



## Aboriginal Peak Organisations

NORTHERN TERRITORY

# Fair Work Strong Communities

2023

A Refreshed Summary Of The APO NT Fair Work Strong  
Communities Proposal To Address Remote Employment

# Executive Summary

The Community Development Program is based on the wrong foundations. It doesn't address the most fundamental problem in remote Australia, which is the lack of jobs in remote communities. It assumes that if people just keep turning up for appointments and doing activities, they will eventually find work.

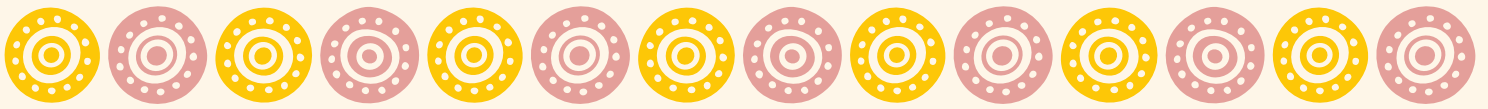
Currently, decisions about how the program is designed, implemented and measured do not reflect the partnership principles in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. While contracted CDP providers are required to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned organisations or in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned organisations, they do not have to be local community controlled. They are bound by contracts that are designed in Canberra, and their ability to respond to local needs is hampered by complex rules.

The Fair Work Strong Communities proposal sets out a new pathway forward. It has been developed by an alliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and others over several years. This proposal will directly address the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, while contributing to rebuilding the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector to address community needs. It will reduce poverty for families across remote Australia and provide thousands of people with an opportunity to take up paid employment that is meaningful for them.

The four key elements of this proposal are:

- 1** **Creating a minimum of 12,000 new jobs** in remote communities across Australia in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector, including **1,500 paid training roles for young people**.
- 2** **Redesigning employment assistance** so that it is not based on appointments and meaningless obligations, but delivers a mix of **services and programs that are relevant** to local conditions, **led by local people**, and is **culturally safe**.
- 3** **Establishing a framework based on Closing the Gap policy partnership principles**, to ensure that the development, implementation, monitoring and ongoing improvement of a new program is done in partnership with affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representatives, and that, as far as possible, **delivery is through local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations**.
- 4** Making sure that the **programs and systems** that are needed for a successful employment program (like access to Centrelink, training and business support) **are in place and working effectively**.

This paper sets out the proposal in more detail, answering some of the questions that arise about the scheme and the outcomes that we are seeking to achieve.



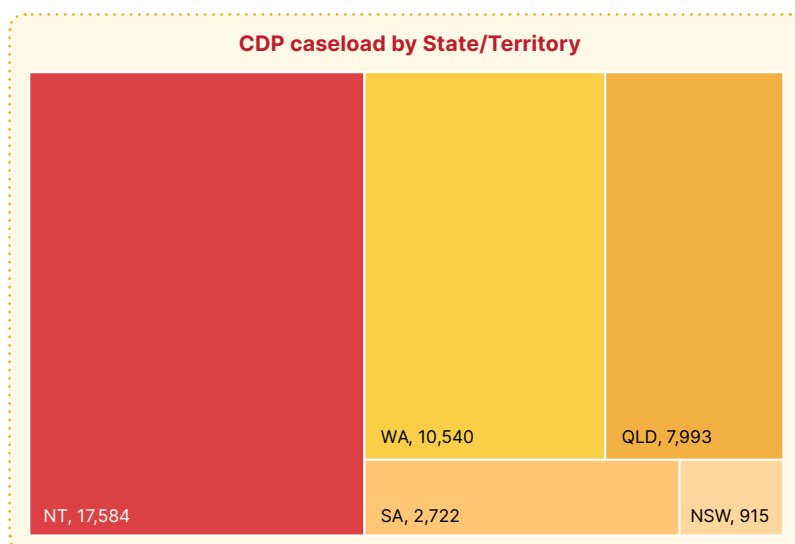
# Table Of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Executive Summary  | 2  |
| Background: Why We Need A Radically Different Approach   | 4  |
| <hr/>  |    |
| <b>A.</b> Addressing The Jobs Deficit Through Immediate And Long Term Initiatives  | 7  |
| • What sorts of jobs could be funded through the remote jobs investment fund?  | 8  |
| • What is the difference between this and CDEP?  | 9  |
| • How would the number and distribution of jobs be decided?  | 9  |
| • Will these jobs have to be subsidised forever?   | 10 |
| <hr/>  |    |
| <b>B.</b> A Remote Employment And Community Development Program That Is Fit For Purpose                                      | 11 |
| • How would the services be different from what currently exists?  | 12 |
| • Making sure that funding and performance arrangements support long term positive outcomes for individuals and communities. | 13 |
| <hr/>  |    |
| <b>C.</b> A New Framework For Governing And Managing Remote Employment   | 14 |
| <hr/>  |    |
| <b>D.</b> Reforming Other Policy And Funding Systems To Make Sure They Support Remote Communities' Ambitions                 | 16 |
| • Implementing the National Framework  | 16 |
| <hr/>  |    |
| <b>Appendix I</b>  |    |
| Mapping Closing The Gap Agreement Targets To FWSC Proposal   | 19 |
| <b>Appendix II</b>   |    |
| Priority Reform 1 – Policy Partnership Principles  | 20 |



