closing the Gap Refresh implementation plans;
- NDIS;
- Communities in distress;
- Jobactive 2020;
- Economic development; and
- Development of local solutions.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Commonwealth Government into the future so that we can make significant progress on initiatives to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

We commend the Council's report to you.

Yours sincerely

Ms Andrea Mason OAM  
Co-Chair

Mr Roy Ah-See  
Co-Chair

8 March 2019