

## Submission to the Employment White Paper

The Northern Australian Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) welcomes the opportunity from the Treasury Department to provide a submission to the Employment White Paper. We would be happy to provide further detail if required.

### Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group

The IRG is an expertise-based advisory group comprised of First Nations people with experience in First Nations economic development in Northern Australia. Current IRG members were appointed in 2019 to provide policy advice to the Minister for Northern Australia and the Minister for Indigenous Australians on practical actions to enhance the economic prosperity of First Nations Australians and unlock the First Nations Estate in Northern Australia. As such, the IRG advises the Australian Government on northern development, maximising benefits and implementation outcomes for First Nations people in Northern Australia. IRG members are presented at **Attachment A**.

The IRG brings a wealth of diverse experiences and insight on how to do business in the north and is committed to using this expertise to advance First Nations economic development in the North of Australia.

### Northern Australia Challenges and Opportunities

Northern Australia comprises 53 per cent of Australia's landmass, defined as all of the Northern Territory, as well as the parts of Queensland and Western Australia that intersect with the Tropic of Capricorn (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Northern Australia

Source: Office of Northern Australia. (2021.) Retrieved from [ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf) ([infrastructure.gov.au](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au)) (p.1)

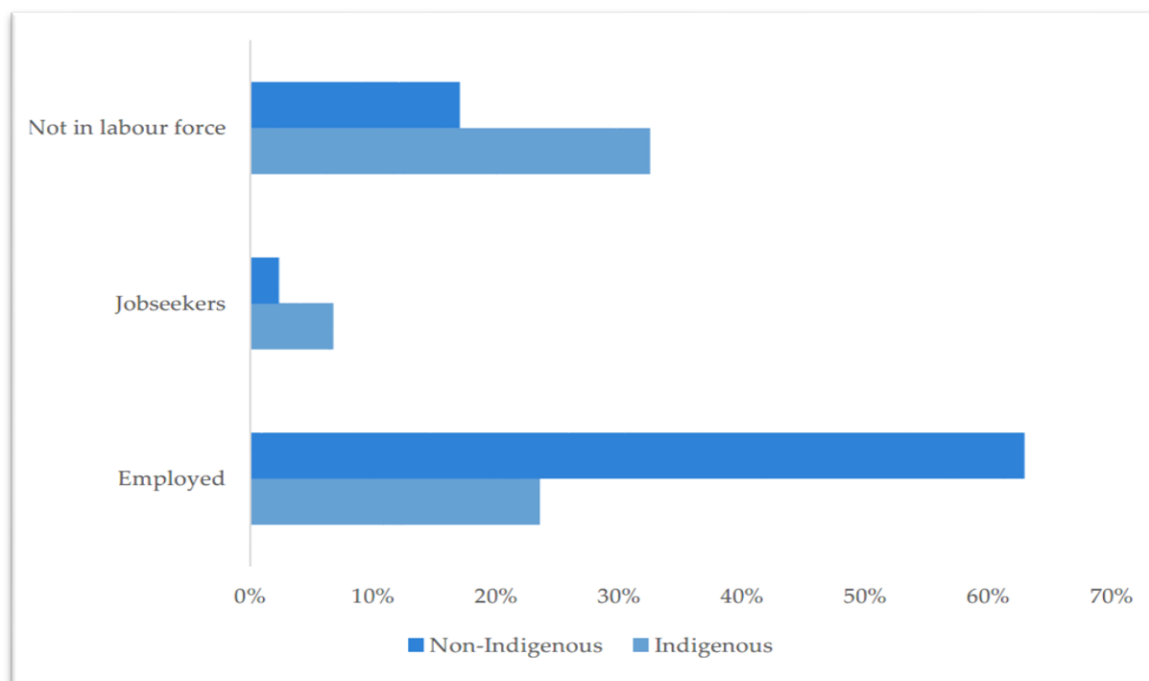
The North is home to only 1.3 million people, or 5.3 per cent of the Australian population, and contributes 11 per cent of GDP.<sup>1</sup> The sparse population, vast distances between major centres and extreme weather conditions make doing business in the north challenging. In

<sup>1</sup> Office of Northern Australia. (2021) *Developing Northern Australia*. Accessed on 24/10/2022. Retrieved from [ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf) ([infrastructure.gov.au](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au)) (p.1)

addition, the presence of fly-in, fly-out workers in the mining and other industry sectors means that the benefit of economic activity is often siphoned away to southern centres.