# Background: Why We Need A Radically Different Approach

There are around 40,000 current participants in the Community Development Program (CDP) across Australia, most of whom are required to participate in CDP in order to receive income support. Over 85% of CDP participants identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



1 NIAA Admin data (provided) 31st October 2022.

Each month, every CDP participant must attend an appointment with their contracted CDP service provider and agree to activities (eg. job search) designed to improve their 'employability'. This is the case even where there are no suitable jobs available. If they don't attend appointments, participants can lose their income support payments. All people on unemployment benefits, whether they have just left school, have a disability or are nearing aged pension age, are required to participate.

The Commonwealth pays \$300m - \$400m every year to CDP providers to deliver the program.<sup>1</sup> This money does not go to participants, who remain on income support. While many providers employ local staff in the program, the highly bureaucratic and IT dependent nature of CDP means that many staff are not based in communities<sup>2</sup>. Many of those that are employed locally are desk bound – tied to a computer so that they can report to Centrelink and NIAA. Some providers are able to extract large profits from the scheme.

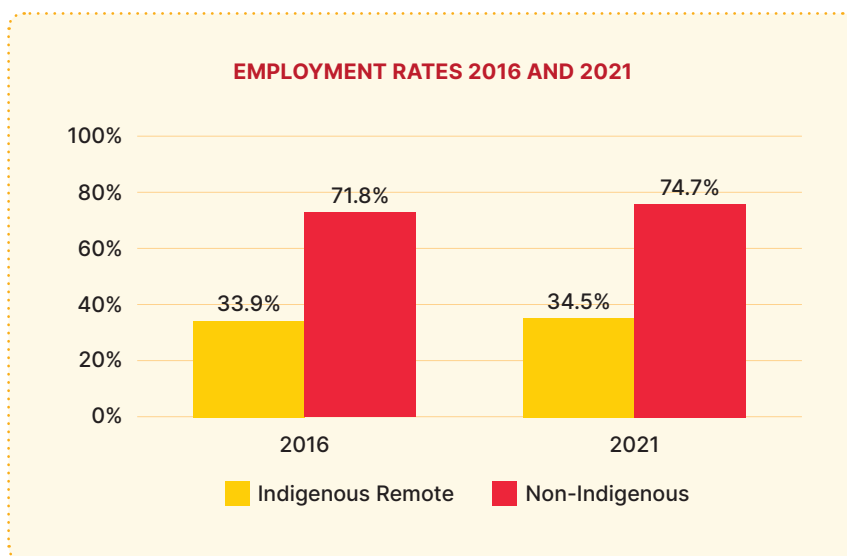
<sup>1</sup> See Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee, Supplementary Budget Estimates 2020-2021 – document tabled 29/10/2021 – NIAA response to Senator Ayres. Also ANAO (Australian National Audit Office) (2017). Design and Implementation of the Community Development Programme (Report No.14, 2017-18), ANAO, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> ANAO (2017). p46

In 2020-21, only 1,639 six-month job outcomes were claimed by providers – at a cost to government of around \$200,000 per job<sup>3</sup>. Over nearly 10 years, fewer than 10% of people who have participated in RJCP/CDP have moved into employment for six months or more<sup>4</sup>. Non-Indigenous people and those who had not spent a long time looking for work have been the most likely to move into jobs<sup>5</sup>. In 2020-21, for example, 17% of the CDP caseload was identified as non-Indigenous, but non-Indigenous people accounted for nearly 40% of 26-week outcome claims.

We estimate that over \$1.75 billion was spent on the CDP between 2015 and 2021, but the employment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Australia has barely moved (Figure 1). As employment for non-Indigenous Australians has improved, the gap between the employment rate of working age Indigenous people in remote Australia and the national employment rate of non-Indigenous people has widened.

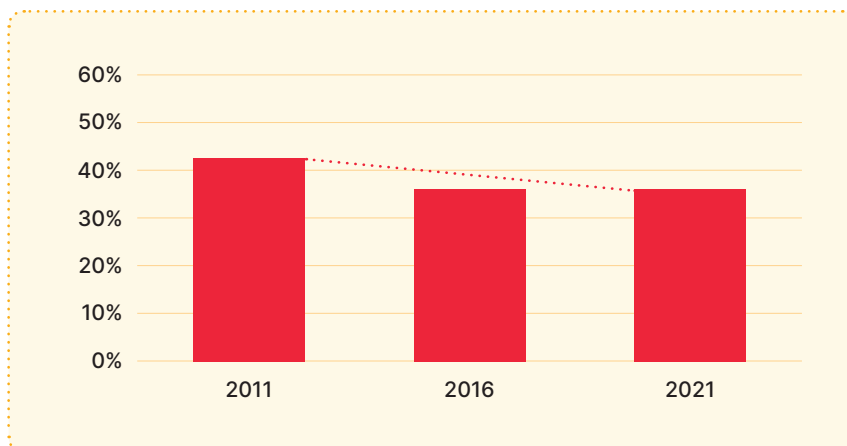
Figure 1



2 Unpublished analysis, ABS Census, 2016 & 2021

The Indigenous employment rate in the NT (which accounts for around 40% of the CDP caseload) has declined over the last decade (Figure 2).

