

Submission to the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper

The Northern Australian Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Employment and Workforce Relations on the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper.

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group

The IRG is an expertise-based advisory group comprised of seven Indigenous leaders with business acumen and experience in Indigenous economic development in Northern Australia. The IRG advises the Australian Government on northern development, maximising benefits and implementation of outcomes for First Nations people in Northern Australia. IRG members are listed at **Attachment A**.

Northern Australia

Northern Australia is the Northern Territory and those parts of Queensland (QLD) and Western Australia (WA) above, directly below or intersecting with the Tropic of Capricorn; the regional centres of Gladstone, QLD, Carnarvon, WA, and Exmouth, WA; the Local Government Areas of Meekatharra, WA; Wiluna, WA; the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku, WA; and the Indian Ocean Territories of Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Christmas Island (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Northern Australia

Northern Australia comprises 59 per cent of Australia's landmass.

First Nations Australians comprise 16.5 per cent of the Northern Australian population. Around 78 per cent of the land in Northern Australia is recognised under native title or statutory land rights.

First Nations peoples in Northern Australia are less than half as likely than non-First Nations peoples to be employed, and 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).¹

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.

¹ 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).

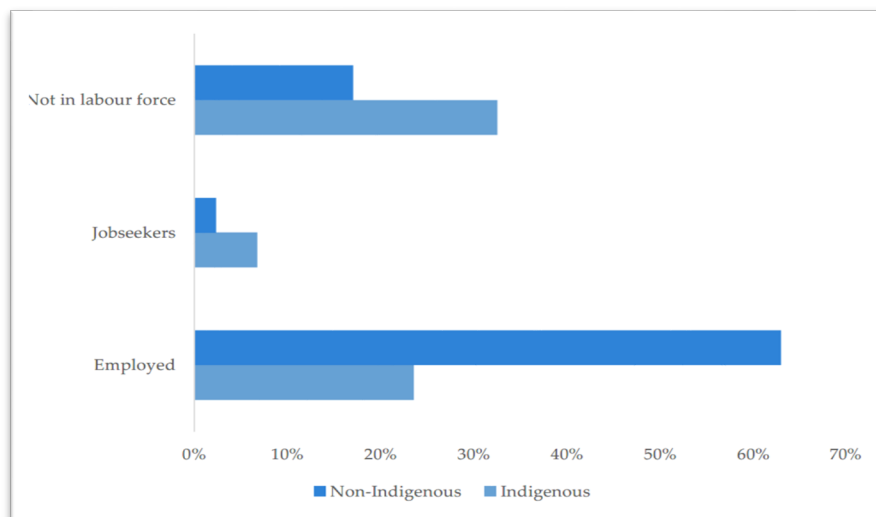


Figure 2 – First Nations labour force in Northern Australia
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016) in Australian Venture Consultants Pty Ltd, (2020) A new framework for accelerated development of the Northern Australian Indigenous economy, provided. Accessed on 26/10/2022. (p.47).

Submission

Structure and governance

1. Are there other design considerations that could further strengthen Jobs and Skills Australia's ability to provide advice to government?

The discussion paper refers to the tripartite advisory body seeking insights from relevant stakeholders on specific skills, labour market and workforce issues as they emerge.

The IRG recommends inclusion of First Nations representation on the advisory body to enable clear representation on the significant gaps in training and employment opportunities and a voice on the challenges faced by First Nations people.

Functions and ways of working

2. What principles could be used to guide Jobs and Skills Australia's priorities, and the development of its workplan?

Through its submission to the Employment White Paper, the IRG suggested 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 into the future, including in regional and remote communities;
- adapting training to suit the learning styles of participants;
- 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.²

As a starting point, these principles could be used to inform the priorities of the JSA workplan.

The IRG would like to see an acknowledgement of the potential of the First Nations workforce in regional and remote Australia and the priorities for upskilling First Nations people to enable a 'growing our own' model. This aligns with the suggested expanded functions of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) of meeting people 'where they are at', creating training packages that lead to real jobs, and identifying what jobs are needed in regional and remote Australia.

3. How could Jobs and Skills Australia seek broader input into the development and refinement of its workplan?

Capturing the views of First Nations Australians will be critical to enabling JSA to deliver on its mandate. The IRG considers broader input could be sourced from:

- Engagement with the National Indigenous Australians Agency on the Community Development Plan (CDP) reforms and with CDP providers;
- Engagement with the IRG; and
- Engagement with Indigenous Business Networks and Indigenous Chambers of Commerce.

4. How could Jobs and Skills Australia engage tripartite partners, experts and other interested parties in its major studies?

As noted in our response to question 1 above, the IRG recommends, in the first instance, permanent First Nations representation on the tripartite advisory body. Beyond this, the IRG recommends aligning JSA engagement with First Nations peoples in Northern Australia with the Closing the Gap framework, ensuring consistency with the priority reforms of Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making, Building the Community Controlled Sector, Transforming Government Organisations and Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level.

² 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>

5. What new information should Jobs and Skills Australia be collecting through its engagement to build a stronger evidence base?

Noting that some of this information may already exist, the IRG recommends for First Nations people in regional and remote Australia, evidence should be made available to answer questions such as:

- What jobs are needed in regional and remote Australia, now and in the future?
- What human resources are available in regional and remote Australia, what are the current skill levels, and how do they align with the jobs required?
- What are the pathways to jobs for First Nations people in regional and remote areas?
- How can traditional knowledge be used to inform jobs of the future in areas such as biosecurity, climate change mitigation, environmental services, agriculture and conservation?
- What are the aspirations of First Nations communities and how can business models be linked to these aspirations?

Discussion questions on ways of working:

6. How can Jobs and Skills Australia expand its engagement to include a broader range of skills and industry stakeholders in its work?

The IRG recommend working with existing networks and engaging with First Nations Business Networks to seek nominations of relevant partners to engage with. This will also eliminate duplication of engagement on existing programs and strengthen existing networks. At a minimum, the IRG recommends engagement with the National Indigenous Australians Agency on the Community Development Plan reforms, the IRG and Indigenous Business Networks.

7. What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?

The IRG recommends outreach and promotion through existing platforms including the IRG, Indigenous Business Networks, the Indigenous Chambers of Commerce, and the National Indigenous Australians Agency's Community Development Program.

8. How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?

The IRG highly values publicly available, easily accessible data to inform First Nations' entrepreneurship and business decisions. Data and information must be easily accessible and its presentation consider the capability of data users. The IRG recommends the use of existing networks to disseminate data and analysis, supported by capability programs to better equip data users and inform individual and business decision making.

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.