# 5 Governance, leadership and culture

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| Strategic areas for action |
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| Governance, leadership and culture |  | Early child development |  | Education and training |  | Healthy lives |  | Economic participation |  | Home environment |  | Safe and supportive communities |
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| 5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures5.2 Participation in decision making5.3 Engagement with services5.4 Case studies in governance | 5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance5.6 Indigenous cultural studies5.7 Participation in community activities5.8 Access to traditional lands and waters |
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Effective governance and leadership, and recognition of culture, play essential parts in the social and economic development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and influence virtually all indicators in the framework.

Governance refers to the way the members of a group or community organise themselves to make decisions that affect themselves and others, and includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and government governance. Leadership is important to the development of a strong governance culture, and there are specific cultural aspects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. The term ‘culture’ used here embraces the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and peoples, each with its own distinct cultural norms, law, language and identity, and which are dynamic in nature. Culture covers many positive outcomes that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ conception of wellbeing, and goes beyond overcoming disadvantage.

The following indicators are included in the ‘Governance, leadership and culture’ strategic area:

* Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures (section 5.1) — one of the principles of the Closing the Gap strategy is emphasising mutual respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous Australians, and is also part of the Australian Government’s response to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
* Participation in decision making (section 5.2) — participation in decision making is a key element in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and has been cited as an important factor in self‑determination and improving outcomes
* Engagement with services (section 5.3) — ‘Engagement’ is a broad concept that encompasses both accessibility (including barriers to access) and appropriate delivery (including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives in designing and delivering programs)
* Case studies in governance (section 5.4) — the case studies emphasise the importance of culture as an essential determinant of good governance
* Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance (section 5.5) — for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, language is an important aspect of culture and wellbeing
* Indigenous cultural studies (section 5.6) — cultural studies can benefit both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (can contribute to improved academic outcomes) and non‑Indigenous young people (can lead to shared views and increased respect)
* Participation in community activities (section 5.7) — art and ceremony are significant markers of cultural strength, and there is evidence that a range of sport and community activities can foster self‑esteem, social interaction and the development of skills and teamwork, leading to good physical and mental health and wellbeing
* Access to traditional lands and waters (section 5.8) — access to land and waters may allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to practise and maintain their knowledge of ceremonies, rituals and history. There may also be other social and economic benefits from connection to traditional country (see section 9.2 on ‘Indigenous owned or controlled land and business’).

The Steering Committee acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. While there has been general endorsement of the cultural indicators in this report, they may not reflect the aspirations of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Attachment tables for this chapter are identified in references throughout this chapter by an ‘A’ suffix (for example, table 5A.2.1). These tables can be found on the web page (www.pc.gov.au/oid2016).

## 5.1 Valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures**[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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| Box 5.1.1 Key messages |
| * Culture is a key aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing — not just knowledge and practice of culture by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, but respect for that culture among the wider community.
* In 2014:
* the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and over half of the general community reported feeling personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (86.3 per cent, and 56.5 per cent respectively)
* nearly all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians considered that it was important for all Australians to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (93.4 per cent) and history (94.1 per cent) and close to four out of five general community respondents regarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (79.5 per cent) and history (83.2 per cent) as important (table 5A.1.3).
* In 2014‑15, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over:
* more than one in three reported they felt treated unfairly (due to their Indigenous status) in the last 12 months (38.6 per cent) (tables 5A.1.11)
* those living in very remote areas were less likely to have reported unfair treatment in the last 12 months than those living in major cities (34.5 per cent and 41.2 per cent, respectively) (figure 5.1.2).
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| Box 5.1.2 Measures of valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures |
| There are five main measures for this indicator. Four of the measures report data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general population, aged 18 years and over, from Reconciliation Australia’s Australian Reconciliation Barometer with the most recent data for 2014 (national: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and general community[[2]](#footnote-2)). Due to extensive revision to the Barometer, including the measurement instrument and sampling design, data from 2014 onwards are not directly comparable to earlier data. * *Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures* is defined as the proportion of people rating their level of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as ‘high’

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| Box 5.1.2 (continued) |
| * *Recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia* is reported using two proxy measures:
* *Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures* is defined as the proportion of people who agree that they are personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
* *Importance of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history* is defined as the proportion of people who agree that it is important that all Australians know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and the history of Aboriginal people in Australia.
* *Level of trust* is defined as the proportion of people rating their perceptions of the level of trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general community as ‘high’
* *Level of prejudice* is defined as the proportion of people rating their perceptions of the level of prejudice between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the general community as ‘low’.

