

Senate Estimates Opening Address – 28 February 2025

National Indigenous Australians Agency, CEO, Ms Jody Broun

Good morning Chair and Senators

Wanthiwa [For Hansard: Yindjibarndi for hello]

I would like to start by acknowledging Country. I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today and acknowledge the Ngambri people and other families with connection to the lands of the ACT and surrounding region.

I extend my respect to Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and to First Nations Senators and witnesses appearing here today.

I would also like to acknowledge the recent anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, on 13 February 2025.

Before I provide an update on the work of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), I would like recognise NIAA staff for their continued commitment and efforts to improve outcomes for First Nations people. Half of the NIAA's workforce lives and works outside of Canberra, many in regional and remote Australia. Many of these staff have been personally impacted by recent significant weather events but have continued to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities also affected by these events. Our staff make a practical difference on the ground, every day. And I am very proud to lead this Agency.

I would like to highlight a few key achievements of the NIAA over the past 12 months.

- Improving access to suitable, appropriate and affordable housing is a key focus for the NIAA.
 - The Commonwealth and NT Governments have committed \$4 billion over 10 years from 2024-25 to build 2,700 new homes over 10 years and reduce overcrowding in remote NT communities; and we're on track to build 270 houses in 2024-25.
 - In 2023-24, 206 new houses were constructed in remote communities and Alice Springs town camps under the Commonwealth and NT remote housing funding agreement.
 - Indigenous Business Australia's Home Loan Capital fund has also been boosted to increase opportunities for First Nations people to buy their own home and build intergenerational wealth.
- The Commonwealth has committed \$2.2 billion to reform remote employment over two stages.
 - \$707 million is being invested in the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program to create 3,000 jobs over 3 years in remote communities; applications from the first grant round are being assessed and the second round has opened.
 - The second stage is an investment of \$1.5 billion over 4 years to deliver a new remote employment service. The new service will improve employment outcomes for job seekers in remote Australia, supporting people to gain skills, prepare for work and contribute to their community.
- We have been expanding the Indigenous Rangers Program. There will be 115 new ranger projects through Round One of the expansion, all with either dedicated women ranger groups or employing women rangers. There will also be new ranger groups on 19 Indigenous Protected Areas

that were previously without Commonwealth-funded Indigenous Rangers. There will be 84 ranger organisations new to the program. Projects undertaken by Indigenous rangers combine traditional knowledge, cultural practices and western science. Ranger activities will include:

- habitat and species management, rescue and rehabilitation
 - cultural burns and fire suppression
 - controlling weeds and feral animals
 - biosecurity monitoring
 - strengthening First Nations language and Culture, and
 - cultural heritage protection and maintenance; and visitor education.
- We ensured a \$193 million funding increase for family violence prevention and legal services under the National Access to Justice Partnership.

Closing the Gap

The NIAA continues to focus on tangible outcomes for First Nations peoples through Closing the Gap.

The Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Implementation Plan, tabled on 10 February 2025, shows substantial progress against commitments across multiple sectors during 2024. While more needs to be done, the Productivity Commission's November 2024 Dashboard reported that 10 of the 15 targets (with data available) are improving, noting some are not on track. We are working across governments and with peak organisations to make a real difference for First Nations communities.

This is illustrated by the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) Partnership Agreement, signed by the Commonwealth, Northern

Territory (NT) Government and the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) in Alice Springs earlier this month. All parties worked together to negotiate and agree the \$842.6 million package to continue the delivery of services for remote communities, including education, women's safety, policing and alcohol harm reduction. The agreement offers certainty for more than 570 jobs, including more than 278 jobs for First Nations people.

At Budget Estimates last year, I provided an update on the SES100 as part of the Government's Boosting First Nations Employment initiative. The recent 2024 Annual Report highlights that the SES100 has achieved the highest representation of First Nations SES ever seen in the Australian Public Service (APS). Prior to this initiative, at 30 June 2023 there were 54 First Nations SES employed – only 1.7 per cent of all SES in the APS. Currently there are an estimated 95 First Nations SES (approximately 2.9 per cent of all SES) and we are on track to meet our target of 100 First Nations SES.

Remote Employment

Since my update in November about the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, more than 200 applications have been received through the first RJED grant round, and the second grant round opened on 4 February. Eligible organisations can still apply for grants for wages and equipment to create new jobs in their community that the community want and need, and to hire local people.

These rounds build on the job trials that informed the design of the RJED program. Far West Coast Investments in South Australia was one of the organisations that received funding through one of the job trials to create four new Indigenous Land Management roles to help look after Country. All the new

employees said they want to be able to ‘read’ Country, to listen, look, smell, observe, follow tracks, and know what the trees and plants can do, and the bush medicine. One of the new employees is enjoying going to new places to work and being involved in community events like NAIDOC Week, Ceduna Oyster Festival and events at local schools. This is the impact a job can have – on an individual, a family, and a community.

The second stage of the Government’s remote employment reform is a new remote employment service. Funding and policy design for this was announced by the Government on 13 December 2024, with the service on track to commence this year. It will support people currently looking for work, or who may need help to become job-ready, to get the skills and resources they need to take up job opportunities – including those created through the RJED program. Together, RJED and the new remote employment service will replace the Community Development Program (CDP), although CDP services will continue in the interim to ensure there are no gaps in service delivery.

Like the CDP, both the RJED program and the new remote employment service are designed to support all job seekers in remote Australia and have been developed in partnership with remote communities to enhance their success. They will also contribute to broader Closing the Gap outcomes – specifically target 7 for better youth engagement in employment and target 8 for strong economic participation in communities.

National Food Security

The NIAA has led the development of major new initiatives to improve food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Government recently announced the implementation of a scheme to align the prices of up to 30 core essential products to suburban supermarkets and

fund a nutrition workforce to promote better nutrition and assist people to make healthy food choices. The NIAA will maintain a leadership role across government and the community-controlled sector developing this and other initiatives in readiness for implementation from 1 July 2025.

Central Australia

The NIAA continues to lead the implementation of the Commonwealth's plan for *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*. Since my last update in November, we are delivering a \$3.2 million investment to support school holiday activities in Central Australia over the next 2 years.

Over the recent summer holidays, more than 24,000 children, young people and their families joined in over 1,400 activities across 26 Central Australian communities, including Atitjere (a-DITCH-air-uh) and Ltyentye Apurte (L-Ginger-Porter). Young people were given the opportunity to learn new skills and stay active, with families coming together to share in the fun.

In Alice Springs, some of the most popular activities were tenpin bowling, roller skating, laser tag and cinema screenings. In remote communities, young people and their families enjoyed dodgeball, bush trips, arts and crafts, music and cooking workshops.

This funding has allowed the delivery of programs and activities that give young people and their families the opportunity to learn, grow, and have fun in safe environment.

Looking ahead

Our focus over the coming months will be to continue working across governments and with First Nations stakeholders to deliver the important policies and programs that are making a difference to First Nations people, with

a particular focus on implementation and delivery of critical services across Australia.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.