Figure 2



3 Unpublished analysis, ABS Census 2011, 2016, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Note that claims can be made in cases where people find their own employment. Multiple claims can be made in respect of one person. In 2019-20 the total number of claims was 1,880.

<sup>4</sup> Unpublished NIAA administrative data.

<sup>5</sup> Fowkes, L. and Li, J. (2018), 'Designing A Remote Employment Program: Lessons From the Past and a Proposal for the Future', Journal of Australian Political Economy, No. 82, pp. 57-83.

In 2016, one in five people in the CDP were reported to have spent at least 70% of their lives on income support<sup>6</sup>.

There are nearly 9,000 people under 25 in the program today who, based on current employment trends, look likely to join them.

Lack of access to paid employment is at the heart of persistent poverty experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities. This has been estimated to account for one third to a half of the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people<sup>7</sup>. Health, social and other outcomes will not change unless poverty is addressed. **After more than a decade of remote communities' employment and incomes going backwards, it is time for a very different approach.**

The Fair Work Strong Communities proposal reflects the principles set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and will make a meaningful difference to achieving its targets from day one.

The key features of the proposal include:

- A** Addressing the jobs deficit through **direct job creation** and long term economic and community development.
- B** Providing culturally safe and fit for purpose **employment and training assistance**.
- C** Genuine **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making** at national and community levels.
- D** Making sure that **critical policies and systems** (like social security, vocational training and enterprise support) are **supporting incomes and employment** in remote communities.



This document will address each of these elements in turn.

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<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Community Development Programme: Evaluation of participation and employment outcomes.

<sup>7</sup> Zhao, Y., Wright, J., Begg, S. et al. Decomposing Indigenous life expectancy gap by risk factors: a life table analysis. *Popul Health Metrics* 11, 1 (2013). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1478-7954-11-1>

# A. Addressing The Jobs Deficit Through Immediate And Long Term Initiatives

We propose immediate action to substantially reduce the jobs deficit in remote communities. This is necessary to break the current cycle of poverty and joblessness, and to provide a reasonable chance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly young people, to build the skills and experience their communities, and the economy, will need in the future.

A Jobs Fund should be established to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to create new jobs in their communities for local people.

This fund should be sufficient to allow for:



Pictured: Doris Jurrah

**10,500**

jobs at **20 hours** per week at **minimum wage**.

**25%**

**allowance** for employers to **cover** employment **costs** (eg. superannuation).

**1,500**

**6-month, full time** paid training positions for **young people**.

Additional

**5%**

set aside to **provide work** related training to **those employed** under the scheme.

We estimate the cost of this fund would be \$336.3m per annum. Additional funds should be set aside to fund capital and equipment costs associated with job generating projects.

Modelling done for APO NT in 2018 suggested that this proposal could generate annual income support savings and additional tax revenue of around \$97.8m, partially offsetting scheme costs<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Fowkes, L. and Li, J. (2018)

The same modelling showed that creating and filling these jobs would, on its own:

### Reduce

the population wide **poverty rate** in CDP regions from **22.7%** to **20.1%**.

AND

### Increase

the population wide **employment rate** in these regions from **48.2%** to **57.8%**<sup>9</sup>.

**This means that the gap between non-Indigenous and remote Indigenous employment rates would be reduced by one third.**

Job creation at scale would also have indirect effects – stimulating local economies, reducing health costs, and improving child welfare outcomes.

## **What sorts of jobs could be funded through the Remote Jobs Investment Fund?**

Under this proposal, any local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation could apply for funding to create new jobs provided that they are attached to a specific project or tasks aligned to community objectives (for example provision of health information, conservation tasks, provision of disability support, building of a community facility, cultural leadership, maintaining outstations) or are aimed at building a specific skill need (for example shadowing a local non-Indigenous office manager, continuing an apprenticeship). Cultural work would be recognised as a legitimate form of work that could be paid for through the Jobs Fund.

Jobs could be created for up to 5 years, with the possibility of extension beyond this.

We expect that in most communities' multiple local employers would apply for funding and employ people through the scheme, although – as under CDEP – there may be organisations that employ larger numbers.

Apart from the youth training places, we are proposing that funding available for each job be capped at 20 hours at the minimum wage (plus loading). Employers could use the Jobs Fund to employ people for up to 20 hours per week and could top this up from other funds (including commercial revenue) to increase hours or wages as appropriate.