One measure reports data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) (15 years and over)/National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) (18 years and over), with the most recent available data for 2014‑15 from the NATSISS (all jurisdictions: Indigenous; remoteness). *Discrimination due to Indigenous status* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over who felt treated unfairly against (including those who responded they did not know if they’d been treated unfairly) due to their Indigenous status, in the previous 12 months.  |
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Culture is a key aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing — not just knowledge and practice of culture by Indigenous Australians, but respect for that culture among the wider community.

In 2014, Reconciliation Australia (RA) developed a framework to measure Australia’s progress towards reconciliation (RA 2016). As a result of this work, the following five dimensions were identified to measure reconciliation in Australia:

* unity – recognition and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a proud part of a shared national identity
* historical acceptance — the acknowledgements of the past (including injustices) and their impacts (both historical and contemporary), and making amends
* race relations — all Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous cultures, rights and experiences which results in stronger relationships based on trust and respect and free of racism
* equality and equity — including equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (such as in health, education and employment), as well as cultural security, self‑determination and their individual and collective rights
* institutional integrity – the degree to which the nation’s political, business and community structures actively support reconciliation (Polity Research & Consulting 2015; RA 2016).

The data that support these measures are sourced from the main data source for this section, the Australian Reconciliation Barometer, with a number of measures in this section also used to report against the dimensions above.

### Mutual respect

Reconciliation Australia explains that mutual respect:

… measures respect based on our level of understanding and pride in the cultures and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We believe that as the level of knowledge and understanding increases, more Australians will share in the pride that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel for their histories and cultures (RA 2013).

The term ‘cultures’ used here embraces the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and peoples, each with its own ‘distinct cultural norms, law, language and identity’ (AHRC 2013a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures are not static, nor relegated to history, but are dynamic exchanges, which are ‘understood through engaging in inter‑cultural dialogue, either in personal contact or through representations and signs’ (Langton and Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994).

#### Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

In 2014, a larger proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians rated their knowledge about the culture (69.0 per cent) and history (75.3 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as ‘high’, compared with the general community respondents (29.9 per cent and 38.7 per cent respectively) (figure 5.1.1).

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| Figure 5.1.1 Perceptions of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians, 2014**a, b**  |
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| Figure 5.1.1 Perceptions of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians, 2014  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image.  |

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| a Participants were asked to describe their knowledge about the history, and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on a scale ranging from ‘no knowledge at all/very low, fairly low, fairly high, or very high’. b Participants from both groups completed the survey questionnaires online. Relative standard errors and 95 per cent confidence intervals for these data should be considered when interpreting these data, and are available in attachment table 5A.1.1. |
| *Sources*: Reconciliation Australia (unpublished) Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2014; table 5A.1.1. |
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#### Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions to Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians contribute in every area of public, social and community life, including the arts, media, academia, politics, sport and business. However, there are no data currently available for the Steering Committee’s preferred measure of ‘recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia’. The Australian Reconciliation Barometer provides data for two proxy measures.

Importance of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history:

* In 2014, nearly all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that it was important for all Australians to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures (93.4 per cent) and history (94.1 per cent)
* Close to four out of five general community respondents regarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (79.5 per cent) and history (83.2 per cent) as important (table 5A.1.3).

Pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures:

* In 2014, the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents (86.3 per cent), and over half of the general community respondents (56.5 per cent) reported feeling personally proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture (table 5A.1.5).

### Progress on a stronger relationship

Stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non‑Indigenous Australians build and sustain mutual respect, while mutual respect contributes to stronger relationships — a virtuous circle. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to respond that they did not trust people, if they had reported they experienced discrimination (46.9 per cent) compared to those who had not (34.1 per cent) (ABS 2010).

A positive relationship is seen as essential to reconciliation (RA 2016), and a stronger relationship can be defined as:

… our perceptions of how we think the relationship is going and whether we think it is important. It also tests for high levels of trust and low levels of prejudice … (RA 2013).

Data from the Australian Reconciliation Barometer are used to explore the levels of trust and prejudice, which reflect (usually negative) *attitudes* toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. ABS survey data are used to explore the experience of discrimination, which is (usually negative) *behaviour and actions* toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

#### Trust

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer includes information on perceptions of mutual trust of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and general community respondents aged 18 years and over. Data for 2014 show low proportions believed trust is high:

* in relation to *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians trusting other Australians,* 40.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians had a high level of trust in other Australians, which was larger than the proportion for the general community respondents (20.6 per cent)
* in relation to *other Australians trusting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 35.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents considered that other Australians had a high level of trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, larger than the 25.4 per cent of general community respondents (table 5A.1.7).