First Nations Australians have significant assets to bring to the Northern Australia development agenda. First Nations peoples comprise 16 per cent of the population in Northern Australia, far greater than their 3 per cent share of the national population. Around 78 per cent of the land in Northern Australia is recognised under native title or statutory land rights.<sup>2</sup> The First Nations population is younger and growing at a faster rate than the rest of the Australian population.<sup>3</sup> As a result, First Nations Australians are projected to constitute approximately half of the working age population of Northern Australia by 2050.<sup>4</sup> Outside of major population centres in Northern Australia this is already the case.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this, First Nations peoples in Northern Australia are less than half as likely than non-First Nations peoples to be employed, those in the labour force are around three times more likely to be unable to find work and are twice as likely to have disengaged from work entirely (see Figure 2 below).<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 2 – First Nations labour force in Northern Australia*  
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) in Australian Venture Consultants Pty Ltd, (2020) *A new framework for accelerated development of the Northern Australian Indigenous economy*, provided. Accessed on 26/10/2022. (p.47).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) in Australian Venture Consultants Pty Ltd, (2020) *A new framework for accelerated development of the Northern Australian Indigenous economy*, provided. Accessed on 26/10/2022. (p.38).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.37

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) in Australian Venture Consultants Pty Ltd, (2020) *A new framework for accelerated development of the Northern Australian Indigenous economy*, provided. Accessed on 26/10/2022. (p.47).

Low workforce participation is linked with adverse economic outcomes, higher levels of welfare dependency and social issues, all of which impact First Nations communities at a much higher rate.

Northern Australia has untapped potential to drive economic growth in the country into the future. It is estimated that the agricultural potential of Northern Australia alone could generate over \$5.3 billion annually.<sup>7</sup> It is also mineral rich, with deposits of lithium and rare earth metals that will be vital to the electrification of the country in the context of moving toward a net zero future.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, with the historical recognition of Native Title determinations of the past decades, there is an opportunity to advance the economic standing of Northern Australia's First Nations people.

**Ultimately, the future growth of Australia is tied to the north and this is inextricably linked to the untapped potential of the First Nations estate and of First Nations people in the north.** It is within this context that the following recommendations are made.

### Submission

The content of our submission is primarily linked to labour participation and its associated issues, barriers and opportunities. Therefore, the focus of this submission will be on Terms of Reference point 5: Labour force participation, labour supply and improving employment opportunities, specifically subpoints 5.1 to 5.3.

### **Terms of Reference 5.1: Reducing barriers and disincentives to work, including the role of childcare, social security settings and employment services.**

Many of the employment issues that are impacting the country such as skills shortages and labour shortage are magnified in Northern Australia, particularly for our First Nations communities. The range of barriers to employment for our people are well documented and significant effort goes into reducing them but there is more to be done.

#### *Reforming the Community Development Program*

For First Nations Australians, the Community Development Program (CDP) is meant to provide remote employment and community development services. However, consistently, this program has not met the needs of First Nations people.

Replacing the CDP provides an opportunity to consult with local employers on redesigning their workplaces to make them culturally safe and to have a focus on employing local people as a priority. This will allow more services to be delivered *by* First Nations people *for* First Nations people. This is already occurring in the Torres Strait and should be replicated across Australia, especially in the north.

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<sup>7</sup> Office of Northern Australia. (2021) *Developing Northern Australia*. Accessed on 24/10/2022. Retrieved from [ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf](https://ona-developing-northern-australia-fact-sheet-final.pdf) ([infrastructure.gov.au](https://infrastructure.gov.au)) (p.1)

<sup>8</sup> Invest Northern Territory. (2022) *Minerals*. Accessed on 24/10/2022. Retrieved from <https://invest.nt.gov.au/infrastructure-and-key-sectors/key-sectors/minerals>.

