



Ministerial Taskforce on
Aboriginal Affairs

March 2013

Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs Final Report



Background

In August 2011, the NSW Government announced the establishment of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs (the Taskforce) to make recommendations for a new Aboriginal affairs strategy with concrete reforms around the following Terms of Reference:

1. to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW;
2. to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW; and
3. to improve service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal affairs across NSW, with particular consideration of the recommendations of the Auditor General's report on *Two Ways Together*, and other reports.

Effective reform in these areas is central to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage.

The NSW Government indicated its strong commitment to bringing the voice of Aboriginal people to the core of government. As a result, the Taskforce membership included both senior Ministers and senior Aboriginal leaders. A full list of the members of the Taskforce can be found at Appendix A.



Community Consultation

In formulating its recommendations, the Taskforce conducted two rounds of community consultation. The first round of consultation, held between December 2011 and March 2012, involved over 1,700 people attending fourteen community forums and over 200 written submissions.

The findings of the round one Consultations were used to inform Taskforce deliberations and subsequent proposals outlined in the Progress Report released on 6 August 2012. These proposals included:

1. Establishing Opportunity Hubs to strengthen the connection between education, training and employment for young Aboriginal people. Related initiatives included developing *industry agreements* and strengthening Aboriginal employment in the public sector.
2. Strengthening support for Aboriginal languages and culture through the establishment of *Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests*¹, as well as refocusing the *NSW Aboriginal Languages Policy*.

3. Supporting and strengthening the capacity of *local community decision-making bodies* to better direct and co-ordinate services.
4. Strengthening accountability at the local and state-wide level, including independent auditing and public reporting of performance.
5. Building the capacity of Aboriginal non government organisations (NGOs) to deliver services to local communities and looking at ways to assist Aboriginal communities to address healing and strengthen wellbeing.

During the consultation process people raised issues outside the Taskforce Terms of Reference and the Progress Report outlined a range of existing or proposed government reforms and programs aimed at addressing many of these issues.

Over August and September 2012 a second round of consultation was undertaken to seek feedback on the Taskforce Progress Report, and in particular the three major proposed initiatives:

1. *Opportunity Hubs*
2. *Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests*
3. *Local Decision-Making model (LDM)*

Over 900 people participated in nine community forums and four stakeholder workshops held across the State and over 400 people completed a survey designed to capture responses to the proposals in greater detail. The results of the second round of community consultation were publicly released on 10 October 2012.

¹ This initiative was previously named the Aboriginal Language and Culture Lighthouses and was changed following community feedback.

Overall approach

Support for the initiatives was high. All three initiatives were received positively.

There needs to be a targeted approach. No initiatives were considered easy to implement, and as such the initiatives should not be rolled out immediately to all Aboriginal communities across NSW. Instead, three to five locations for each initiative should be selected, in consultation with and on the invitation of local Aboriginal communities and key Aboriginal stakeholders, to trial and fully evaluate the proposals before expansion to other locations.

There is a need for a localised and flexible place based approach, with the initiatives designed and implemented in partnership with local Aboriginal communities. A one size fits all approach will not work because local circumstances and the strengths of the local community need to be taken into account.

There needs to be real partnerships with Aboriginal communities.

Investment in meaningful dialogue and engagement with Aboriginal communities at both the design and implementation stages of the initiatives needs to occur in order to gain real community buy-in and partnership. Initiatives should only be trialled in communities that volunteer or agree to participate, rather than being imposed on communities that may not want them.

The initiatives should build on existing strengths within local communities, including successful programs and with existing Aboriginal community decision-making bodies and organisations.

A long-term commitment with realistic resourcing is needed. It is necessary to build a platform for change to break the cycle of Aboriginal disadvantage. It will take time to build relationships, trust and the confidence of Aboriginal communities that government will stay invested long enough for outcomes to be realised.

Evaluating the implementation of proposals at the trial sites is essential to build the evidence base and inform the rollout of the proposals in other locations.



Taskforce Recommendations

Taking into account the feedback gained through two rounds of extensive community consultation and Taskforce deliberations over the last 12 months, the Taskforce makes the following recommendations to the NSW Government:

Overall direction

The aim of the plan should be to support strong *Aboriginal communities where Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life*. To achieve this aim the following areas need to be addressed:

1. Strengthened mutual accountability for delivering services and achieving outcomes;
2. Strengthened role of Aboriginal people in local decision making;
3. Strengthened support for Aboriginal language and culture; and
4. Strengthened economic participation, including making sure Aboriginal people get the education and training they need to fulfil their economic potential.

Strengthening Accountability

Accountability framework

The Taskforce recommends that a new Accountability Framework be implemented to:

- Embed a new partnership with Aboriginal people across NSW;
- Ensure the new strategy for Aboriginal affairs is implemented successfully; and
- Improve the effectiveness of government expenditure in Aboriginal affairs.

