

## Response by the Tasmanian Government to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap October 2023

The Tasmanian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Draft Report.

As a small jurisdiction, there are challenges in meeting the voluminous requirements of Closing the Gap architecture and governance, in addition to progressing the substantive work on priority reforms and target outcomes, but we remain firmly committed to full implementation of the Closing the Gap program of work in Tasmania.

We look forward to the receiving the Productivity Commission's Final Report on its Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

### Information request 1 – Effectiveness of policy partnerships

Progress in Tasmania has focussed on strengthening the partnership between the Tasmanian Government and the Coalition of Peaks Representative, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC), and more broadly with all Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The partnership has progressed over the past 18 months, with monthly meetings of the Combined Policy Partnership Working Group (CPPWG). The CPPWG includes Heads of Agencies (Justice; DPFEM; Mental Health; Education, Children and Young People; Housing), the Aboriginal Partnerships division, and Coalition of Peaks partner. The CPPWG is now developing the second Tasmanian Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap.

As a small jurisdiction, there is a small number of individuals on each side of the partnership with multiple responsibilities in relation to national policy partnerships, local policy partnerships and sector strengthening plans. An implication of this is that Tasmania does not have Aboriginal representation on every policy partnership at the national level and there remain some challenges ensuring appropriate early engagement and timely follow-up between the partners on policy partnership activity, as well as ensuring that there is engagement with the broad Aboriginal community in Tasmania.

While the Tasmanian partnership is collaborative and robust, the volume and scale of the Closing the Gap governance and architecture relative to the size and capacity of both partners presents a challenge: the Coalition of Peaks representative has a single dedicated Policy Officer and some Government officials sit on multiple Closing the Gap working groups and committees.

Despite this challenge, the Tasmanian partners continue to work together and build the partnership. Engagement includes community meetings, visits with Aboriginal community organisations and members, online information sessions, and presentations to key local forums. To further enhance collaboration across Aboriginal organisations and communities the Tasmanian Government is working towards increased engagement under the next Tasmanian Implementation Plan.

To assist our Closing the Gap Peak Partner, the Tasmanian Government provided \$550 000 over two years to fund the employment of their dedicated Closing the Gap Policy Officer. The policy officer helps to coordinate

Closing the Gap activities for the Peak and serves as a key liaison point between the Peak and the Tasmanian Government on Closing the Gap matters.

While policy partnership representatives note some issues raised at a national level of policy partnerships do not always reflect issues and experiences in Tasmania, it is too early to provide feedback on the question of whether policy partnerships are the right mechanism to drive sectoral change. For example, the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) has met several times and feedback from the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People is that it is an effective structure with a clear workplan from which early opportunities have been identified; however, change in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector is yet to be seen.

A key future housing policy approach is the development of the Tasmanian Housing Strategy. The Tasmanian Government is investing heavily in social and affordable housing. Key stakeholders including Tasmanian Aboriginal people were consulted to inform the long-term vision of the Tasmanian Housing Strategy. The Tasmanian Housing Strategy is soon to be released and addresses housing challenges around affordability, supply and sustainability.

The Tasmanian Housing Strategy will have a key focus on the type of dwellings needed to support and promote the diversity of Tasmania's regions and its residents. The provision of homes in regional and remote areas will provide local responses to community needs.

## Information request 2 – Shifting service delivery to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs)

In line with our commitments under the National Agreement, the first Tasmanian Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap was finalised in 2021, developed in full collaboration with Tasmanian Aboriginal people. A key element of Tasmania's Plan is to build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations through our \$5.3 million Closing the Gap Capacity Building Fund.

Eleven proposals were received from Aboriginal organisations for round one funding through the Capacity Building Grants Program. A whole-of-government assessment panel reviewed the proposals and recommended funding allocations to the following applicants:

Applicant	Project	Funding allocated
Cape Barren Island Aboriginal Association Incorporated	Digital connectivity and child health	\$365,000
Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation	Circular Head Renal Centre	Withdrew application
Elders Council of Tasmania Aboriginal Corporation	milangkani Cultural Program	\$140,000
Karadi Aboriginal Corporation	Health and community services (Deadly Choices)	\$300,000
melythina tiakana warrana Aboriginal Corporation	Building capacity on Tebrakunna Country	\$250,000
Six Rivers Aboriginal Corporation	Building a resilient and connected community	\$166,000
South East Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation	Family Support	\$122,000
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre	Comprehensive Closing the Gap work program	\$1,500,000
Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service	Bail Support Program	\$250,000
Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service	Bridgewater Youth Community Hub	\$120,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$3,213,000</b>

More than \$2 million is available through the second tranche of funding, with the outcomes of that round expected to be announced by the end of 2023.

The next Tasmanian Implementation Plan will further develop actions to sustain the outcomes of the initial Closing the Gap Capacity Building Grant Program.

The *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings* recommends further capacity building and funding for Aboriginal organisations to deliver services, building on existing early intervention services for children and their families delivered by Aboriginal organisations. The Government has already made a commitment to accept and implement all of the Commission's recommendations and will do this in collaboration with Aboriginal people.

The Tasmanian Government recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to determine and deliver services to meet the needs of their community members in culturally appropriate and effective ways.

In relation to housing, the Tasmanian Government is working closely with Tasmania's ACCOs to review long-term options for housing and essential and municipal services in line with the Stronger Remote Aboriginal Services Agreement.