In rolling out a new program, there is an opportunity to learn from the former Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) which had a number of successful elements. Under the CDEP, for example:

- opt-in community ownership and community-control;
- Australian Government infrastructure and maintenance projects were utilised to provide services and training for the unemployed;
- acknowledged the lack of labour market in some remote locations and gave community control to create employment roles for services that were important to them;
- training was locally administered and allowed jobseekers to upskill quickly utilising on-the-job and non-accredited training opportunities; and
- wages were paid by the provider and not Centrelink, distancing those in the program from welfare providers.

### *The role of childcare*

Improving workforce participation by First Nations people in Northern Australia also requires adequate levels of affordable childcare. Early childhood education is a crucial foundation for later academic and social success.<sup>9</sup> However, almost 1.1 million Australians live in regional and remote areas where there is no childcare available at all, much of this is concentrated in Northern Australia.<sup>10</sup> There needs to be an increase in funding of early childcare centres in terms of facilities and staff in remote Northern Australia<sup>11</sup> and, importantly, child care services must be culturally appropriate and provide services for children with cognitive, social or physical disabilities. Culture plays a crucial role in early childhood development for First Nations people and as such, early childcare services need to be provided by a local workforce, who are capable to provide children with the right cultural foundation. Government could lead on creating more culturally appropriate childcare by investing in more jobs and skills training for Indigenous child carers and developing guidelines mandating the level of cultural training required by non-First Nations staff.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2015). *Literature review of the impact of early childhood education and care on learning and development*. Canberra: AIHW. Accessed on 07/11/2022. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/learning-development-impact-of-early-childhood-edu/summary>

<sup>10</sup> Hurley, P., Matthews, H., & Pennicuik, S. (2022). *Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare?* Mitchell Institute, Victoria University. Accessed on 07/11/2022. Retrieved from <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/how-accessible-is-childcare-report.pdf> (p.8)

<sup>11</sup> Nationally only 4.3 per cent of children in early education and care identify as Indigenous despite being 6.1 per cent of the population of children aged 0-5 years. This issue is particularly impacting those living in regional and remote Australia who often do not have access to child care services at all. Minister Linda Burney, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2022). *Making childcare more accessible for Indigenous families*. Accessed on 26/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2022/making-childcare-more-accessible-indigenous-families> & McLennan, A. (2021). *Australia Talks finds six out of 10 regional families can't easily access child care*. Accessed on 26/10/2022. Retrieved on: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-12/regional-child-care-shortage-australia-talks-survey/100195218>

The IRG recommends that:

1. The new remote employment and community development service program needs to be considered in a Northern Australia and remote community context;
2. The roll out of a new remote employment and community development service program be used to consult with local employers on redesigning their workplaces to make them culturally safe and to have a focus on employing local people as a priority;
3. In the design of a new remote employment and community development service program, lessons should be drawn from the former CDEP;
4. Government supports investment in early childcare centres in Northern Australia; and
5. Government lead on creating more culturally appropriate childcare through guidelines mandating the level of cultural training required by staff and investing in more jobs and skills training for First Nations child carers. This includes services for those children with cognitive, social or physical disabilities.

**Terms of Reference 5.2: Improving labour market outcomes for those who face challenges in employment, including First Nations people, those who live in rural and remote areas, younger and older Australians, people with disability, and those who may experience discrimination.**

*Improving First Nations employment*

Meaningful employment lies at the heart of opportunity. A job is not only a source of income for individuals and families, it can help build skills and experience as well as self-esteem, bring about financial security and improve living standards. Beyond this, the health benefits of good work are well documented with benefits to physical and mental health, social inclusion and improved developmental outcomes for the children of employed persons.<sup>12</sup>

Yet employment rates for First Nations people in the north remains well below the national average. Although increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who are employed is a goal of the Closing the Gap reforms, there is a lot of work to be

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<sup>12</sup> Biddle 2013, Gray et al. 2014 and WHO 2012 cited in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Indigenous Employment*. Accessed on: 26/10/2022. Retrieved from: [Indigenous employment - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-employment)

done.<sup>13</sup> Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in employment in Northern Australia can be achieved by:

- ensuring that education and training is accessible, affordable and relevant to the jobs that are available now and in the future in communities (see 5.3 below);
- adapting training to suit the learning styles of participants (see 5.3 below);
- making workplaces culturally safe;
- ensuring career pathways for First Nations Australians; and
- supporting the establishment and growth of First Nations business which are more likely to employ and invest in First Nations people and communities.<sup>14</sup>

Improving the participation rate of First Nations people in employment is especially important in the context of the workforce shortage that Australia is facing in a post COVID-19 scenario<sup>15</sup> and moving forward. The size of the Northern Australia First Nations population, residential stability, links to traditional lands and growth trajectory means that First Nations people will perform an increasingly important role in the workforce and the Northern Australia economy.

