

Committee: Senate Environment and Communications References Committee

Inquiry: National Cultural Policy

Question: 01

Reference: 16 April 2024, Hansard page 36

Committee member: Senator Cox

QUESTION 01:

Senator COX: How many First Nations people do you have in your membership?

ANSWER 01:

The CPSU added this identifier to member systems in 2005; we currently have 1,904 members who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander.

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Question: 02

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QUESTION 02:

Senator COX: Thank you to you both. My question is really grounded in the consultation pieces that both of your unions have had in relation to some of the really key issues for First Nations artists and art workers, in some of those areas around career structures and pathways that are both long-term and sustainable. We know that there are several issues that obviously impact them, around fair remuneration, industry standards and making sure that our workplaces are also safe and inclusive. Is there any particular work that you can speak of specifically, just as an example of the work and the engagement that you're having?

Ms Aldersey: Yes. It's such a good question because, when we talk about the ability to attract and retain staff within our cultural institutions, one of the most pressing problems has been our inability to retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in leadership roles within our organisations. The inability for some organisations to run a grad program—my own organisation has a very minimal one—to provide a pathway into working in this area for First Nations people and then to provide them with secure, meaningful and ongoing career progression is an issue that we have suffered from in recent times. Another issue is the ability of our organisations to train staff and to ensure our cultural competency, not only so that we have a safe workplace but also so that we can provide safe and appropriate access to the collections that we hold and can undertake meaningful consultation about those collections and about access to them.

Senator COX: Thank you. That's great.

Ms Northam: If I can just add, I think this comes back to the fact that one of the key things the CPSU did during service-wide bargaining was pay equity measures. Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, the lowest paid public servants in the APS were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies. Aboriginal Hostels Limited, for example, were at the very bottom. We introduced pay equity mechanisms into bargaining, and they essentially got a much larger pay increase than others around the service. It was really unfortunate that the National Gallery wouldn't participate in those pay equity mechanisms as well. Again, those are some of the things that we're trying to do to make sure that we're attracting and retaining people and making the APS a better place for our lower paid workers, which unfortunately is a category that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers fall into a lot of the time. We would really like to see non-APS agencies, like our National Gallery, coming along and participating in those pay equity schemes.

ANSWER 02:

Through the CPSU's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Caucus and direct feedback mechanisms we worked to develop a claim for Australian Public Service service-wide bargaining. That CPSU claim went to many issues of inclusion and support for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in the Australian Public Service.

Our focus is on whole of service improvements that deliver meaningful outcomes for workers in all APS and non-APS agencies; this includes those working in cultural agencies such as curators, but we cannot speak to initiatives that support artists directly.

As at 31 December 2023, there were 6,159 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS employees and more than half of these employees work in the “extra large” agencies (Services Australia, ATO, Home Affairs and Defence). In these workplaces, 65% of First Nations workers are APS4 or below; 26.2% at the APS1-3 or trainee level. This data is from the APS Employment Database.

Retention rates for APS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers is one third of non-Indigenous public servants. While most APS workers stay for approximately 12 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers leave after around 4 years. There is a 5% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment target for the APS, and the CPSU recently made comments on the APS Recruitment Strategy that included strengthening both the Identified criterion and affirmative measure processes.

As outlined during the hearing, there have been improvements in the APS that don't necessarily flow to non-APS Commonwealth workplaces and are on an agency-by-agency basis. Through service-wide bargaining in 2023, the CPSU secured significant improvements to the workplace rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS employees; including improvements to ceremonial leave, NAIDOC leave, as well as improvements to entitlements like flexible work requests.

Mechanisms to recognise and maintain connection to country were identified as an important attraction and retention tool that was missing in APS agencies. For example, the need to relocate to take up graduate or entry level programs could make it difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to maintain their connection to family and country, and to participate in cultural obligations. The CPSU secured consideration for the employee's connection to country be taken into account when considering a request to alter their location of work under provisions on flexible work.

The CPSU also wanted cultural competency training for all public servants; however, at this stage it is only mandated for EL2s. The option remains for agencies to do better.

All APS agreements now include a definition of family that recognises traditional kinship relationships, which means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees can access leave to care, support and grieve family members consistent with their traditional kinship relationships and connections. Similarly, all APS agreements now include explicit recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' languages for the purposes of community language allowance; payable where an employee regularly uses language in the course of your work. The Community Language allowance is an incredibly important and practical recognition of the value of workers with First Nations language skills.

All APS agencies now have at least one day of paid leave during NAIDOC week for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to celebrate and participate in community NAIDOC events;

some agencies have better conditions and those conditions have been retained. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander APS employees have access to up to 6 days paid ceremonial leave over two calendar years; so that employees can participate in ceremonial activities.