While the Jobs Fund is designed to enable stable employment for up to 5 years, the mix of traineeships, part-time, casual and/or temporary work could be determined locally based on local needs. For example it would be open to local organisations to: create a casual pool to deliver some tasks; use funds to create casual jobs for school students; provide temporary wage assistance for individuals who are starting their own microenterprise or create temporary jobs that operate while other seasonal work is not available. While 20 hours per week has been identified as a starting point (and a cap), local communities could decide to distribute funded hours differently.

<sup>9</sup> Discrepancy in employment rate from Census data reflects data set & approach used by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling. Modelling is available from APO NT.



## What is the difference between this and CDEP?

Key differences between this proposal and CDEP are:

- Funding for jobs could be accessed by any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation in the community, and people would become employees of that organisation. Under CDEP there was usually one provider in each area. Where other organisations had work available, they could 'host' CDEP participants – but CDEP participants often missed out on opportunities for training and promotion in their host organisation. Under this proposal, **more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations could take on additional employees directly;**
- 
- CDEP participants on wages were not eligible for unemployment benefits or for many employment rights (eg superannuation on their base wage, long service leave). This meant that they were usually worse off financially than other part-time employees. Under this proposal **people would be employees like any other.**

## How would the number and distribution of jobs be decided?

This proposal would make a substantial, immediate impact on the chances that people in remote communities can find work. We think that more funded jobs should be created in regions that are very 'job poor', and that, over time, the amount of funding could be shifted up and down depending on the strength of local jobs demand.

Local communities should have the power to make decisions about which jobs are funded through the Jobs Fund in their region. This may include establishing selection criteria that reflect local community aspirations and conditions, or by identifying an appropriate decision-making process. Where there are existing local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander decision making structures, which are authorised by and representative of their communities, these may be the appropriate decision-making bodies for distribution of funding for jobs. We expect that governance arrangements may change or evolve over time. Decision makers must be resourced appropriately (with secretariat support, governance training and access to meaningful data and information) to make these decisions. NIAA could assist local authorised decision makers, but decisions should not generally be made by NIAA.

