



Community Broadcasting Sustainability Review: Strengthening First Nations Media and Communications Sectors for Sustainable Cultural, Social, and Economic Advancement.

First Nations Media Australia acknowledges Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; and to Elders past and present.

Introduction – A message from First Nations Media Australia’s CEO

First Nations media is not merely a sector; it is a powerful movement towards self-determination, culture and language preservation, and social justice. The success of the ‘Closing the Gap’ (CTG) targets are inextricably linked to the strength and reach of First Nations media and their communication platforms providing an opportunity to amplify and empower First Nations voices; ensure community narratives are included in the public discourse; and make significant strides to promote and increase Cultural knowledge.

By strengthening the sustainability of the First Nations media and communication sectors, we can make significant strides towards ‘Closing the Gap’ in several key areas. Culturally responsive media can improve health outcomes by disseminating vital information in languages and formats that are accessible to Indigenous communities. In education, media initiatives that celebrate Indigenous knowledge systems and role models can inspire and engage First Nations students, contributing to improved educational attainment. The employment pipeline also addresses the economic aspect of the Closing the Gap targets by creating jobs and fostering career pathways that are aligned with the aspirations of Indigenous people.

Digital access is essential for participation in government services, including healthcare and education, which are foundational to the well-being and empowerment of First Nations peoples. It is not merely a convenience, but a necessity that enables individuals and communities to engage fully in the opportunities provided by the contemporary world. Access to telehealth services can bridge the gap in healthcare delivery for remote communities, ensuring timely and culturally appropriate medical care. Similarly, digital access in education provides the opportunity for First Nations students to engage with learning resources, connect with educators, and pursue knowledge that is both relevant and empowering. Ensuring digital

equity for First Nations communities is not just about technological inclusion; it is about upholding their rights to health, education, and self-determination, ensuring they have the tools to shape their futures in a digitally connected world.

Prioritising co-design of policy and programs ensures First Nations voices are heard and respected in national and international discourses. The First Nations media sector plays a critical role in empowering communities, preserving culture, and advocating for the rights and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To fully realise the potential of First Nations media in supporting the Closing the Gap targets, it is essential to have a strong, viable and adequately resourced sector with real investment in education, training, and the creation of an employment pipeline into media and communications sectors. This approach not only contributes to achieving the targets but also strengthens the fabric of Australia's multicultural society by valuing and amplifying the voices of its First Peoples through Truth Telling and sharing Culture.

First Nations media and communications organisations are a pivotal enabler to the cultural, social, and economic well-being of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There is an urgent need to improve the sustainability of the First Nations media sector to align with the government's objectives, particularly in closing the gap between First Nations and non-First Nations Australians.

This at the heart of this submission are the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** First Nations Media Australia calls for commitment in full to the FNMA 10 Calls for Action from this, and all future Governments.
- **Recommendation 2:** First Nations Media Australia calls on the NIAA Department to develop a IBMP Strategy that clearly outlines its priorities for our sector (noting the Australian Government recently released the \$68M Indio Pacific Broadcasting Strategy)
- **Recommendation 3:** First Nations Media Australia calls for Government to embed their election promise and principles of Co-design, Self-determination and Self-empowerment across its arms of government to deliver programs and outcomes 'with, not for' First Nations people.
- **Recommendation 4:** FNMA calls for the immediate injection of \$20M in operational funding. If these funds are not forthcoming, FNMA calls for a redirection of current grant funding into ongoing Operational funding. In relation to those agencies who provide either operational or grant based funding, FNMA calls for agencies to demonstrate their commitment to co-design, self-determination and self-empowerment through ongoing collaboration with First Nations Media Australia as part of any future funding models.

The key message to whomever receives or delivers funds to our sector: we demand true partnerships.

Wally Tallis

CEO, First Nations Media Australia



FNMA's Role and Mission

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak body for First Nations media and communications, advocating for essential voices in our communities through community-led programming. Our mission is to empower Australia's First Nations communities through a culturally connected media industry. FNMA's membership and supporters include both First Nations and non-First Nations organisations and individuals who work in or alongside the community-controlled media industry such as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers, and allies.

