

ABORIGINAL BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE – 8 OCTOBER 2021

Purpose

The NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan includes an action under Priority Reform Five (Employment, Business Growth and Economic Prosperity) to convene Aboriginal business roundtables. This first event was held in October 2021, during Indigenous Business month.

Community consultations in April 2021 heard that governments need a better understanding of the barriers facing Aboriginal businesses. Relationships with the Aboriginal private sector are key to improving our performance against the NSW Aboriginal procurement policy, as well as improving broader Aboriginal employment outcomes.

The purpose of the event was to hear directly from Aboriginal businesses on how to:

1. Make it easier to do business with government
2. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to grow their networks and profile with Government clients; and,
3. Support Aboriginal businesses to establish, grow, expand and diversify.

Feedback from the Roundtable will shape the next NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan and inform future investment by the NSW Government in growing Aboriginal businesses.

Participants

- 35 Aboriginal businesses attended, from sectors spanning the arts, tourism, retail/hospitality, mining, construction, IT and professional services.
- Journalist and broadcaster Stan Grant, as MC, facilitated the conversation on key barriers to business growth, reducing unnecessary red tape and better targeting investment to the unique needs and strengths identified by Aboriginal businesses.
- Two Aboriginal business leaders, Jarin Baigent from Jarin Street and Trading Blak, and Amanda Healy from Warrikal and Kirrikin, presented on the challenges and opportunities to support an effective Aboriginal business sector in NSW.
- Tamworth-based Aboriginal business 2 Rivers provided event management, scribing and facilitation services.

What we heard

Businesses discussed opportunities and barriers to growth. Key opportunities to explore included:

- **Strengthen accountability and transparency** under existing policies like the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, and consider legal reform alongside education to address ongoing discrimination and exploitative practices like black cladding and black-facing
- **Increase access to finance and information** to address difficulties in establishing and growing business, taking into account geographical constraints; duplication of existing services; the impact of government regulation; and eligibility requirements
- **Simplify procurement processes and make them more accessible** to Aboriginal small businesses, while also reducing red tape and making it easier for businesses to operate in NSW
- **Grow stronger relationships and networks and recognise Aboriginal talent** to address the lack of visibility around diverse Aboriginal businesses and sectors to partner with, while ensuring joint ventures provide real and ongoing benefits for local Aboriginal businesses and employees
- **Education for Government and the private sector** on the different types of Aboriginal businesses and cultural obligations
- **Increase education and training** for Aboriginal businesses and cohorts like women, youth and those with a disability, who may wish to explore establishing and growing a business as a vehicle for meaningful employment

- **Increase place-based approaches** through partnerships with local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, businesses and councils

Next steps

Feedback has been shared with relevant government and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations representatives and considered in developing new initiatives to include in the next NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap.

Key themes which emerged from the Business Roundtable around increasing access to procurement opportunities for Aboriginal businesses have informed the development of an \$8.7 million NSW Closing the Gap Grants program for Aboriginal Business and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. These grants will support Aboriginal businesses to win NSW Government contracts, sell goods and services to the NSW Government and/or grow their businesses and are expected to be announced early in the New Year. This will contribute to improved employment outcomes, business growth and economic prosperity for Aboriginal people in NSW.

Actions to address further gaps in the immediate, medium and longer term will be explored over the next six months. We will progress these through relevant state and national governance groups, including advocating for a stronger role for the NSW Aboriginal business sector in the Commonwealth's new *National Roadmap for Indigenous Skills, Employment and Wealth Creation*. Additionally, these will be part of development of NSW's own Roadmap for Aboriginal Businesses and Jobs, placing Aboriginal businesses and community at the centre.

