



Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
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Dear Senator Stewart

We are writing to you on behalf of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) in relation to the Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians (Inquiry).

For context, the Advisory Group was established in January 2023 by the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Minister for Communications, to provide advice on progressing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Target 17: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion. This underpins Outcome 17 of the National Agreement: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives. The Advisory Group consists entirely of First Nations Australians, and is supported by a Digital Inclusion Expert Panel.

Our engagement with First Nations people and communities, stakeholders, and research has clearly shown low levels of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians, particularly in rural and remote areas. This is a fundamental impediment to enabling First Nations Australians to having the same economic and social benefits available to other Australians. Digital inclusion is a key enabler of economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians, as well as for broader benefits such as access to information, media and essential services.

The Advisory Group provides the following recommendations for your consideration:

- improving digital inclusion for First Nations people and businesses to take advantage of employment and economic opportunities
- investing and utilising the reach and expertise of the First Nations Media and Broadcasting Sector
- ensuring First Nations people have a voice in key economic, business and employment policies
- building the community-controlled sector and service delivery
- continue to promote procurement of First Nations services and suppliers

More information on these recommendations are included in the appendix to this letter. More generally, we note the work the Department of Treasury is currently undertaking on scoping a First Nations Economic Partnership and look forward to seeing the outcomes of that work in the next six months.



We hope you consider these recommendations and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss these matters further and to work together on improving economic self-determination for First Nations Australians.

If you would like to contact us or arrange a meeting, please contact our secretariat FirstNationsDigitalInclusion@infrastructure.gov.au. Further information on the Advisory Group can be found on our website: www.digitalinclusion.gov.au. For your information, we also enclose a copy of our initial report.

Yours sincerely

Dot West OAM
Co-chair
First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group

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Co-chair
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APPENDIX

Improving digital inclusion for First Nations people and businesses to take advantage of employment and economic opportunities

The 2023 results for the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, which measures the level of access, affordability and digital ability, shows there is a national gap of 7.5 for First Nations people, with a score of 65.9 compared to 73.4 for non-First Nations Australians. The gap progressively widens in regional, remote and very remote areas. First Nations people living in remote and very remote areas had particularly low levels of digital inclusion, averaging 24.8 points below the national non-First Nations average¹.

Poor communications access and digital ability means that First Nations people are unable to utilise educational and employment that could enable On-Country learning and employment and economic opportunities. Improving digital inclusion could expand the visibility and international reach of local First Nations businesses such as cultural tourism, arts, bespoke industries such as forestry, fish and oyster farming, online businesses such as First Nations media, journalism, and digital services.

Investing and utilising the reach and expertise of the First Nations Media and Broadcasting Sector

We wish to highlight the role of First Nations media and broadcasting sector. The First Nations media and broadcasting sector provides multiple avenues for employment and technical training, preserves First Nations culture and identity and bridges the communication divide between First Nations communities, government and industry. The sector has been both underfunded and also underutilised especially when many economic and investment opportunities such as government/industry employment offers, funding, grants and initiatives are being advertised through the wrong channels.

For example, a Department of Finance 2014 report Media consumption and communication preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences showed that Indigenous media was used primarily because it was perceived to be relevant, easy to understand and meaningful². However, the opportunity to streamline procurements for advertising and translations by government with First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is limited, as noted by the Whole-of-Australian Government Advertising Arrangements and guidance.

Ensure First Nations people have a voice in key economic and employment policies

The Advisory Group encourages First Nations representation in key economic and employment policy areas to ensure genuine partnership and collaboration in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reform One:

¹ [ADII 2023 report](#)

² [Media consumption and communication preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences - Qualitative research \(finance.gov.au\)](#)



Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making and Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations.

Improving economic outcomes for First Nations people requires genuine collaboration and changing how governments work. For example, in the Advisory Group's submission to the Regional Connectivity Program³, it was noted that there was a heavy administrative burden on First Nations communities which was further hindered by language and cultural barriers. This means that large and beneficial economic and investment opportunities can be lost due to overly bureaucratic processes, as such considerations tend to be missed without First Nations representation.

Building the community-controlled sector and service delivery

The Advisory Group has strongly advocated for place-based solutions and this aligns with Priority Reform Two: Building the Community-Controlled Sector. There is substantial employment and economic opportunity for expanding First Nations community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of First Nations people which can be further enhanced and expanded with improved digital inclusion.

For example, the establishment and ongoing success from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services provide clinically effective, trusted and culturally appropriate care to First Nations people which also provides training and employment for First Nations health staff. The success of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, which have access to Commonwealth funding, even if they are funded by state governments, can be replicated with similar flexible and collaborative investment. This flexibility allows all parties to work closely together and this model can be expanded to other sectors such as First Nations media and broadcasting, education and other sectors of need.

Continue to promote procurement of First Nations suppliers

A strong focus by government and industry on First Nations procurement helps build capacity for First Nations businesses. Developing First Nations business is a key way of building employment opportunities and providing the cultural safety for employees that many larger organisations do not provide.

This could be expanded to include First Nations suppliers to support improved digital inclusion such as First Nations internet service providers, digital infrastructure rollout and maintenance technicians and other IT services to support essential service delivery e.g. telehealth, online education and assisting in basic access to social services

³ [Regional-connectivity-program-submission.pdf \(digitalinclusion.gov.au\)](#)