### Information request 3 – Transformation of government organisations

In 2022 the Tasmanian Government announced that the Department of Communities would be abolished, with its functions moved to other departments. As part of this change to the machinery of Government, a new Aboriginal Partnerships division was created within the Department of Premier and Cabinet to provide whole-of-government coordination of services to Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

Monthly Combined Policy Partnership Working Group meetings between Heads of Agencies, the Aboriginal Partnerships division and Closing the Gap Peak Partner provides a structure to support organisational cultural change through the lens of Closing the Gap.

Last year, the Government established an Aboriginal Advisory Group who can work with the Government to design a process for truth-telling and treaty that is led by Aboriginal people, and provided an allocation of \$500 000 to support this process. It is acknowledged that truth-telling is an important component of transforming government organisations.

A whole-of-government Aboriginal Engagement Strategy, to be developed, will support the continual reinforcement of the message that Closing the Gap, in partnership with Aboriginal people, is core business for the Tasmanian Government and its agencies.

Moving forward, the second Closing the Gap Tasmanian Implementation Plan will establish a much tighter focus on transformational work, including firmer accountabilities.

### Information request 4 – Indigenous data sovereignty and Priority Reform 4

The Tasmanian Government understands the principles of data sovereignty, as described by the Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective, mean that Indigenous peoples should exercise control of the relevant data ecosystem including its creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination, and the infrastructure in which it is stored.

While the objectives of the Closing the Gap Agreement are necessarily ambitious, the aims of data sovereignty for Aboriginal people go further and set clear statements for the degree of control Aboriginal people should have over data about them.

The Tasmanian Government is presently in the early stages of working with the Coalition of Peaks representative, and across the Aboriginal community, on the parameters for a project to advance Priority Reform 4.

### **Information request 5 – Legislative and policy change to support Priority Reform 4**

Tasmania is in the early stages of co-creating the approach to Priority Reform 4 and understands that addressing legislative and policy barriers to data sharing and Aboriginal data governance may require legislative reforms and corresponding investment.

Tasmania understands that this may include legislative change to allow individual and collective consent for both the collecting and disclosure of information, in addition to broadening legislative definitions for the purpose of information disclosure.

### **Information request 6 – Characteristics of the organisation to lead data development under the Agreement**

Tasmania acknowledges in principle the value of appointing an organisation to lead data development under the Agreement, to strive for a considered, prioritised and integrated approach to data development.

The structure should enable shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and must integrate the many related data commitments into a consolidated piece of work to avoid duplication.

Expertise across systems, policy and service delivery would provide a balanced view of the work.

### **Information request 7 – Performance reporting tools – dashboard and annual data compilation report**

While the dashboard and the Annual Data Compilation Report (ADCR) are publicly accessible, it is likely that most visits to the sites are by Government officers and ACCOs with direct reporting responsibility or tasks relating to Closing the Gap.

The information in the ADCR is provided in a format that is easily accessible for the public, however, accessing the dashboard information requires a higher degree of digital literacy which could impact its accessibility.

Tasmania can see much benefit from building the capacity of ACCOs through online or face-to-face workshops in plain English to build capacity in data access and comprehension in relation to the dashboard and ADCR.

### **Information request 8 – Quality of implementation plans and annual reports**

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges clauses 108 and 118. As the collective experience in co-designing the Tasmanian Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap grows, and priority reforms are progressively embedded, planning and reporting will be increasingly aligned.

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges and supports in-principle efforts to improve reporting practices under Closing the Gap. Tasmanian Government agencies welcome the opportunity to collaborate on the development of the next Tasmanian Government Implementation Plan, including how it could include more

focused actions with clear goals and desired outcomes in line with the broader intentions of Closing the Gap, while maintaining a focus on the bespoke needs of our jurisdiction.

### Information request 9 – Independent mechanism in the broader landscape

The Tasmanian Government agrees there is scope for a national independent mechanism to drive accountability for obligations under the National Agreement, including against each of the priority reforms.

The role of the independent mechanism in successfully advancing the Agreement will depend on its capacity to have an impact at both the national and jurisdictional levels. The national independent mechanism must have role clarity that distinguishes its functions from independent mechanisms in states and territories.

### Information request 10 – Senior leader or leadership group to drive change in the public sector

The Tasmanian Government believes that Closing the Gap work is an opportunity for leadership, at every level in the State Service, to place Aboriginal people at the centre of our work.

The vital function of a high-level authorising environment for Closing the Gap in supporting action under the National Agreement within and across the Tasmanian Government is increasingly understood.

Tasmania has a director-level Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) for Closing the Gap through which there is capacity to elevate matters for consideration.

The Tasmanian Government's approach to public sector change, through progressive implementation of Priority Reform 3, is underpinned by the principle that Closing the Gap is core business for all agencies, at every level, from Portfolio Ministers through to officers.

### Information request 11 – Sector-specific accountability mechanisms

Tasmania is open to exploring options for establishing dedicated Aboriginal accountability mechanisms.

The *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings* recommended the Tasmanian Government should appoint a Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People with statutory powers and functions to monitor the experiences of Aboriginal children in out of home care and youth detention, and appoint an Executive Director for Aboriginal children and young people within the Department for Education, Children and Young People.

The Government has already made a commitment to accept and implement all of the Commission's recommendations.

The Tasmanian Government remains firmly committed to fully implementing the Closing the Gap program of work in Tasmania and acknowledges that while progress is being made against the goals of Closing the Gap, there is much more work to do.

Over the coming year we will particularly be focusing on driving implementation of the priority reforms of Closing the Gap across Government agencies and in partnership with Tasmanian Aboriginal people.