



**Aboriginal Peak
Organisations**
NORTHERN TERRITORY

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via Email: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Thursday 23 November 2023

Dear Committee Secretary

APO NT Submission – Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Bill 2023

I write in support of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Bill. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay. We understand you are due to be finalizing the report on this bill on 23 November this week.

About APO NT

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) is an alliance of Aboriginal organisations working to promote and protect the rights of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory.

The APO NT alliance comprises:

- Central Land Council,
- Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT
- Northern Land Council,
- North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency,
- Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory,
- Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network,
- Tiwi Land Council, and
- Anindilyakwa Land Council.

The member organisations of APO NT are united in their commitment to improving the outcomes of Aboriginal people across broad political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. As representatives from peak organisations in the NT, we strive for Aboriginal self-determination, and collectively share the aim of protecting and advancing the wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal people and communities.

APO NT's submission to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee's Inquiry into the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Bill 2023

APO NT supports the passage of this bill through the Australian Parliament. We welcome efforts by the Australian Government to recognize and address entrenched disadvantage. The formation of the proposed advisory committee acknowledges that our current system has enabled existing disadvantage to continue, and new expert advice is needed for appropriate measures to be taken.

In particular, we welcome the proposed inclusion of at least one First Nations person in the advisory committee. This will provide a much needed voice for the unique contributors to ongoing entrenched Aboriginal disadvantage in this country. Given the extent of poverty experienced by First Nations people in Australia, we call for the committee to include two First Nations representatives: one male and one female.

To ensure the proposed Advisory Committee can be successful in addressing disadvantage, we look forward to seeing how central agencies in the Commonwealth Government embed the recommendations of the committee into its formal budget and Cabinet processes. Giving appropriate weight, resourcing and integration of recommendations into standard government operating procedures will be pivotal to the committee's overall value and ongoing mandate.

Matters for the proposed Advisory Committee to consider

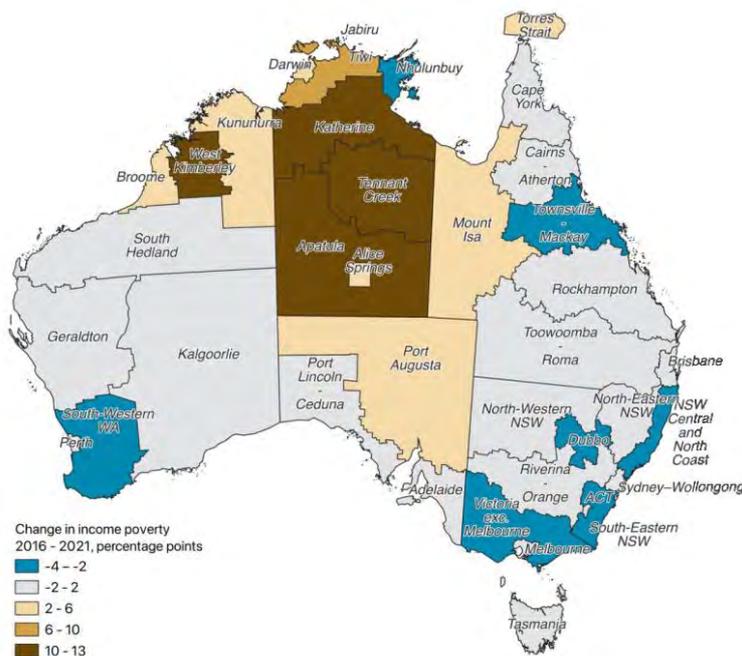
If this bill passes through Parliament and the Advisory Committee is established, we recommend that where recommendations are made that will affect Aboriginal people, that the Committee make recommendations that are consistent with the four Priority Reforms contained within the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap. These Priority Reforms provide a strong framework, recommended by Aboriginal leaders, for effective policy-making in support of Aboriginal self-determination and economic empowerment. Especially in light of the outcome of the recent referendum, we at APO NT are urging governments to return to the principles set out by the Priority Reforms to guide decision-making on matters affecting Aboriginal peoples. This position is consistent with and takes the lead from the Coalition of Peaks.

As the Committee will be well aware, the Productivity Commission's annual data report on the 17 socioeconomic targets contained within the National Agreement on Closing the Gap demonstrate that the NT is going backwards on 8 of the 17 targets. This includes the target on Aboriginal employment, where the rate of Aboriginal people employed in the NT is falling, and has been falling for a decade. For this reason, an economic inclusion agenda holds the most promise for change in the NT.