The FNMA 'Calls for Action' were developed in 2019 by members as a strategic roadmap, to address critical priorities across the First Nations media and communications sectors. Originally nine, a tenth Call for Action to 'Improve Access to Digital Services' was added in 2024.

Since their inception, successive governments have failed to fully address the Calls for Action, leading to chronic underfunding across the sector, placing extreme financial pressure on First Nations media organisations in the provision of their vital services.

FNMA's 10 Calls for Action

FNMA's advocacy and work are guided by the 10 Calls for Action, which are critical to the sustainability and growth of the First Nations media sector:

1. Reform Broadcasting Act for First Nations Broadcasting.
2. Increase in Operational and Employment Funding.
3. Expand Live and Local Radio Programs.
4. Strengthen First Nations News Services.
5. Expand Training and Career Pathway Programs.
6. Upgrade Infrastructure and Digital Networks.
7. Recognize First Nations Broadcasters as the Preferred Channel for Government Messaging.
8. Preserve Archives.
9. Establish an Annual Content Production Fund.
10. Improve Access to Digital Services. *

*Note: FNMA's membership elected to include "Improve Access to Digital Services" as the tenth Call for Action in April 2024.

FNMA's Principles and Strategic Approach

FNMA operates under key principles of First Nations self-empowerment, self-determination, equity, and equality. These principles guide all our initiatives and efforts to enhance outcomes for First Nations communities. FNMA Key principles for First Nations Self-Empowerment and Self-Determination will inform best Government and funding partners for the First Nations Media and Communications sectors.



- **Self-Empowerment and Self-Determination:** Providing the tools, training, and resources necessary for First Nations peoples to tell their own stories, through their own media, from within their communities.
- **Equity:** Ensuring programs are accessible and tailored to meet the diverse needs of all communities, recognising and addressing the unique challenges faced by urban, metropolitan, regional, and remote groups through locally based solutions.
- **Equality:** Ensuring fair representation, equal opportunities, and the elimination of systemic barriers that hinder First Nations peoples' participation in the digital and media landscapes.

It is only through FNMA's approach above, and a true 'co-design' process, delivered by First Nations people that the First Nations communications and media sectors will find sustainable, culturally safe policy and funding environments required to thrive.

First Nations Media and Communication's Impact across Closing the Gap targets

First Nations media and communications organisations are key to achieving Target 16 (Cultural and Language preservation) and Target 17 (Digital Inclusion) of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly. However, the success of the Closing the Gap initiative is deeply interconnected with the strength and reach of the First Nations media and communication sectors. By providing information and content in local languages and ensuring that First Nations stories are told by First Nations people, First Nations media strengthens cultural identity, community cohesion and impact of critical community information.

It is the position of First Nations Media Australia that First Nations media and communications are integral to the success of *all* the Closing the Gap targets, serving as a crucial platform for the dissemination of culturally relevant information and the amplification of First Nations voices.

Challenges Facing the First Nations Media and Communications Sectors

Despite the critical role FNMA plays in supporting First Nations communities, there has been a significant lack of action and minimal funding across our 10 Calls for Action. These calls, which are essential for the sustainability and growth of the First Nations media sector, have largely been unmet. This leaves the sector struggling to fulfill its vital mission and risks sustainability.

The challenges include:

- **Policy and Funding disconnect:** Funding and Grants currently administered by separate Departments as Operational funding is supplied via the NIAA's Indigenous Media and Broadcasting Program. Content funding is supplied by a competitive grant process by the Community Broadcasting Foundation.
 - This disconnect significantly contributes the chronic underfunding of the Indigenous Media and Broadcasting sectors.



- **Underfunding:** Chronically insufficient funding has hampered the sector's ability to address systemic issues effectively. FNMA calls for the immediate injection of an extra \$20M in operational funding to the IBMP.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Inadequate infrastructure restricts access to media services in remote areas.
- **Employment Pathways:** Limited investment in training and employment pathways weakens the sector's capacity to build a strong and skilled First Nations workforce, with a pipeline to Management and Executive positions for First Nations workforce within the sector.
- **Content Creation:** There is a need for dedicated, ongoing funding outside of the current competitive grants system to support content that reflects the diversity and richness of First Nations cultures.