#### Prejudice

Prejudice takes the form of unfavourable opinion or attitudes toward individuals who belong to a particular group. Reconciliation Australia notes that ‘high levels of prejudice reflect low levels of understanding about one another’ (RA 2013).

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer includes information on perceptions of prejudice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents and general community respondents towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Data for 2014 show that:

* 27.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents perceived that other Australians held a ‘low’ level of prejudice toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
* 36.1 per cent of general community respondents perceived that other Australians held a ‘low’ level of prejudice toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (table 5A.1.9).

Data on the perceptions of knowledge about, and importance of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, as well as pride, trust and prejudice, by Indigenous status are available for 2008, 2010 and 2012 in tables 5A.1.2, 5A.1.4 5A.1.6 5A.1.8 5A.1.10. These data are not directly comparable with 2014.

#### Discrimination

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC 2013b) states that racial discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another person in a similar situation, because of their race. The Australian Government has a legal obligation to promote equality and prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, as set out under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (AHRC 2013b).

In 2014‑15, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over:

* more than one in three (38.6 per cent) reported they felt treated unfairly (due to their Indigenous status) in the last 12 months (tables 5A.1.11)
* the most common experience of unfair treatment was through hearing racial comments/jokes (23.0 per cent), and the most recent experience of unfair treatment was from members of the public (8.7 per cent) (tables 5A.1.11 and 5A.1.13)
* those living in very remote areas were less likely than those living in major cities to have reported unfair treatment in the last 12 months (34.5 per cent and 41.2 per cent, respectively), mainly due to a lower proportion hearing racial comments/jokes (11.5 per cent in very remote areas compared to 27.5 per cent in major cities) (figure 5.1.2; table 5A.1.12).

| Figure 5.1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who felt treated unfairly against in last 12 months, by remoteness, 2014‑15 |
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| Figure 5.1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who felt treated unfairly against in last 12 months, by remoteness, 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
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| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15; table 5A.1.12. |
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In 2014‑15, 8.7 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 2 to 14 years were reported (by proxy) to have been treated unfairly at their current or previous school because of their background (tables 5A.1.20). Data by remoteness area are available in tables 5A.1.22‑23.

Data from the 2012‑13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 18 years and over felt after being discriminated against and what they did after discrimination are available in tables 5A.1.24‑25, and data on the place and situation by State and Territory, and by remoteness are available in tables 5A.26‑27.

### Things that work

| Box 5.1.3 Things that work — valuing Indigenous Australians and their cultures |
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| **Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)** are formal reconciliation commitments undertaken by organisations, under Reconciliation Australia’s RAP program. RAPs have been adopted by small and large organisations in business, government and in the community sector, and allow organisations to implement practical actions that build respectful relationships and create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (RA 2016a). The RAP Impact Measurement Report 2015 (and previous reports) highlighted the demonstrated benefits of the program. Compared to the general community, people in RAP organisations:* are more likely to trust Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
* are likely to agree that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold a special place as the First Australians
* are less prejudiced
* are more likely to be proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
* have more frequent contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (RA 2016b).

In 2015 there were 658 organisations that had created a RAP since 2006 — an increase from 590 in the previous year.  |
| Sources: Reconciliation Australia 2016a, *RAP Online Hub: About*, Reconciliation Australia, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/about/ (accessed 9 June 2016). Reconciliation Australia 2016b, *Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2015*, Canberra, ACT, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp‑content/uploads/2016/02/RAP‑Impact‑Report‑2015\_Web.pdf (accessed 17 March 2016). Reconciliation Australia, 2015, Reconciliation Action Plan Impact Measurement Report 2014, Canberra, ACT, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp‑content/uploads /2015/05/RAP‑IMPACT‑REPORT‑Final‑4.pdf (accessed 17 March 2016). |
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### Future directions in data

The Steering Committee has identified ‘recognition of the contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to Australia’ as a key measure. However, there is no currently available data source for this measure.

### References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2010, *The Health and Welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, Cat. no. 4704.0, Canberra, http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4704.0Main+Features1Oct%202010?OpenDocument (accessed 8 June 2016).

