

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group Communiqué – February 2022

First meeting in Darwin, Northern Territory

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The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group held its first formal meeting in Darwin in the Northern Territory on 23 and 24 February 2022.

Chaired by Mr Colin Saltmere, the Group focused on the next phase of the northern development agenda, and strategies to increase economic engagement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Northern Australia.

The meeting was attended by the Senator Susan McDonald, Special Envoy for Northern Australia. The Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia, David Littleproud and Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt also addressed the group virtually.

Members in attendance included Tara Craigie, Jerome Cubillo, Troy Fraser, Gillian Mailman and Cara Peek. Representatives of the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia and the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network also participated in the meeting.

The Group discussed the Government's next five-year plan for Northern Australia *Our North, Our Future: 2021-2026 – Targeted Growth* and was provided with an overview of the Regions of Growth Initiative by the Office of Northern Australia. The Group supports a dedicated Indigenous consultation process for the Regions of Growth Master Plans and requests the opportunity to provide input to the scope of the process. The Group identified connectivity and housing as key infrastructure priorities for Indigenous businesses and communities.

Improving Indigenous employment and procurement outcomes were a key topic of discussion. The Group recommends further investigation of a certification and compliance process for ownership of Indigenous businesses to strengthen genuine outcomes from procurement policies.

A representative from the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) provided an overview of the NAIF and its Indigenous Engagement Strategy. The Group requests an opportunity to meet with the NAIF Board to increase an understanding of the effectiveness of Indigenous Engagement Strategies.

The Group received an update from the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) and requests advice from CRCNA specifically on investment in the Traditional Owner-led business stream.

Members of the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) presented at the meeting and provided an overview of the role, initiatives and plans of the NTIBN. The group discussed the challenges and opportunities facing Indigenous businesses across Northern Australia and commended the NTIBN on the Indigenous business directory the group is developing.

In conclusion, the Group is preparing a report with an action plan and recommendations to Minister Littleproud and Minister Wyatt.

Next meeting

The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group will meet quarterly.