FNMA's 2024-2025 Financial Year Budget Submission

FNMA’s pre-budget submission for the 2024-25 fiscal year called for an immediate increase in funding for the First Nations broadcasting sector, from \$20 million to \$40 million annually, with adjustments for CPI indexation ongoing from this annual baseline.

Real funding levels for the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (IBMP) have deteriorated significantly over time (Table One, Figure One). Current funding levels remain insufficient to:

- meet station demand for grants
- meet growing community need for services
- support efficient, multi-year grant-making
- respond to technological, social, environmental and economic trends
- support investment to build station resilience, support innovation, enhance the sector’s community impact and deliver a better return on investment to taxpayers
- achieve social and economic outcomes desired by stations as well as community and government stakeholders

Table One: IBMP Nominal vs Real Funding 2014/15-2022/23¹

Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program (IBMP)				
Year	CPI	Nominal Funding	Real Funding (14-15\$)	Nominal funding if 14-15 real funding was maintained
2013-14	3.1			
2014-15	1.6	\$21,817,306	\$21,817,306	\$21,817,306

¹ Table from First Nations Media Australia’s 2024/25 budget submission.

2015-16	1.1	\$21,007,195	\$20,776,116	\$22,059,966
2016-17	1.9	\$21,007,195	\$20,376,979	\$22,492,068
2017-18	2.0	\$21,788,448	\$20,699,026	\$22,965,585
2018-19	1.5	\$21,068,448	\$19,698,999	\$23,334,017
2019-20	-0.4	\$21,068,448	\$19,783,273	\$23,234,618
2020-21	3.9	\$20,466,077	\$18,419,469	\$24,241,451
2021-22	6	\$21,097,335	\$17,721,761	\$25,972,983
2022-23	5.9	\$21,562,588	\$16,840,381	\$27,935,091
2023-24 (Estimate)	3.3	\$21,562,588	\$16,128,816	\$29,167,521
2024-25	2.8	\$38,000,000	\$29,260,000	\$30,301,814
2025-26	2.5	\$39,275,168	\$29,260,000	\$31,391,807
2026-27	2.5	\$39,809,524	\$29,260,000	\$32,563,143

