Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
Via email to: IndigenousAffairs.Reps@aph.gov.au

Friday 9 April, 2021

Re. Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business

Dear Mr Leeser and Committee members,

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) wishes to thank the Committee for the invitation to appear at the public hearing on Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business. As detailed in our submission to the inquiry, we see a wide array of opportunities to grow employment pathways in and through the communications sector.

As additional information to the discussion points on Thursday 25 March, we would like to expand on the following topics:

1. COVID-19 Funding Support

First Nations Media Australia received $234,500 through the NIAA as emergency assistance to the First Nations media industry to respond to the early stages of COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020). The funding was distributed across 30 organisations to purchase small equipment items required for remote and/or COVID-safe workspaces ($91,608), contribute to the production of messaging content relating to the pandemic ($81,000) and for FNMA as the peak body to provide industry support for media organisations as businesses to respond to a significant downturn in self-generated revenue and to ensure members had up-to-date and factual information to broadcast ($61,892).

In reporting on this funding, FNMA collected nearly 600 examples of content produced including: short form radio and television announcements (eg. 30 second spots), animations, long-form podcasts, news reports, print media stories, online video publications including social media distribution, special programming series and songs. Stations rebroadcast messaging from Minister Wyatt and other government and community organisation sources, as well as producing their own content in English and in Yolngu Matha, Yawuru, Kriol, Arrernte, Warlpiri, Anmatjere, Pintubi, Martu, Pitjantjatjara and other local Indigenous languages. Over a six-week period, 32 First Nations media organisations published a total 1,299 social media posts across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with information tailored to their community audiences.

First Nations Media Australia developed a dedicated website for the distribution of current, factual information from Government departments to media organisations, including messaging for re-broadcast developed by 33 Creative in consultation with the peak body. We provided business advice to media organisations, calling on expert advice from KPMG, ORIC and i2iGlobal to ensure media organisations had information on relevant reporting requirements, financial support mechanisms available and their governance obligations to manage organisations through the pandemic.

The funding provided did not meet the needs of the sector in responding to the pandemic or come close to addressing the additional workload and value of the information disseminated by the First Nations media sector. Nor did it address the ongoing impact of the pandemic on the industry and the work our members have continued to do over an extended period of time to keep communities safe. However, it did support First Nations media organisations to continue providing essential services through the various lockdowns and restrictions.

2. Representation in Mainstream Media

Mr Young asked about levels of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream media. The lack of data on this topic is an issue FNMA has been seeking to address through the Closing the Gap data development work. While there are some fantastic examples of individuals working in mainstream media (Stan Grant, Narelda Jacobs and Brooke Boney to name just a few), there is no comprehensive study that examines levels of First Nations representation in mainstream media as either presenters or guest speakers. There are only small studies such as Media Diversity Australia's review of mainstream news reporting, which did not include NITV and focused primarily on multicultural diversity in news presentation.

The biannual Reconciliation Barometer provides some insight into perceptions of positive, negative or neutral portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the media. In 2020, 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 44% of the general community believe media portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is usually negative (Reconciliation Australia, 2020). The Reconciliation Report provides a baseline data from which to measure future change in the portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in media, which would be positively impacted by greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as content-makers and as subject experts, spokespeople and panellists in mainstream media.

FNMA is not resourced to carry out this type of research but has made a number of suggestions to the NIAA on how Government might undertake this data development work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers such as the Lowitja Institute. Alternately, a series of sample periods through media monitoring could be commissioned by the Government to collect this data. FNMA would be happy to provide advice and support to this data development process to have a clearer picture of the link between the First Nations media sector, the mainstream media sector, representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in each and the impact of representation on attitudes toward First Nations communities within the general community. We urge the Government to urgently support this work.

3. Current training activity

During the hearing Ms West provided some examples of the training programs delivered by Goolarri Training in Broome, including leadership initiatives such as the hugely successful Kimberley Girl program now called the Young Indigenous Women's Leadership Program which is also delivered in the Pilbara and Goldfields region. First Nations media organisations have created training hubs within communities in areas of digital communication skills, public speaking, management, marketing and technical areas. Outside of the Registered Training Organisations operating in and alongside the sector (Goolarri Training, 4AAA Training, the Community Media Training Organisation, Batchelor Institute and AFTRS), our members are not resourced for the work they undertake in building employment capacity within their communities through this hub role. Umeewarra Media provides a good example of an organisation supporting resume writing for community members who drop into the station as a community service activity. FNMA seeks funding support to convene a Training Working Group to 'connect the dots' between training opportunities available to the sector and address identified gaps, as well as significantly expanding the range of training programs available to media workers in the establishment phase of their careers and to help move people through various levels of their career path (such as mentorship, exchange internships and job-shadowing opportunities).

4. Policy change

In partnership with the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, FNMA developed an Employment and Skills Development Strategy Called *Strong Voices Stronger Communities.* It recommends investment in training and targeted employment programs such as pathway roles in areas like management, training, project management, content production, technical and IT services. Through our Pre-Budget Submission 2021, FNMA has requested funds to bring wage levels in line with Award rates across the sector, implement the Employment and Skills Development Strategy, increase formalised training activities for sector-wide skills development, increase mentorship, job-shadowing and non-accredited training support and provide funding toward a minimum 20 mid-level positions nationally to establish career pathways between broadcaster and executive level roles. Support for these activities could be drawn from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment which does not provide support to the sector currently, nor is there a program the sector could apply to for support for these activities. Support for content production could similarly be provided through programs focused on education, skills and employment due to the relevant outcomes generated from participation in culturally-relevant content production.

