

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group Meeting Communique

Meeting in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory

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The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group advises the Australian Government on northern development, maximising benefits and implementation outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group held its ninth meeting in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory on 16-18 October, 2023.

Chaired by Colin Saltmere, the Group focused on driving three priorities of their 2023 Action Plan to provide advice on improving the social and economic prosperity of Indigenous Australians in Northern Australia:

- Strengthening Indigenous business outcomes through procurement policies.
- Improving disaster resilience and recovery of Indigenous businesses and communities.
- Place-based, people-centred initiatives to support Indigenous youth.

Members in attendance were Colin Saltmere (Chair), Peter Jeffries, Gillian Mailman, Troy Fraser and Jerome Cubillo. The meeting was also attended by senior representatives from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility.

IRG member Tara Craigie was an apology for the meeting due to prior commitments.

To progress their priorities the IRG met with the Hon Dr Anne Aly MP, Minister for Youth, Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP, Assistant Minister for Defence, and Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP, Chair of Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport. IRG members also met with senior representatives from, Department of Finance, NIAA and the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

The group explored options for future collaboration with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (FNDIAG) and agreed to co-host a workshop on digital connectivity for Indigenous businesses as a part of the Aboriginal Economic Development Forum in Darwin on 8-10 November 2023.

On 17 Oct, the group attended Parliament House to witness Minister Kristy McBain deliver the Northern Australia Annual Statement to Parliament on behalf of the Hon Madeleine King

MP, Minister for Northern Australia. Minister McBain welcomed the focus on Indigenous businesses. IRG members also attended Minister M. King's Stakeholder event where members were able to network with a number of key individuals and groups.

Members thanked First Assistant Secretary, Lil Gordon and senior staff of the First Nations Partnership Division in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts for meeting with the IRG.

Next meeting and 2024 priorities

The next meeting of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group is scheduled for February 2024 in Mt Isa, Queensland.

For 2024, the IRG discussed that they will focus their efforts on:

- Local economic opportunities are maximised for Indigenous economic development;
- Supporting communities and Indigenous decision making with greater access to data; and
- Justice reinvestment.

In addition to areas that focus on Indigenous aspirations in Northern Australia.