#### *Creating culturally safe workplaces*

To attract and retain First Nations employees, workplaces must provide an environment that is culturally safe, where employers consciously nurture shared respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge. Creating an appropriate environment requires organisations to be connected to the communities in which they operate and to invest in business and employer capability.

#### *Creating careers, not just jobs*

The jobs available to First Nations people must provide clear pathways for career progression and not be limited to entry level positions or contracts that last for only a year. Providing opportunities for advancement based on an individual's skills, interests and aspirations will contribute to long term employment outcomes including progression to senior levels. Taking the time and investing the money to create a skilled First Nations workforce can mitigate the skills shortage in regional, rural and remote areas, especially in the north, where it is felt most acutely. Perhaps more importantly, increasing capacity and leadership of First Nations peoples in business will improve business practices by bringing a

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Indigenous Employment*. Accessed on: 26/10/2022. Retrieved from: [Indigenous employment - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-employment) & Employment. (2022). *National Indigenous Australians Agency*. Accessed on: 25/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://ctgreport.niaa.gov.au/employment>

<sup>14</sup> Supply Nation and First Australians Capital (undated) *Indigenous Business Growth: Working together to realise potential*. Accessed on 21/11/2022. Retrieved from <https://supplnation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Building-Indigenous-Growth-Report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade. (2022). *Work Hard Play Hard campaign begins* Accessed on 27/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://industry.nt.gov.au/news/2022/march/work-hard-play-hard-campaign-begins> & Harvey, A. Donaldson A and Zilman S (2022). *Left to Rot*. Accessed on 25/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-17/worker-shortage-griffith-four-corners/100071304>

greater depth and breadth of experience and improving the ability to relate to local and regional issues and to First Nations employees.

Increasing Government procurement targets and revising the Government's definition of an Indigenous business to one that is majority (51 per cent) Indigenous owned and operated, will accelerate opportunities to establish and grow authentic, First Nations businesses on country and in communities across Northern Australia and reduce unemployment rates for First Nations people. First Nations businesses are over 100 times more likely to employ First Nations workers than other businesses and invest in First Nations peoples' development and communities<sup>16</sup>. They can also mobilise workforces in rural and regional communities. Supporting majority ownership and Traditional Owners trying to create local opportunities in their communities is an avenue for genuine capacity building and self-determination.

There is an opportunity to learn from existing First Nations owned organisations and programs that have developed successful spin-off companies to provide services such as construction, commercial cleaning, in-home care and health services and tender for other in-demand municipal services. At the same time, it is necessary to support such spin-offs to become majority First Nations owned and operated while being vigilant to reduce the incidence of 'black-cladding' which can arise from the presence of government supports to grow First Nations enterprise.

#### *Avenues for change*

To increase the participation of First Nations people in the workforce in Northern Australia we recommend that government focus on Australia's top 200 employers and the Australian Public Service (APS) which together have a large footprint in Northern Australia and have the capacity to invest in change. Resource companies, major banks and retailers such as supermarkets have a significant presence in the north, including in regional and remote centres, and should have an obligation to employ locally, provide culturally safe workplaces, reduce the incidence of fly-in, fly-out workers and to provide career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees to progress to senior levels. The IRG considers that these businesses should also be required to support First Nations businesses and community-controlled organisations as suppliers of first resort where there is capacity and value for money can be demonstrated. Growing commercial relationships will enable First Nations businesses and community-controlled organisations to deliver an increasing number of products and services on country and in their communities, mobilise a larger share of the First Nations work force who are not already engaged in employment and fill employment gaps. These commitments should extend to major subcontractors given their prevalence in the north.