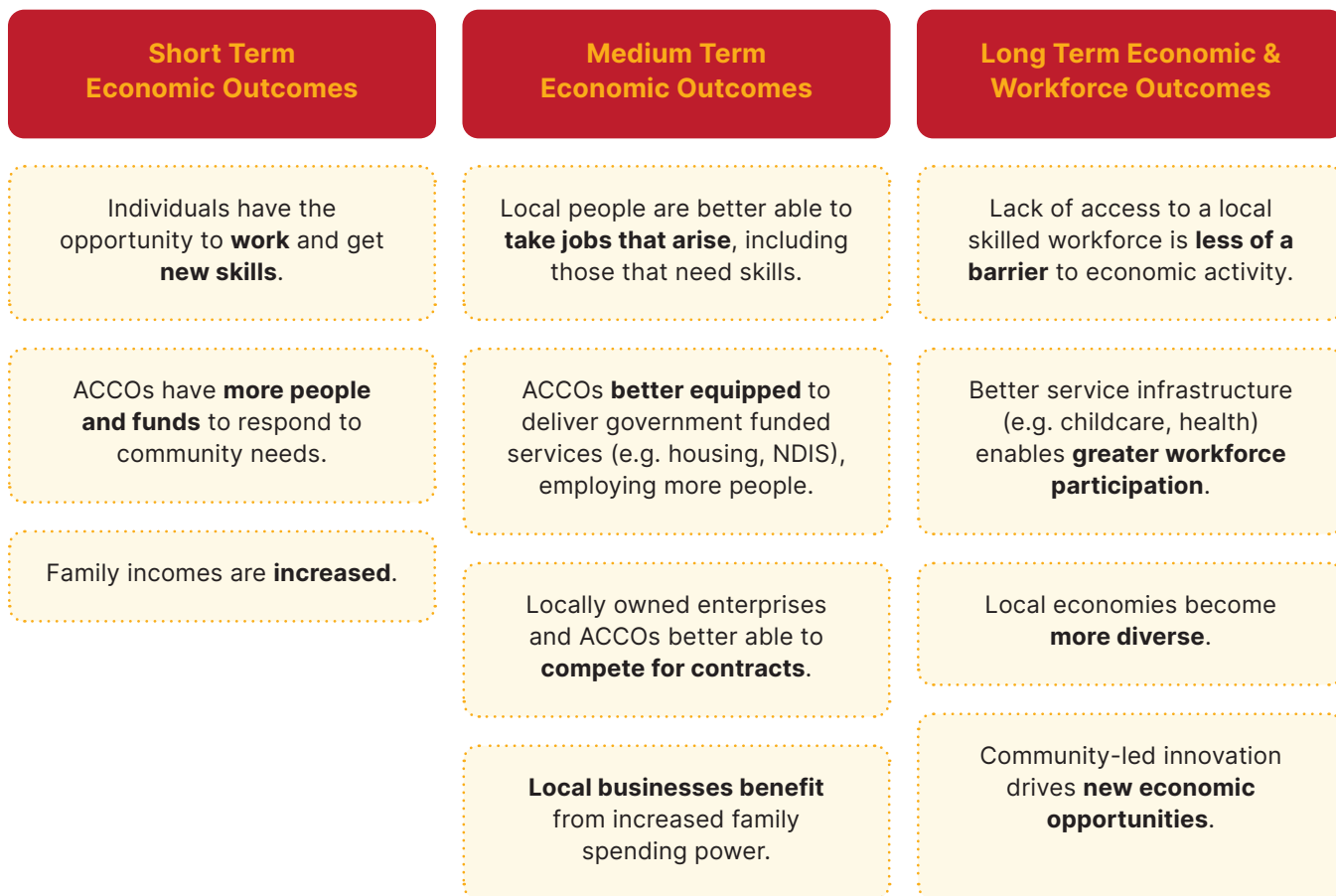


## **Will these jobs have to be subsidised forever?**

When CDEP was abolished, there seemed to be an assumption that new jobs would spring up in its place. This hasn't happened and things have become worse. Government intervention to create jobs is needed in order to address the immediate need and to establish conditions for future economic opportunity. In addition to directly creating jobs, the Job Fund is expected to indirectly generate increases in employment and incomes in remote communities (Figure 3).

It is intended to create a 'virtuous cycle' that will support economic development and workforce capabilities in remote communities. It will give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the opportunity to generate new economic opportunities, including through building new capacity to deliver services and developing new initiatives – just as, in the past, the CDEP was used to support creation of Ranger programs and Arts centres.

Figure 3 – Long Term Economic Opportunites Generated By Jobs Fund



# B. A Remote Employment And Community Development Program That Is Fit For Purpose

Many people will have the opportunity to take up new jobs funded by the Jobs Fund. But remote communities will still need access to employment assistance and to an organisation that can support economic and community development locally.

Many people will have the opportunity to take up new jobs funded by the Jobs Fund. But remote communities will still need access to employment assistance and to an organisation that can support economic and community development locally. Unemployed and underemployed people and young people leaving education need access to employment assistance that is strengths based, effective and culturally safe. There is also community demand for voluntary activities that give people the chance to come together without the pressure of a formal job (e.g. women's centres, men's shed).

CDP providers currently do some of these things, however their ability to offer a service that meets local community needs and is culturally appropriate is limited by operating within a centrally driven structure which emphasises participant and provider compliance. For example, providers are required to lodge and update individual job plans online, so that mutual obligations can be enforced. This is administratively complex and almost always takes place in front of a computer in the provider's office. For many participants the environment is uncomfortable. Often the whole appointment focusses on mutual obligation requirements and administration.

Principles that should underpin this new program include:

## 1 Strengths Based Case Management And Services Designed For Local Needs

Employment assistance should be based on long term, strengths-based case management, delivered in a way that is trauma informed and culturally safe. This means radically reducing administration and reporting, and minimising reliance on the government's IT system. It means maximising flexibility at the local level to adapt the way services are offered to encourage people to participate.

## 2 Appropriate Mutual Obligations

Mutual obligations would remain, but be limited to quarterly meetings. Local communities would have the opportunity to have input into how mutual obligation works in their community and what constitutes fair and realistic obligations for people on income support. There would be a focus on voluntarily engaging community members, particularly young people, through high quality tailored employment and skills assistance.

### 3 Support Economic And Community Development

In addition to providing employment assistance to individuals, the program should be designed to develop and support locally driven community and economic development activities. This includes supporting enterprise and microbusiness development. It would include development of and/or participation in local community and economic plans.

### 4 Delivered By Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations

Wherever possible services should be delivered by locally led, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations who are accountable to the community.

## How would the services be different from what currently exists?

The current program is based on the mainstream employment services model, which focusses on managing each individual's mutual obligation and requiring them to continuously apply for work. This approach is built into the way that providers are funded (on a per participant basis for each person on their caseload, and each person who gets work) and how their performance is assessed. The current service is built around the IT system – which allows Centrelink to monitor participants and NIAA to monitor service providers.



Pictured: Helen Wilson and Dione Kelly

The new program would have an increased emphasis on a community approach with a range of community development, training, engagement and career development activities designed to maximise long term economic wellbeing for specific communities. It would also provide employment assistance to individuals, including assistance to move into better jobs and to access training. This wouldn't be driven by mutual obligation.

Local providers would have flexibility to shape the services to what will work best. It might include, for example, a drop in service where people could access computers and/or careers advice. It could include working with schools and school students to help with employment transitions.

We expect that significant investment will be required to build the capacity of local organisations (including organisations delivering the new remote employment program) and staff to plan and deliver quality services under this model, and to provide the level of economic and community development support needed.

