

Meeting hosted by the Prime Minister in the Cabinet room with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations

23 January, Parliament House, Canberra, Communique

The Prime Minister hosted an historic meeting today with senior representatives of the Coalition of Peaks, a representative body made up of almost 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled peak organisations.

At the start of the meeting, the Prime Minister provided an update on the Commonwealth's bushfire recovery efforts and the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations in providing immediate and tailored responses to effected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was acknowledged.

The Coalition of Peaks expressed the deep sorrow that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right across the nation feel at the scarring of their country and loss of wildlife. The meeting recognised the significant role that cultural burning, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, can play in expertly managing the impacts of bushfires in the future.

The Morrison Government and Coalition of Peaks are working together, with the states and territories, to develop a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which will set out our shared priorities over the next ten years to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The meeting comes after the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed in March 2019 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Coalition of Peaks where for the first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through their community controlled representatives, and Australian governments share decision making on Closing the Gap. The Coalition of Peaks acknowledged the Prime Minister's leadership on the development of the Partnership Agreement.

The meeting discussed the Priority Reforms, agreed in-principle by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap in August 2019, to be included in the new National Agreement. The Priority Reforms that were put forward by the Coalition of Peaks to Australian governments to be included in the National Agreement to change the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and accelerate progress on closing the gap:

- Priority Reform 1: Developing and strengthening structures to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in shared decision making at the national, state and local or regional level and embedding their ownership, responsibility and expertise to close the gap;
- Priority Reform 2: Building the formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services sector to deliver closing the gap services and programs in agreed priority areas; and
- Priority Reform 3: Ensuring all mainstream government agencies and institutions undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap.

The Coalition of Peaks shared the outcomes of the recent engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the development of the new National Agreement, where there was overwhelming support for the adoption of the Priority Reforms. One theme that regularly emerged from the engagements was that shared decision-making depends on all parties having access to the same information, leading the Coalition of Peaks to now propose the development of local data projects as a fourth Priority Reform.

The Prime Minister commended the Coalition of Peaks for their leadership on the Priority Reforms and for helping ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right across Australia have a say on the development of the new National Agreement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled peak organisations leading engagements with their communities on Closing the Gap is a significant change to the way that policies are developed.

The Prime Minister committed \$1.5 million for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data project to develop regional profiles of Closing the Gap targets, Priority Reforms, and other community priorities to support regional decision making between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Australian governments. This project will be led by the Coalition of Peaks in partnership with the Indigenous Data Network and form of delivering on the new Priority Reform Four.

The meeting noted the work underway to develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood strategy which will include a dedicated workforce, training and development program.

A meeting between the Coalition of Peaks and the Minister for Housing to discuss further the outcomes of the engagements on the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was also agreed.

The good progress on refining the draft COAG Closing the Gap targets to reflect the engagement outcomes was noted.

The Prime Minister and the Coalition of Peaks committed to finalising the negotiations between all governments on the new National Agreement based around the Priority Reforms as quickly as possible.