We refer you to recent work published by Dr Francis Markham from the ANU, who has produced a map of Australia showing the increase in poverty during 2021.¹ This map is reproduced below, and demonstrates that the sharpest increases in poverty are being experienced across regional Northern Territory, as well as one area of the West Kimberley in WA.

¹ Dr Francis Markham, *Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs' Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia*, 31 October 2023.





APO NT recommends the Committee prioritise discussion of the adequacy of **income support payments**. Specifically, we recommend that:

- (1) income support payments should be permanently increased;
- (2) the remote area allowance should be permanently increased; and
- (3) Basics Cards / “Enhanced income management” processes should become voluntary only.

For further information, we refer you to APO NT’s submission from March 2023 to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia.²

In light of the above map prepared by Dr Markham, it is clear that economic disadvantage has a clear geographic element, and that economic inclusion should be considered in that context. APO NT’s position is that government should **differentiate remote and very remote settings** from urban settings when considering policies, systems and structures designed to address economic disadvantage.

A high priority for the Committee to consider is the current reform agenda for the Commonwealth Government’s **Community Development Program**. Following the 2022 Federal Election, the Government had committed to scrap CDP and replace it with a new program that creates real jobs. Given that close to half of the people working under the CDP program are Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, we call on the Commonwealth Government to undertake this reform in partnership with Aboriginal people and organisations in the NT, consistent with the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to Priority Reform One in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Giving Aboriginal people a say on the type and design of jobs offered through the reform project is necessary component of the success of the new program. We refer you to APO NT’s refreshed *Fair Work Strong Communities* proposal.³

Separate to the operation of our national welfare system, we also recommend consideration of the Commonwealth Government’s policies with relation to **Aboriginal employment and Aboriginal procurement**. Given that the Northern Territory has a uniquely high population of First Nations people, with over 30% represented across the general population, and over 40% of the young NT population, we call on the Commonwealth Government to adopt more ambitious employment and procurement

² [02032023-APO-NT-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-on-Poverty.pdf](https://apont.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/APO-NT-Submission-to-the-Inquiry-on-Poverty.pdf) (apont.org.au)

³ apont.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/APO-NT_FWSC-Refreshed-Proposal-2023.pdf



targets when operating in the NT. We note in particular the high anticipated investment into the NT from Commonwealth Defence at this time, and recommend that this investment is made with a stronger and more ambitious set of Aboriginal employment and procurement targets. Aboriginal economic participation is the pathway out of poverty for Aboriginal Territorians, and we would welcome leadership from the Commonwealth Government to make pathways available in support of this goal.

Transparency of government funding into Aboriginal Affairs

Consistent with the position taken in APO NT's recent submission to the Productivity Commission responding to the 3-year review of the progress against the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap,⁴ we call on the Commonwealth Government to bring **greater transparency** to government money being spent on Aboriginal affairs. In 2013 and 2017, the Productivity Commission prepared an Aboriginal Expenditure report providing an overview of government funding allocations to services and programs for Aboriginal people. This report has not been continued. APO NT would like to see greater reporting and transparency around allocations of funding for Aboriginal Affairs, including a break-down of how that money is then allocated to government organisations, non-government organisations, and Aboriginal businesses and organisations. We know that Aboriginal businesses are far more likely than non-Aboriginal businesses to employ Aboriginal people. With more transparency around government funding allocations, we could better identify sectors and grant processes that would support the growth of Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal employment.

Co-design of funding agreements and programs affecting Aboriginal people

We welcome recent Commonwealth efforts to work with APO NT on shared decision-making processes around NT remote Aboriginal investment and remote housing investment funding agreements. Including Aboriginal voices in funding design and implementation processes is an important first step to improving the effectiveness of Commonwealth funding designed to address disadvantage in the NT. Aboriginal people and organisations in the NT have a clear understanding of how our communities operate, why our communities are unable to better engage with the mainstream economy, and what we might do to improve the economic empowerment of our people. Including us in decisions that affect us pays respect to our expertise, as well as contributing to improved program design and effective government spending. *When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish.*

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you in greater detail. Furthermore, if your Committee Members visit the Northern Territory in the coming months, we would be delighted to meet with them in Darwin or Alice Springs.

Yours sincerely

Leeann Mick-Ramsamy

CEO, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

⁴ [Submission 69 - Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory \(APO NT\) - Closing the Gap Review - Commissioned study \(pc.gov.au\)](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/indigenous/aboriginal-peak-organisations-northern-territory)