## **Making sure funding and performance arrangements support long term positive outcomes for individuals and communities**

Current funding arrangements have allowed some providers to generate large profits which are not spent in communities. The funding model is complex and can be volatile. The funding model for the new program should provide stable funding and be easy to administer. It should ensure that program funds are spent in the local community, and on achieving program objectives. It might include, for example, a cap on management fees and obligations to reinvest surpluses locally.

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled organisations should be supported by the Government to deliver programs and services well. Performance measurement should focus on continuous improvement over an extended period. It should be aligned to the outcomes, indicators and measures set under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including:

- 1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting **fewer barriers in accessing services.**
- 2 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting they are able to **have a say** in their community **on issues important to them.**
- 3 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **people in employment.**
- 4 Proportion of young people in **employment, education and training.**

**Appendix.** Maps Fair Work Strong Communities objectives against Closing the Gap outcomes, indicators and measures.

# C. A New Framework For Governing And Managing Remote Employment

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap commits the Government to a new way of working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

These commitments require a fundamental re-engineering of the way that the Government manages remote employment services. They mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement, not just in deciding what activities are delivered, but how the program is designed, evaluated and run.

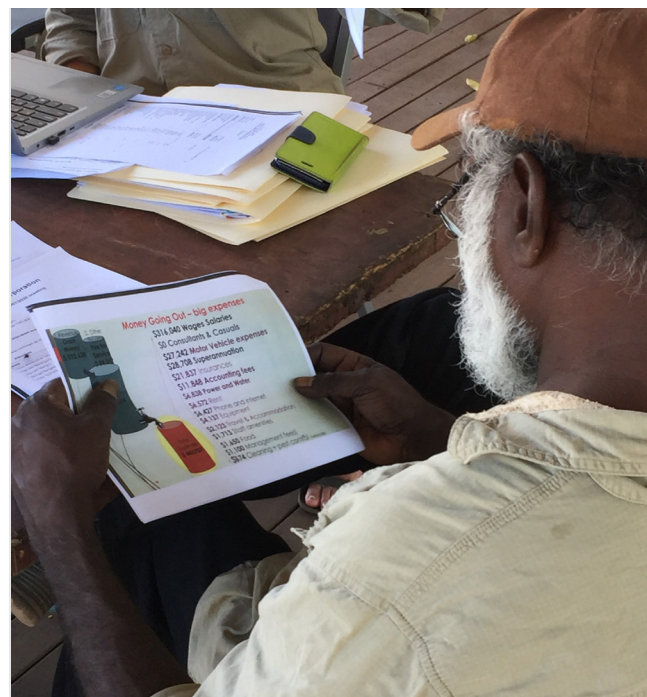
Priority Reform One identifies policy partnership agreements as a vehicle for decision making to be shared and sets out key elements of strong partnerships (see Appendix II). However at present there is no national framework for shared decision-making about the design and delivery of remote employment services.

Decisions about policy design, contract management and measurement are made by NIAA, sometimes in consultation with contracted providers. Local pilots and other parts of the current reform process do not allow for discussion of national policy principles.

We propose a national policy agreement for remote employment through which the new remote employment scheme can be negotiated. The agreement would establish arrangements for ongoing implementation and evaluation of the scheme. It should reflect the principles of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap around data sharing, access to independent advice, and the ability to conduct broad consultation with communities.

A key part of this agreement should be the development of a new approach to supporting the program which is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led, not led by NIAA. A nationally led body is critical to ensuring that the program meets its objectives, including through advocating with other governments and parts of government to ensure that their actions support increased jobs and incomes in communities (see further Part D).

We also support a strong role for local and regional decision making in ensuring local delivery of both employment assistance and the jobs fund meets local needs. The new scheme should have a combination of nationally set core requirements, national 'model' arrangements that can be adapted locally, and local decision making.



## Indicative Decision-Making Structure

| National Decisions  | National Guidance Can Be Adapted                          | Local Decisions  |
|---|---|--|
| Protection of rights to access to income support and employment rights (eg. no greater obligations on remote unemployed than non-remote). | Quarterly appointments for people with mutual obligation. | Temporary exemptions for individuals from mutual obligation<br><br>Development of local guidance on what is fair and realistic obligation. |
| All individuals who are unemployed or underemployed have access to individual employment advice and assistance.                           |   | How assistance is delivered and the mix of employment assistance and other community and development activities.                           |
| Initial allocation of Jobs Fund across regions according to need.   | 20 hours per week set as guideline for jobs created.      | Which proposals are supported, mix of types of jobs (eg may adopt alternative distribution of available funded hours).                     |
| Overall objectives of scheme – aligned with CtG targets   |   | Specific measures against CtG targets.<br><br>Additional community identified measures.  |
| Program evaluation.   | Ongoing learning/ sharing of good practice.               | Community input, continuous improvement.   |
| Advocacy with other governments and parts of government for improvements in policies and services for remote communities.                 | Advocacy at State/Territory level.                        | Development and implementation of local economic and community plan (or participation in local plans).                                     |

# D. Reforming Other Policy And Funding Systems To Make Sure They Support Remote Communities' Ambitions

The performance of the current CDP is heavily impacted by other systems and services. For any new program to work, these other systems also need to be reformed.

