

Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group Meeting

Communique

Meeting in Cairns, Queensland

Publication Date: 24 July 2026

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 (IRG) held its fifth meeting under the current terms of reference in Cairns, Queensland on 15 June 2026. The meeting focused on the priority issues and opportunities to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the north.

A Welcome to Country was delivered by on behalf of the Gimuy-walubarra Yidinji people.

The IRG met with the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, and the Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, Senator the Hon Nita Green. The group held discussions with external stakeholders and government representatives on matters relevant to First Nations economic participation and regional development, including members of the First Nations Economic Partnership, Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility CEO Neil MacDonald, CEO of Jobs and Skills Council Geoff Babaro and the Deputy Commissioner of Jobs and Skills Australia Trevor Gould.

The IRG used the Cairns meeting to progress delivery of their three priority areas: analysing outcomes for First Nations communities from Government investment in Northern Australia, strengthening the education-to-employment pipeline, and addressing barriers to Indigenous enterprise.

These priorities are increasingly being applied as a lens to shape the IRG's work on communities undergoing economic transition in Northern Australia. This includes providing advice to government on how Indigenous leadership can drive more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes before and during transition, ensuring that community priorities are reflected in planning, investment, and implementation.

IRG members in attendance were Professor Martin Nakata (Chair), Alinta McGuire and Damien Djerrkura. Troy Fraser, Nini Mills and Flora Warrior attended virtually. The next IRG meeting is scheduled for 4 August 2026 in Alice Springs, Northern Territory.