For the APS, we strongly recommend increasing First Nations employment rates, including at senior levels, employing locally and having succession planning in place to replace exiting staff with qualified locals. This will not only contribute to improved employment outcomes

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<sup>16</sup> Supply Nation and First Australians Capital (undated) *Indigenous Business Growth: Working together to realise potential*. Accessed on 21/11/2022. Retrieved from <https://supplynation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Building-Indigenous-Growth-Report.pdf>

but also the identification of local, place-based services. Achieving these outcomes is unavoidably linked with the availability of affordable, local accommodation as well as appropriate training and skills development.

For both the top 200 employers and the APS there is currently no standardised and public reporting on the numbers and levels of First Nations people in their employment. Without this reporting being publicly available such issues will continue to exist in the background with no real accountability.

Finally, supporting First Nations businesses will also play a key part in increasing First Nations employment levels. According to the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, First Nations businesses are over 100 times more likely to hire First Nations workers than non-First Nations businesses.

The IRG recommends that:

6. Government works with Australia's top 200 employers to increase local First Nations employment and reduce the incidence of fly in, fly out workers, provide culturally safe workplaces and career pathways for First Nations employees and support First Nations businesses and community-controlled organisations as suppliers of first resort where capacity and value for money can be demonstrated;
7. Government increase the First Nations Employment rate in the APS, particularly in remote areas, and introduce succession planning to employ local people who are best placed to provide local solutions to the issues communities face; and
8. Government implement mandatory reporting of First Nations employees for the top 200 employers and the APS in Northern Australia on an annual basis. Indicators should include, at a minimum, the number and share of First Nations employees and their level of employment.

### **Terms of Reference 5.3: Skills, education and training, upskilling and reskilling, including in transitioning sectors and regions.**

#### *Skills, education and training, upskilling and reskilling*

Building capacity through training and education are the foundation for workplace confidence, which has a direct correlation with the ability of an individual to perform successfully at work and to feel secure in their employment.<sup>17</sup> However, the levels of training and education for First Nations peoples in Australia is markedly lower than non-First Nations people. Ninety per cent of non-First Nations Australians finish high school or achieve a Certificate Level II or equivalent in a vocation as opposed to 65 per cent of First Nations

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<sup>17</sup> United States Merit Systems Protection Board. (2021). *Confidence in Ability to Perform Successfully* (p.10). Accessed on 27/10/2022. Retrieved from: [https://www.mspb.gov/studies/researchbriefs/Confidence\\_in\\_Ability\\_to\\_Perform\\_Successfully\\_1868023.pdf](https://www.mspb.gov/studies/researchbriefs/Confidence_in_Ability_to_Perform_Successfully_1868023.pdf)



Australians who attain the same level.<sup>18</sup> First Nations Australians are also 30 per cent less likely to have achieved a tertiary qualification than non-First Nations people.<sup>19</sup>

The IRG recommends:

9. Tailoring training and education to meet the needs of First Nations people in Northern Australia as follows:
  - a. Having the platform for treating people as individuals in positive action initiatives - Training needs to identify personal strengths and skills to build on, and areas for improvement within each individual and their unique context;
  - b. Services to be flexible - Training and education services should consider prior learning and individual capacity including the individual's confidence, personal skills, capacity to talk with others and so on;
  - c. Education and training to be culturally appropriate - Education and training should be provided in a culturally appropriate manner with cultural values, practices and ways of learning as the foundation for curriculum design and delivery;
  - d. Education and training to be locally delivered - Education and training should be delivered locally or include culturally appropriate means to access training. This includes the provision of transport, accommodation and wrap around services for those that need to travel away from home to access opportunities or digital access that meet the needs of the individual and the community;
  - e. Investing in foundational skills development from early primary, secondary schooling, tertiary and trade - Investment needs to be made into building language, literacy and numeracy as foundational skills to prepare people for the workplace, particularly for school leavers and the long term unemployed;
  - f. Supporting behavioural change in investment in trade-based training to build non-academic skills in line with future labour demand; and
  - g. Supporting underrepresented mentors to guide students journey from primary, secondary and outside of their academic or trade related education.

Further, the IRG considers that First Nations peoples' participation in the fields of science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and digital fields must be increased.