The most critical of these are:

## 1 Social Security System

The income support safety net is not working for many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents. A large number of people who are entitled do not receive any income support. Systems for assessing work capacity or entitlement to Disability Support Pension don't work well, so that many people have obligations that they can't meet or are on the wrong payment. These failures contribute to poverty, income insecurity (e.g. through suspensions, losing benefits), and people being compelled to participate in employment assistance from which they can't benefit. The Government should take immediate action to ensure people in remote communities are accessing their correct entitlements.

An independent review should be conducted to identify what needs to be done to ensure that, in future, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in remote areas can access all their entitlements under the income support system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities should have access to legal help to enable them to pursue their rights in the social security system.

## 2 Vocational, Language, Literacy, Numeracy And Digital Skills Training

Lack of access to training in both foundation and vocational skills locks people into low skilled and low paid work. Many people in remote communities currently miss out, often because training providers require minimum attendance levels at training which are not viable in many communities. Training is often not appropriately tailored in its content, delivery or assessment to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities. A concerted effort needs to be made to address these gaps.



### 3 Capacity Building For The Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector

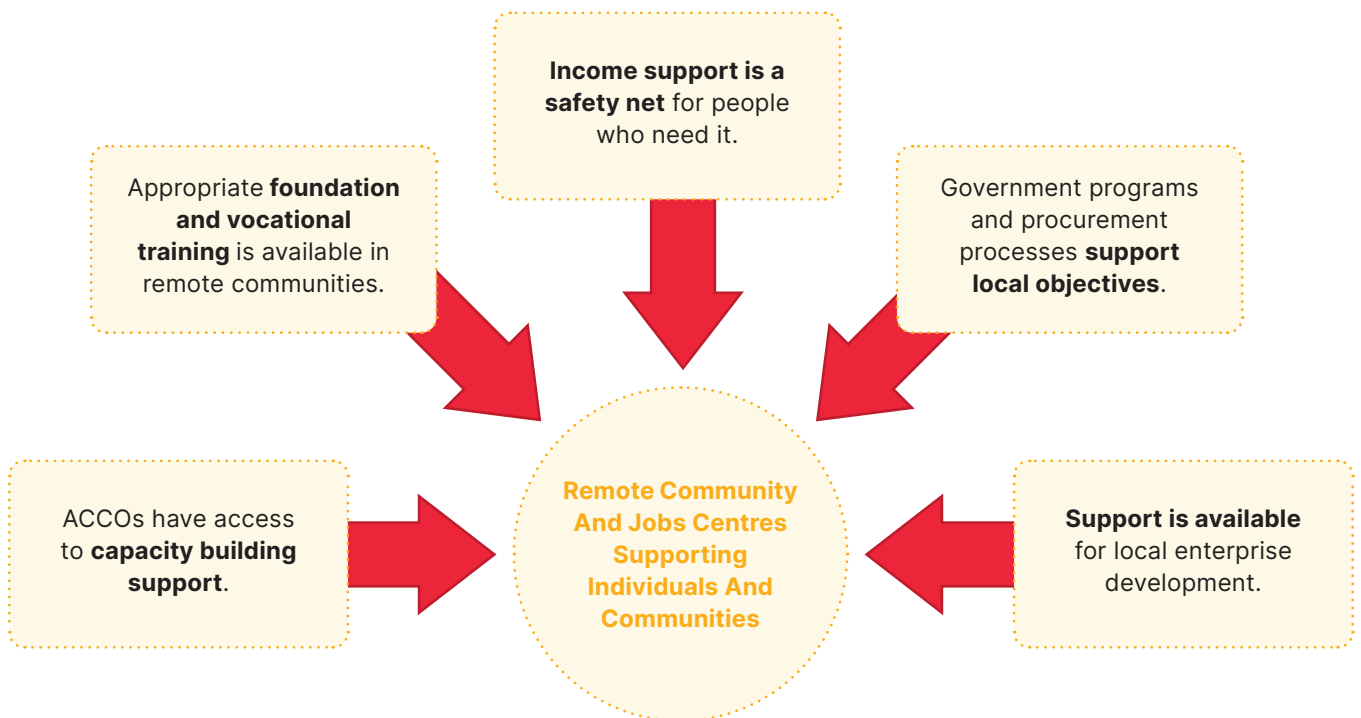
This proposal includes substantial job creation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. This will strengthen their capacity to deliver services and programs. But, in order to maximise the opportunities from this investment in jobs, the organisations themselves may need capacity building support. This includes organisations that are delivering the Fair Work Strong Communities employment services in their communities, as well others who may be accessing Jobs Fund jobs.

### 4 Enterprise Assistance

Many individuals and groups in remote communities have ideas to generate additional income. Some business assistance is available, but increased support for tailored Aboriginal business support services that address the needs of remote communities is needed.