It should contain the following four key components:

- Strong Aboriginal voice in design and delivery, building on existing Aboriginal community decision-making structures and existing partnerships with the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO). An independent Aboriginal Council (*working title only*) with membership based on skills and expertise should be established to provide strategic advice to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on specific areas of reform.
- Improved coordination and oversight, including a 'solution broker' role mandated within government to deal with systemic issues and matters requiring cross-government coordination. In addition the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs should invite the Auditor General to undertake regular performance audits.

- Meaningful and measureable reporting, including periodic reporting by the proposed independent Aboriginal Council to NSW Parliament and coordination of Aboriginal specific expenditure data across government by Treasury.
- Clearer roles and responsibilities for Aboriginal Affairs, including a focus on whole of government Aboriginal affairs priorities and policies as well as economic development opportunities.

These measures respond directly to the concerns raised by the NSW Auditor General and NSW Ombudsman, especially the need to have a strong Aboriginal voice on issues fundamental to improving the lives of Aboriginal people and the need for transparent and clear reporting. They also respond to the feedback from Aboriginal communities about the need for greater government accountability and transparency back to communities, especially at a local and regional level.

Local Decision Making

The Taskforce recommends the implementation of an *Aboriginal Local Decision-Making model* (LDM) to improve service delivery outcomes and accountability at the local/regional level. It is recommended that the model be implemented initially in one urban, one regional and one remote trial location and be fully evaluated.

The model would ensure Aboriginal communities have a real say in what and how services are delivered to them and would strengthen community leadership and governance.

While the intent was strongly supported by communities, there were differing views about how the model should build on existing Aboriginal decision-making bodies.

The model should therefore be designed and implemented to reflect the characteristics and needs of each trial location and incorporate the following core elements:

- Detailed service mapping;
- Building on existing community decision-making arrangements;
- Progressively increased authority and delegation based on community capacity;
- Flexible and pooled funding arrangements; and
- Capacity building for both communities and government.

As the trial is expanded, underpinning legislation should be considered to govern

agency participation and ensure the effective devolution of decision-making.

Aboriginal NGO capacity building

The Taskforce recommends the development and implementation of a public sector wide *Aboriginal NGO capacity building strategy* to ensure that:

- Aboriginal NGOs are supported to be fully functional, sustainable and achieve good governance and effectiveness;
- Procurement processes across government support the purchasing of services from Aboriginal NGOs without compromising probity requirements; and
- There is an increased Aboriginal workforce capacity across government-funded NGOs.

The importance and role of Aboriginal NGOs in strengthening Aboriginal community capacity and leadership was raised during both rounds of consultations.

Aboriginal cultural competence in the public sector

The Taskforce recommends that the Public Service Commission include a focus on *Aboriginal employment and career development* and *Aboriginal cultural competence* in NSW public service reforms.

Career progression of Aboriginal public sector workers also has the potential to increase the number of Aboriginal people in decision making positions, which can strengthen the cultural competency of the sector and improve service delivery to Aboriginal people.

Improving the cultural competence of government agencies was seen during consultations as critical to enabling the successful implementation of the initiatives proposed by the Taskforce.

Aboriginal Language and Culture

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests

The Taskforce recommends the implementation of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests to build a sense of pride in and strengthen the identity of students, while also expanding the inclusion of local Aboriginal people in the teaching and learning domain as equal partners. It would also support non-Aboriginal students to learn about and to develop respect for Aboriginal people and their histories, cultures, languages and contemporary matters and support the maintenance of Aboriginal languages.

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests should be developed in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Educative Consultative Group Inc (AECG) and the Centre for Aboriginal Language Coordination and Development (CALCD). It should be initially trialed in one location from each of the following five Aboriginal language groups which have an established community of speakers:

- Gamilaraay
- Gumbaynggirr
- Bundjalung
- Paarkinthi/Barkindji
- Wiradjuri.

Community consultations emphasised that Aboriginal language is inseparable from culture and community. Therefore the design and implementation of Nests needs to reflect the particular characteristics and needs of each trial location, with the following core elements:

- Partnerships between local Aboriginal communities, schools, TAFE, universities, the AECG and the CALCD to support language learning, revitalisation and maintenance;
- Remunerating Elders and Aboriginal community tutors at a level that is commensurate with their expertise, skill level, knowledge and abilities;
- Building the cultural awareness of staff;
- Documenting and cataloguing Aboriginal languages for learning and preservation by the local Aboriginal community; and
- Embedding Aboriginal languages into the school curriculum from K-12, establishing clear pathways for language learning from early childhood through to TAFE and university.

To support this work the Taskforce recommends that the NSW Board of Studies develop a scope and sequence for teaching and learning NSW Aboriginal languages.

