

RESOURCE AND ENGAGE WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' REPRESENTATIVE ORGANISATIONS

The Australian Government must recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' right to self-determination — including their right to drive policy — and back these policies with appropriate resources and support. Only then can Australia effectively close the gap in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' right to self-determination is recognised and policy is driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and made effective through appropriate resourcing and support, progress in closing the gap will be limited.

The Australian Government can achieve positive outcomes by working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities. And it can successfully bring about change when it adequately resources, listens to and works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' representative peak organisations and the communities they serve. This includes dedicating sufficient resources to tackling the impacts of climate change, given Indigenous communities are particularly vulnerable.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

PROVIDE GREATER SUPPORT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES.

EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE WITH AND RESOURCE THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLES AND NATIONAL PEAK ORGANISATIONS.

IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION AND ADDRESSING THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF RECONCILIATION.

The council's recommendations recognise First Peoples, replace the race powers with an anti-racial discrimination clause and propose processes such as developing a national framework agreement or treaty to address reconciliation.

DEVELOP AN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA CLIMATE ACTION PLAN.

Include measures to value and integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' knowledge while providing new sources of income for communities, such as programs under the Carbon Farming Initiative. Support communities with climate change adaptation and resilience building.

WHY

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can only be effective when the Australian Government respects and promotes their self-determination, agency and inherent rights. This is in line with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international human rights instruments.

This means that national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative peak bodies should drive — or at the very least co-drive — policy formation, decision-making and implementation. It also means that their leaders should have the opportunity to meet regularly with the Prime Minister and relevant ministers to ensure that policies are grounded in principles of meaningful engagement and cultural respect, and are effectively implemented.

For example, The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has taken a leadership role in addressing the unfinished business of reconciliation, recommending changes to the Australian Constitution and processes, including a national framework agreement. These processes need to be a priority for Federal Government leadership.

The National Health Leadership Forum's involvement in developing a plan to implement the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan* is a positive example of what can be achieved when governments work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and experts from representative peak organisations.

The negative impact of past policies has been clearly documented in reports such as the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* and the *Bringing Them Home Report*. Both reports make clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be the fundamental drivers of change, not just recipients of departmental policy direction and funding. And these commitments and resources must be for the long term, regardless of election cycles and changing governments.

Underlying all approaches should be recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' connection to lands and waters, cultures and ways of life — a connection that places them at the frontline of climate change. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are strongly engaged in land management around the country and are well placed to play a leading role in climate mitigation and adaptation. A well-planned Indigenous climate strategy could both tackle climate and provide employment opportunities in remote and regional Australia.

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