Figure One: IBMP Nominal vs Real Funding 2014/15-2022/23²

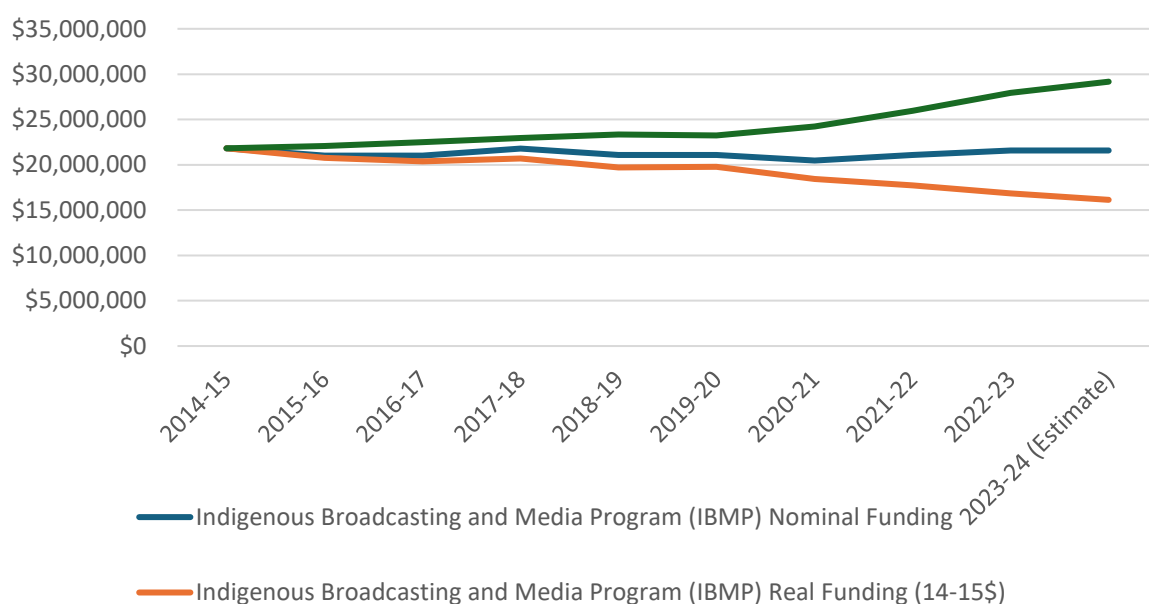


Table and Figure One above demonstrate the real-world decline in sector funding for First Nations Media and Communications. Simultaneously, expectations, responsibilities and cost-of-living expenses for these organisations across the sector are growing. Without sustainable and significant operational funding increase, First Nations broadcasting, communications, and media organisations, will continue to struggle.

True Co-Design Process - Led by FNMA

FNMA’s key principals and strategic approach, outlined above, are the critical building blocks of a true ‘co-design’ process between Government and First Nations people. It is only through

² Table and Figure 1 supplied by Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBA)



a deep commitment to First Nations led co-design that the First Nations communications and media sectors will find the sustainable, culturally safe policy and funding environments required to thrive.

FNMA believes that further, specialised consultation with First Nations broadcasters and organisations is required to adequately define localised needs and priorities. FNMA's position as Peak Body for First Nations media enables meaningful and deep engagement with the sector for Government.

Concerns Regarding Cultural Competency in Government Processes

FNMA has concerns regarding the development and progression of the cultural competence and processes across Federal Government departments. FNMA will operate within the principles of Co-Design which it believes is the best way to achieve outcomes for First Nations peoples. FNMA recognises the strong intent and commitment of Government but is yet to fully experience the embedded practice required to drive the key platforms within Closing the Gap. Embedding FNMA within key departments and having partnerships and relationship could improve this process, we are continuing to be left out and advised not part of the development of key areas that affect our sector, this needs to change.

Preferred Administration of First Nations Broadcast and Media Funding

Assuming the additional \$20 million for First Nations Broadcasters called for in FNMA's pre-budget submission is granted, FNMA believe that the principles of Co-Design, Self-Determination, Self-Empowerment, and the establishment of a culturally responsive service system and functionality should drive the program, regardless of Federal Department charged with its delivery and administration.

We recognise that the NIAA has not yet fully realised these principles, we believe they are further along in this process, and we think that with additional funding our partnership with NIAA to co-design will go a long way towards building the fundamental structures our sector requires. We believe that form this relationship continued strategic partnerships with other agencies like the Communications Department is critical to informing how and the needs of our sector across the 10 Calls for Action.

Review of Current Funding Channels

FNMA believes the ongoing funding of the First Nations Media and Communications sectors through agencies such as the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) should be reviewed. FNMA proposes this review consider moving away from the current CBF competitive grants program, and towards a co-design process between FNMA and the Federal funding and administration Department. This approach would aim to develop a sustainable funding model that meets the specific needs of our sector, specifically funds the Calls for Action, and clearly articulating Self Determination and Empowerment as key, non-negotiable principles.

It is FNMA's strong view that the CBF should not to make decisions regarding IMBP First Nations funding; instead a First Nations-community controlled entity with an independent,



skills based board should be established. This view is echoed and supported within the CBF's submission to this review.

Conclusion

First Nations media is crucial to the cultural, social, and economic advancement of First Nations communities across Australia. A co-designed, culturally safe approach to policy and funding, led by FNMA, is essential to ensure the sustainability and growth of the sector.

We strongly urge the Department for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, and the Arts to consider this submission and continue to work with FNMA in the ongoing development of a strategic, funding and policy framework that ensures a sustainable future for First Nations media and communications in Australia.