

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group Meeting Communique

Meeting in Mount Isa & Camooweal, Queensland

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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 tenth meeting in Mount Isa and Camooweal, Queensland on 21-22 February, 2024.

Chaired by Colin Saltmere, the Group provided advice to the Minister for Northern Australia, the Hon. Madeleine King MP, senior officials and consultants on practical actions to improve the social and economic prosperity of Indigenous Australians in Northern Australia.

Minister King attended the meeting virtually and welcomed two new members, Ms Niniella Mills from Broome, Western Australia and Ms Flora Warrior from Marbiug Island, Torres Strait. Other members present included Colin Saltmere (Chair), Peter Jeffries, Gillian Mailman and Troy Fraser. The meeting was also attended by Katherine Gurbiel, Advisor, Northern Australia, and senior executive officials from the Office of Northern Australia and National Indigenous Australians Agency.

During the meeting the IRG engaged with officials, consultants and the Coalition of Peaks on key government policy including:

- the development of the next five-year action plan for Northern Australia;
- preliminary outcomes of the review of the Northern Australia Indigenous Development Accord;
- proposed reforms to government's Indigenous Procurement Policy;
- establishment of a national First Nations Economic Development Partnership;
- the new National Water Initiative currently under development; and
- the drafting of legislation to protect and commercialise Indigenous knowledge.

Advice provided focussed on the specific circumstances of First Nations Australians in the north and the need to ensure that the challenges and opportunities available in the north are central to policy design and implementation.

The group also heard from Mount Isa Mayor Danielle Slade and representatives from Glencore Zinc Assets Australia on the actions being undertaken to transition the Mount Isa and surrounding areas following the closure of mine sites in the region. Lessons can be translated to other regions across the north experiencing similar decommissioning of mines.

At the meeting the IRG identified their key areas of focus for 2024 to be driving growth in local jobs through Indigenous enterprise, economic development, and activating the Indigenous estate; addressing rising cost of living in regional and remote First Nations communities; and protecting Indigenous knowledge and data sovereignty.

IRG members were invited to tour Myuma Group's Dualanji Camp near Camooweal on the Queensland-Northern Territory border. Here the IRG Chair and the Director of the Australian Institute for Bioengineering and Nanotechnology shared insights into Indigenous-led innovation and commercialisation opportunities and the need to protect Indigenous intellectual property.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group is scheduled for May 2024 in Alice Springs.