

## OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you for the opportunity to make a short opening statement at this stage of the Estimates hearing.

I would like to take the opportunity to provide a short update for the Committee on a number of important matters that have been progressed in the Indigenous Affairs portfolio and I look forward to discussing these and other issues with you.

Since the last Estimates hearing in May, the Government has worked in partnership with Indigenous Australians across the country on a number of significant initiatives and delivered better opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

I have attended the National Native Title Conference in Broome where, in a forum that Senator Dodson also presented at, I announced a new suite of measures that will ensure our native title funding program will deliver native title holders the best pathway to success including funding to support the development of Prescribed Bodies Corporate best use their native title to pursue their own aspirations including economic development.

The Coalition Government recognises that economic development must be at the heart of our work with native title holders and other Indigenous land holders going forward.

In this theme, I am also pleased to be delivering on our commitment to ensure the long term sustainability of our commitment to Indigenous owned land through reforms to the operation of the Indigenous Land Account which funds the Indigenous Land Corporation.

Yesterday, legislation to reform the Indigenous Land Corporation and the Indigenous Land Account passed the House of Representatives that transfers management of the Land Account to the Future Fund and allows the Indigenous Land Corporation to rightfully invest and support activities on fresh and salt water country.

**Senate F&PA Committee**  
Tabled Document

Inquiry: Supplementary Estimates

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Witness Name: Senator The Hon Nigel Scullion

Organisation: Dept. of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

I want to thank the Opposition, particularly Senator Dodson for working in partnership with me to deliver this outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have made some very significant announcements about our support for the Indigenous business sector over the last five months.

We have announced that we are trialling four Community Development Program Business Incubators that will help remote jobseekers turn CDP activities into small businesses.

The first CDP Business Incubator provider would be the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation who will provide business support to CDP participants to help turn CDP activities into sustainable businesses.

We are also ramping up access to microbusiness support and microfinance loans for Indigenous Australians in regional and remote Australia through a \$21 million investment, through Many Rivers Finance.

Initiatives like this build on the success of the Indigenous Procurement Policy. Since it began in July 2015, over 1000 Indigenous businesses have won over \$1.084 billion of contracts, up from the just 30 Indigenous businesses who were winning \$6.2 million of Commonwealth contracts in 2012-13.

I am also pleased to report that we have released this week the report into the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

The Review, which was undertaken because of a conversation I had with Senator Dodson after one Estimates, found 78 per cent of the 339 recommendations have been fully or mostly implemented across all levels of government.

At a Commonwealth level, 91 per cent of the recommendations have been fully or mostly implemented.

However, it is disappointing that despite the review's finding that significant progress has been made in implementing the recommendations, Indigenous people are still over-represented in prisons.

The review also recognises that the vast majority of policy levers that impact on Indigenous incarceration rates remain within the remit of the states and territories therefore we need to continue to work in partnership with all state and territory jurisdictions if we are to achieve meaningful and long term improvements.

One example of this is why we are continuing to encourage and plead with state and territory governments to implement Custody Notification Services in all jurisdictions to ensure that we prevent needless Indigenous deaths in custody.

Finally, I am pleased to advise that the Government has introduced legislation to reform the Community Development Program.

I have listened to the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in remote Australia when developing these reforms. Communities that have been telling me they want the Government to:

- change the complex compliance system and its high rates of financial penalties;
- build greater community involvement and control;
- provide more pathways to real jobs; and
- provide a change that can and should be delivered now.

I am disappointed to say that I cannot report a similar spirit of cooperation within the Parliament in this important area.

Despite working in partnership with the Opposition and support from the Opposition during the Committee Inquiry stage, I was most surprised to read by press release that the Labor Party would no longer support the amendments to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers in remote Australia.

Changes that Senators at this Committee hearing today have been calling for – and I hope we can use today to hear what changes you want to see to the reforms rather than a blanket union driven no.

Regardless, I am pleased to update the Committee that the key changes that we are putting forward to the program, include:

- Reducing income reporting requirements to Centrelink for job seekers who have a mutual obligation of less than 15 hours a week.
- Improving the assessment process so barriers to employment are better identified and local health workers can provide the medical evidence needed to reduce the required participation.
- Reducing required participation from up to 25 hours a week to up to 20 hours a week.

These changes will support local control and decision making through a more community based approach. We are strengthening community say in how CDP is delivered locally and by contracting with more Indigenous service providers.

And importantly, the Government will also work with local communities to support 6,000 subsidised jobs across remote Australia. Providing access to real wages, and moving people off welfare and into work.

These jobs will only be available to CDP participants and will grow the size and capacity of the remote labour market and support the development of more local businesses.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this opening statement and am happy to answer questions.