5. Peak body capacity

Ms Claydon asked a question about the capacity of First Nations Media Australia as the sector's peak body to support the administration of funding to the industry. First Nations Media Australia has distributed funding to the First Nations media sector on behalf the NIAA under emergency conditions in 2020. We regularly coordinate collaborative projects on behalf of any number of our members, distributing funding for bulk-purchase equipment items, news content production and other activities regularly. We also have a working relationship with the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), who distribute funding to the community media sector on behalf of the Department of Communications. First Nations Media Australia does not seek to be the administrator of funding to the First Nations media sector, however the peak body is well-placed to take on this function if required for the benefit of the sector and/or to work with the CBF on appropriate mechanisms to administer funds to the industry as required.

6. Indigenous Rangers case study

Ms Claydon requested further information on comparisons between the Indigenous Rangers program and the First Nations media sector. During the hearing we provided some information about the potential for the meaningful employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Community Archive Managers, maintaining significant archive materials and supporting appropriate community access to culturally sensitive materials. Content producers carry out a similar role in storytelling, combining cultural knowledge with technical skills in a manner comparative to the Rangers in many ways. A short case study of the Ranger Program is provided as an appendix to this letter for the Committee's information.
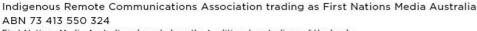
We hope that this information is helpful to the Committee in forming its recommendations on Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business.

Sincerely,

Dot West   Claire Stuchbery
Chairperson   Interim CEO

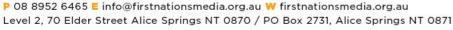## Appendix A: Case Study - Ranger Program, Central Land Council, NT

Focus Question – the Ranger Program is heralded by First Nations people and other stakeholders as a success. Our case study question was: Could the Ranger Program be applied as a model to the sector to develop a Media Ranger Program to support the development of FNMOs?

Context – Indigenous ranger projects were first funded by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 2007 through the former Working on Country Program and created meaningful employment, training and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in land and sea management. Indigenous ranger funding has created more than 2200 full-time, part-time and casual jobs for First Nations people around Australia.

Indigenous ranger projects support Indigenous people to combine traditional knowledge with conservation training to protect and manage their land, sea and culture. Indigenous ranger groups also develop partnerships with research, education, philanthropic and commercial organisations to share skills and knowledge, engage with schools, and generate additional income and jobs in the environmental, biosecurity, heritage and other sectors. The program is operated by land councils in conjunction with Traditional Owners.

Funding is predominantly from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, although there are strong links and support from state authorities and foundations, such as the Pew Charitable Trust.

- **Ranger Operations** – nationally there are some variations in the implementation of the Ranger Program, so this case study uses the Central Land Council's (CLC) Ranger Program as a benchmark. CLC's Ranger Program is a subset of the overall national Ranger Program.

- **Organisation & tasking** - the CLC Ranger Program is organised in 12 groups identified by Traditional Owners, largely organised around language groups. Each group is led by a Ranger Coordinator, who supervises anywhere between 4–10 Rangers. There is 'wrap around support' with four mentors from CLC who coach, mentor and develop the Rangers, with a particular focus on the Ranger Co-ordinators but work across the whole team as needed. Rangers typically work together in their teams on a range of activities identified by Traditional Owners such as fencing, caring for rare species, wildlife tracking and surveys, and introduced species eradication.

- **Work mode** – team roles are full time, part-time and casual. The majority of CLC Rangers are part-time, mostly by choice because of commitments to family and culture.

- **Training** is an important enabler. Some of the training is compulsory, such as workplace health and safety. However, most of the training is not compulsory although strongly encouraged. (The training framework is being re-worked presently.)

- **Advancement** - most people commence their role in the program as either a Ranger or a Leading Ranger depending on previous experience and cultural authority. Not everyone seeks advancement. Those that do, can seek promotion to the role of Ranger Support Officer who shadow the Ranger Co-ordinator to learn the Co-ordinator role first-hand.

- **Recruitment & selection** - there is high regard for Rangers, typified by school students often remarking that when they finish school, they 'want to be a Ranger'. There are many more people applying for roles than there are positions available, which reinforces the need for

robust recruitment standards and to avoid any perceptions of nepotism or cultural group bias. Recruitment follows Australian Public Service rules, with interview panels including Traditional Owners to ensure cultural relevance and safety. The age range of Rangers is between 20 and 67 years. Women Rangers make up about one third of the roles.

Keys to success - CLC's perspective on the success of the Ranger Program is due to five key factors:
1. Useful work – the work has intrinsic value to the community, to individuals and to the CLC.
2. On Country – it is based on land that has direct connection with the staff who are Rangers.
3. Cultural safety – the Rangers feel culturally safe in their employment.
4. Flexible and tailored – there is no one-size model and leaders are acutely aware of cultural requirements and the need for time away from work.
5. Intergenerational – Rangers are not all one age and the range in age and cultural authority with elders is a core aspect to the success of the program.

Conclusion – there is high applicability of the Ranger Program to FNMA and the sector particularly in remote and possibly regional areas. There are direct parallels to the opportunity, context, and culture and FNMA could draw on the Ranger structure and keys to success for a media-oriented program. The title 'Ranger' has high equity among Indigenous people and government representative and could be consider as part of a remote FNMA developed program.

Case study source – Workforce Development Action Plan, prepared by Belinda Clark, June 2019

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Indigenous Remote Communications Association trading as First Nations Media Australia
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First Nations Media Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands
on which we work. We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.