Refocus the NSW Aboriginal language policy

The Taskforce recommends that the *NSW Aboriginal Language Policy* be *re-focused* in partnership with the CALCD to support better targeted language revitalisation initiatives. Aboriginal communities strongly expressed that attempts be made to revitalise some aspects of all Aboriginal languages, not just the strongest surviving languages where there continues to be a community of speakers. The Policy should incorporate a new monitoring and evaluation framework and be subject to regular review to ensure that outcomes are achieved.

² Schools include Toomelah Public School, Boggabilla Central School, Wilcannia Central School, Walgett Central School, Bourke Public and High Schools, Moree East Public School and Secondary College, Coonamble Public and High Schools, Taree Public and High Schools, Brewarrina Central School, Menindee Central School and Hillvue Public School (Tamworth).

Education

Connected Communities

The Taskforce recognises the impact that *Connected Communities* will have in improving Aboriginal student educational outcomes across the 15 schools² in which it is being implemented. This work involves implementing a flexible, rigorous and challenging curriculum, setting high achievement standards and expectations, and fulfilling the aspirations of Aboriginal students, their families and their communities.

It also involves embedding Aboriginal culture and language into the school curriculum and actively engaging Aboriginal families and communities in shared decision-making. In addition it incorporates a focus on cross-agency coordination and service delivery to address the personal and academic needs of students, and to assist their families and general community where required.

Employment

Opportunity Hubs

The Taskforce recommends that *Opportunity Hubs* be implemented initially in three trial locations to improve the transition of Aboriginal students from secondary school into tertiary education, training and employment, and that the model be fully evaluated. There was universal agreement that employment, including, where possible sustainable jobs within local communities, is fundamental to overcoming systemic disadvantage and improving the lives of young people.

The model should be flexible to reflect the characteristics and needs of each trial location, but incorporate the following core elements:

- Coordination of opportunities that develop the career aspirations of Aboriginal students into sustainable employment;
- Matching Aboriginal students with local training and employment opportunities to provide a clear pathway to transition to employment or further education;
- Supporting students through individualised career planning, utilising mentoring and support services and the engagement of family and community members;
- Partnerships with local businesses, tertiary education and training providers and NGOs; and
- Following up with students to support and track their transition.

Strategic coordination of economic development

The Taskforce recognises the need for central and strategic coordination of NSW Government activity to improve economic development outcomes with Aboriginal people. It is recommended that Aboriginal Affairs take a lead role across government in setting strategic directions and coordinating cross-government activity. It is recommended that this role includes:

- Agreements with key industry groups to support industry specific strategies to create training, employment and business opportunities for Aboriginal people and develop education and training pathways;
- Agreements with local government and the Australian Government to support Aboriginal economic capacity development;
- Partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and its Economic Development Committee to support Aboriginal Land Councils to develop their land and business holdings, and related enterprises;
- Opportunity Hubs leveraged to include business and entrepreneurial skills development; and
- Employment opportunities created through public sector procurement.

Healing and wellbeing

Healing

The need to overcome inter-generational trauma, especially in the context of achieving communities which are cohesive, functioning and working towards a common goal, was a common issue in both rounds of consultations. The issue of community divisions and difficulty in getting everyone within communities “working together” was repeatedly identified as a potential impediment to the success of the initiatives proposed by the Taskforce.

The Taskforce recognises the issue of healing and trans-generational trauma needs to be better understood by working in partnership with Aboriginal communities and that Aboriginal people must identify, drive and own action in this arena. There are a number of healing initiatives currently being progressed within NSW, but programs are often fragmented and uncoordinated. The Australian Government through the Aboriginal Healing Foundation is also now seeing healing as a priority and is funding and evaluating a number of programs within NSW and in other jurisdictions.

The Taskforce recommends that the critical importance of healing, at the community, family and personal level, be formally recognised by Government as a legitimate underpinning requirement to achieving improved outcomes in Aboriginal communities. The Taskforce also recommends targeted community forums to progress dialogue on healing, with a view to increasing the profile of healing and wellbeing, and developing responses and approaches for further consideration.



Appendix A

Membership of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs

The Hon. Victor Dominello MP (Chair)

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

The Hon. Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health

The Hon. Adrian Piccoli MP

Minister for Education

The Hon. Mike Baird MP

Treasurer

The Hon. Greg Smith SC MP

Attorney General and Minister for Justice

The Hon. Pru Goward MP

Minister for Family and Community Services

The Hon. Kevin Humphries MP

Minister for Mental Health, Healthy Lifestyles and Western NSW

Mr Stephen Ryan

Chair, Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations

Professor Shane Houston

Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous Strategy and Services) University of Sydney

Ms Maydina Penrith

Youth member

Mr Danny Lester

Chief Executive, Aboriginal Employment Strategy

Mr Chris Eccles

Director General, Department of Premier and Cabinet

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