#### *STEM and digital education*

As the world becomes increasingly digitalised the job market of the future will rely heavily on knowledge in STEM subjects. Jobs in STEM have increased at a much higher rate than non-STEM jobs and will continue to do so into the future.<sup>20</sup> Jobs that may not be classed as STEM

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2021). Indigenous education and skills. Accessed on 26/10/2022. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-education-and-skills>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2020). *No STEM-ing of growth for Aussie jobs* Accessed on: 24/10/2022. Retrieved from: [STEM jobs growing almost twice as fast as other jobs - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government \(dewr.gov.au\)](https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-and-workplace-relations/employment-and-workplace-relations-research-and-statistics/employment-and-workplace-relations-research-and-statistics-reports-and-publications/no-stem-ing-of-growth-for-aussie-jobs)

right now are also likely to have need some level of knowledge in STEM areas into the future too, such is the rapid change in technology and digitisation that is occurring.<sup>21</sup>

It is well documented that First Nations children and young adults are much less likely to be involved in STEM topics.<sup>22</sup> Enrolments in these topics for First Nations people and especially First Nations women in tertiary education is far below the level for other Australians.<sup>23</sup> The IRG recommends that government and industry come together to invest in STEM programs including secondary and tertiary scholarships with specific positions for Northern Australian First Nations students. Any pathway into STEM or Digital Jobs that is created must be First Nations designed and led, so that it is culturally safe and meets the needs of First Nations people. This will increase enrolment and achievement levels and ultimately upskill our First Nations peoples to achieve employment in these areas.

Covid-19 showed us that working from home, including operating businesses, is possible. There is no reason why First Nations people in regional and remote communities in Northern Australia could not work in jobs or service markets that are primarily located elsewhere domestically or internationally. With the right infrastructure and skills, First Nations communities could participate in such activities as cyber security. This opens up opportunities for First Nations people to participate in the global economy and benefit from the technological revolution.

The capacity to work from home requires the requisite infrastructure complimented by First Nations led training to enable local First Nations people to maintain it. Community based technicians could ensure that problems are identified and fixed quickly and efficiently and that First Nations communities, once connected, remain connected. Training local technicians provides jobs and skills for our people and a ready and available workforce for the Government and private employers.

An example of where STEM jobs will be particularly valued and required will be the in the clean energy transition. This provides an opportunity for First Nations people to be involved in the transition to net zero and ensure that they benefit from the proposed changes

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<sup>21</sup> Department of Education. (2022). *Why is STEM important?* Accessed on: 26/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/national-stem-education-resources-toolkit/introductory-material-what-stem/why-stem-important>

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education. (2022). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.* Accessed on: 26/10/2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-curriculum/national-stem-education-resources-toolkit/i-want-know-about-stem-education/which-school-students-need-stem-education/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-students>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

**Case study: Raising support for First Nations peoples' participation in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and digital technology**

Illuminate FNQ Ltd is a not-for-profit provider of scientific and environmental education in Far North Queensland, Australia. One of their priority aims is to promote dialogue and partnerships in science and environmental planning and research between Australia and other countries in a variety of communities, industries, universities, and the private sector; and including youth, women, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

A core component of their program is to hold an International Science and Environment Festival organised by First Nations traditional scientists and the community. Participation in all aspects of the festival includes influential elders, youth, and community members to generate momentum in the public to engage more fully in STEM careers. Beyond the festival, Illuminate FNQ are creating a number of other endeavours to build upon the momentum of the festival, to educate, provide careers and STEM for youth, women, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

This year's festival was held in Cairns, 18-20 August 2022 and saw presentations from:

- Dr Mary Ellen Weber, Stellar Strategies and former NASA astronaut
- Associate Professor Alice Gorman, International Space University
- Professor Mark Hutchinson, Adelaide Medical School and Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Nanoscale Bio Photonics
- Dr Linda Pfeiffer, School of Education and the Arts, Gladstone Marina campus
- Maree Wilson, Branch Head, Digital Earth Branch at Geoscience Australia
- Dr Joseph West, Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne in advanced Artificial Intelligence
- Alan J Hurd, Physicist, Los Alamos National Laboratory
- Professor Hugh Possingham, Queensland's Chief Scientist

Multiple grant applications, for a total of \$445,000, were submitted to local and national funding bodies seeking financial assistance to bring the festival to fruition. Submissions were made to Cairns Regional Council, Economic Event Partnership Gambling Fund, National Indigenous Australians Agency, Torres Strait Regional Authority, Queensland Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Regional Partnership Grant – Office of the Chief Scientist, Science Foundation, Makers Project, and Australian Indigenous Education Foundation. These grant applications were unsuccessful.