### 5 State, Territory And Commonwealth Contracts And Investments

Government funding and procurement processes should, wherever possible, be designed to maximise local economic and employment opportunities and build the capacity of ACCOs.



## **Implenting the national framework.**

We believe that this proposal provides a framework that will increase employment and improve local services, while enabling local communities to have substantial control over local delivery.

Some trial measures underway at the moment have elements of this proposal in them.

We have tested this proposal widely but believe that further consultation is needed before implementation.

The policy partnership principles in National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap (Refer Appendix II) should be applied to ensure joint decision making over the overarching framework for the new scheme, and a means for local communities to be effectively consulted throughout the process.

# Appendix I.

## Mapping Closing The Gap Agreement Targets To FWSC Proposal

|   | FWSC Elements  | Indicators Relevant To New Remote Program   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Priority Reform Target One.</b><br>Formal Partnerships And Shared Decision Making  | National Partnership Agreement.<br>National and Local decision making.   | Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting they are able to have a say in their community on issues important to them.  |
| <b>Priority Reform Target Two.</b><br>Building The Community Controlled Sector  | Jobs Fund.<br>Delivery by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector.<br>Capacity building for providers and staff. | Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reporting fewer barriers in accessing services   |
| <b>Outcome 7.</b><br>Youth Engagement In Employment Or Education  | Jobs Fund.<br>Flexible employment and training assistance, not driven by mutual obligation.  | Increase in proportion of young people in employment, education or training.<br><br>Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with services and activities.</li> <li>• Traineeships/apprenticeships.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Outcome 8.</b><br>Economic Participation And Development Of Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander People And Communities | Jobs Fund.<br>Flexible employment and training assistance, not driven by mutual obligation.  | Increase in proportion of people aged 25-64 who are employed (or earning business income).<br><br>Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment security.</li> <li>• Underemployment.</li> <li>• Long term unemployment.</li> <li>• Income from employment.</li> <li>• Distribution of opportunity by age, disability status.</li> </ul> |

# Appendix II.

## Priority Reform 1 – Policy Partnership Principles

This Appendix sets out the agreement in relation to policy partnerships in full. An agreed framework for developing and implementing a new remote employment program should reflect this agreement. A formal agreement may follow in future.

The Parties commit to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.

Priority Reform One seeks to apply the principles in the historic and unprecedented Partnership Agreement to more partnership arrangements between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments at all levels. This was strongly supported by the 2019 engagements.

Under this Agreement, there are two forms of partnerships – “policy partnerships” and “place-based partnerships”. Policy partnerships are partnerships created for the purpose of working on discrete policy areas, such as education, health or housing.

Place-based partnerships are partnerships based on a specific region, between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and others by agreement, from those specific areas.

The purpose of formal policy partnerships and place-based partnerships is to:

- 1 Drive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **community-led outcomes** on Closing the Gap.
- 2 Enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, communities and organisations to **negotiate and implement agreements with governments** to implement all Priority Reforms and policy specific and place-based strategies to support Closing the Gap.
- 3 **Support** additional community-led **development initiatives**.
- 4 **Bring together all government parties**, together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities to the collective task of Closing the Gap.

## **Strong Partnership Elements**

The Parties agree that strong partnerships include the following partnership elements.

### **Partnerships are accountable and representative and are between:**

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where participation in decision-making is done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people appointed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a transparent way, based on their own structures and where they are accountable to their own organisations and communities.
  - Up to three levels of government, where government representatives have negotiating and decision-making authority relevant to the partnership context.
  - Other parties as agreed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and governments.
- 

### **A formal agreement in place, that is signed by all parties and:**

- Defines who the parties are, what their roles are, what the purpose and objectives of the partnership are, what is in scope of shared decision-making, and what are the reporting arrangements, timeframes, and monitoring, review and dispute mechanisms.
  - Is structured in a way that allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to agree the agenda for the discussions that lead to any decisions.
  - Is made public and easily accessible.
  - Is protected in state, territory and national legislation where appropriate.
- 

### **Decision-making is shared between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.**

#### **Shared decision-making is:**

- By consensus, where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as the governments.
- Transparent, where matters for decision are in terms that are easily understood by all parties and where there is enough information and time to understand the implications of the decision.
- Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives can speak without fear of reprisals or repercussions.
- Where a wide variety of groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including women, young people, elders, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability can have their voice heard.
- Where self-determination is supported, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lived experience is understood and respected.

- Where relevant funding for programs and services align with jointly agreed community priorities, noting governments retain responsibility for funding decisions.
  - Where partnership parties have access to the same data and information, in an easily accessible format, on which any decisions are made.
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**The Parties recognise that adequate funding is needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to be partners with governments in formal partnerships. This includes agreed funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to:**

- Engage independent policy advice.
- Meet independently of governments to determine their own policy positions.
- Support strengthened governance between and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and parties.
- Engage with and seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all relevant groups within affected communities, including but not limited to Elders, Traditional Owners and Native Title Holders.



**Aboriginal Peak  
Organisations**

NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Fair Work Strong Communities 2023**

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