The festival was made possible through philanthropic funding, totalling \$256,000, from the United States (US) State Department, US based company Trenchant Economics, Batchelor Institute, Rainbow Gateway, Gunggandji Project Management, Great Barrier Reef Foundation, and Exchange Container. The major contributors were from the US with a total of \$135,000 in philanthropic funding.

Illuminate FNQ Ltd have stated it is far more cost effective for them to seek overseas philanthropic and government funding than it is to spend over 200 hours writing unsuccessful submissions for funding locally and nationally.

### *The Clean Energy Transition*

Northern Australia has an abundance of natural resources to support new, clean energy as part of the Government's commitment to achieving net zero emissions. The region's proximity to Asia positions the region to become an exporter of renewable energy. Delivering on the Government's objectives, while ensuring First Nations heritage is protected and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share in the benefits, however, is dependent upon placing First Nations people at the heart of this development.

The rapid transition to renewables provides opportunity for Traditional Owners and First Nations communities to leverage the economic value of their land, water and sea. In the Northern Territory alone 54 of the 72 First Nations communities are off-grid, using diesel (generation sets). If done right, and in partnership with First Nations Australians, the transition to renewable energy has the capacity to provide communities with cheap, reliable power, secure jobs, steady income and the power to choose what happens on their country.

Given the urgency of Australia's transition to renewables, we have an opportunity to learn from global First Nations best practice. First Nations communities have been involved in the development of renewable energy in Canada and the United States of America for more than 20 years. For the Navajo, taking the lead to drive the necessary transition from coal to renewables aims to maximise the economic benefits for local communities.

The IRG recommends that:

10. Government and industry come together to invest in STEM programs including secondary and tertiary scholarships with specific positions for Northern Australian First Nations students.

**Case study: Navajo Power**

A global example of First Nations people that have been actively involved in, and benefited from, the energy transition is Navajo Power in Navajo Nation in the United States of America.<sup>24</sup>

Navajo Power was founded to maximise the economic benefits of clean energy for tribal and impacted communities. It is a Public Benefit Corporate that develops utility-scale clean energy on tribal lands, and maximises the economic benefits for local communities. It supplies reliable clean energy to people living on the Navajo Nation that would otherwise be without power and reinvests profits from supplying this energy elsewhere into Navajo communities.

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<sup>24</sup> The Climate Reality Project. (2021). *Bootstrapping clean energy on the Navajo nation*. Accessed on 25/10/2022. Retrieved from <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/bootstrapping-clean-energy-navajo-nation>

### IRG Membership

- Mr Colin Saltmere, Chair – Managing Director of the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu Aboriginal Corporation, the Myuma and Rainbow Gateway companies, and Adjunct Professor with the University of Queensland’s Aboriginal Environments Research Centre.
- Ms Tara Craigie – Managing Director of J&T Craigie Pty Ltd, Indigenous Engagement Consultant at AAM Investment Group, and President at Northern Cowboys Association and Founder of Territory Rodeo Services.
- Mr Jerome Cubillo – Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network, Chairperson of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC), and on the Board of Ironbark Aboriginal Corporation representing LNAC.
- Mr Troy Fraser – Chief Executive Officer of Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire Council and formerly Community, Youth and Economic Development Manager at the Aboriginal Development Benefits Trust.
- Mr Peter Jeffries – Chief Executive Officer of Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation and has formerly worked with the WA Police Force, Rio Tinto, the Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation, Woodside and his own business offering consulting services and Aboriginal cultural tourism.
- Ms Gillian Mailman – Managing Director of Fibre Optics NQ, Chief Executive Officer of MJB Solutions Pty Ltd, Director of Indigenous Wealth Hub, and Director of Illuminate FNQ.
- Ms Cara Peek – lawyer, entrepreneurial leader, and cultural intelligence strategist. Cara has worked closely with many regional communities across Australia, the US, and Canada as part of her personal mission to create deep, positive social change for First Peoples globally.