AHRC (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2013a, *Ensuring the Ongoing Survival of the Oldest Living Culture in the World*, Paper No. 4, The Declaration Dialogue Series, Sydney, https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/declaration-dialogue-series (accessed 6 May 2016).

—— (Australian Human Rights Commission) 2013b, *Equality and Non-Discrimination*, Paper No. 5, The Declaration Dialogue Series, Sydney, https://www.humanrights. gov.au/publications/declaration-dialogue-series (accessed 9 June 2016).

Langton, M. and Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994, *Valuing Cultures: Recognising Indigenous Cultures as a Valued Part of Australian Heritage*, Australian Government Publishing Service.

Polity Research & Consulting 2015, *2014 Australian Reconciliation Barometer*, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra.

RA (Reconciliation Australia) 2013, *Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2012: An Overview*, January, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, ACT, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/raphub/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/2012-Australian-Reconciliation-Barometer-Overview.pdf (accessed 6 June 2016).

—— (Reconciliation Australia) 2016, *The State of Reconciliation in Australia*, Reconciliation Australia, Canberra, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/ uploads/2016/02/The-State-of-Reconciliation-report\_FULL\_WR.pdf (accessed 5 June 2016).

## 5.2 Participation in decision making**[[3]](#footnote-3)**

| Box 5.2.1 Key messages |
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| * Participation in decision making is a critical component of self‑determination for all people.
* In 2014‑15, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over:
* one in four (25.5 per cent) felt they were able to have a say in their community all or most of the time, on issues important to them, and a further 42.5 per cent felt they could have a say, some or a little of the time (table 5A.2.1) — similar to 2008 (table 5A.2.2)
* those living in remote and very remote areas, and older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to feel they could have a say in their community all or most of the time (tables 5A.2.3 and 5A.2.5).
* As at 30 June 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in Australian parliaments ranged from:
* over parity in the ACT Legislative Assembly (5.9 per cent representation in parliament compared with 1.7 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the total ACT population eligible to stand for election)
* below parity in all other Australian, State and Territory governments (table 5.2.1)
* between 2014 and 2016 the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of Australian parliaments increased from 13 to 17 (tables 5A.2.7 and 5A.2.8).
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| Box 5.2.2 Measures of participation in decision making |
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| There are two main measures for this indicator: * *Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could*. There is currently no data source available for this measure.
* *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia and in State and Territory parliaments* is defined as the proportion of federal, state and territory parliamentarians who have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared to the proportion of the Australian population eligible to stand for parliament. Data are sourced from the Parliamentary Library. Data are as at 30 June 2016.

There is one proxy measure for this indicator:* *Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who felt able to have a say within their community* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who felt they were able to have a say within their community on issues that were important to them.

The data source for the proxy measure is the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), with the most recent available data for 2014‑15 (all jurisdictions; remoteness; age). |
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### Governance, self‑determination and participation in decision making

A critical element of governance is self‑determination (see section 5.4). Participation in decision making is a key exercise of self‑determination and empowerment. Broadly:

* external participation includes participation in electoral politics, participation in parliamentary processes, and direct participation in the broader governance environment
* internal participation includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance, legal systems, institutions and internal decision making structures and processes (UN Expert Mechanism 2011, 2010, cited in AHRC 2012).

The State of Reconciliation in Australia report highlights the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in decision making and notes the need to ‘ … truly value and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ right to self‑determination — to participate in and make decisions about their social, cultural and economic development … ’ (RA 2016, p. 67). While there is general agreement on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision making (Gardiner-Garden 2010), there is a lack of data with which to measure this participation. There is currently no data source available for the main measure ‘Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could’.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia and in State and Territory parliaments

As noted by Australia’s Social Justice Commissioner, there is ‘no substitute for direct representation’ when it comes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the decision making processes of government in Australia (Gooda, quoted in Kennett 2012). Parliamentary representation provides people with ‘a voice in parliament’. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parliamentarians represent what are in effect two constituencies: their electorate, as well as broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia (Deshong 2013; Lloyd 2009).

In both the 2013 federal election and the 2012 NT election, there were a record number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians nominated as candidates (Deshong 2013). Although the small numbers involved can fluctuate over short periods, increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates are being elected.

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Parliament of Australia

As at April 2016, 1.8 per cent (4 out of 226) of federal parliamentarians (House of Representatives and the Senate) self‑identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, an increase from 0.9 per cent in 2014 (2 out of 226). This falls below the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians eligible to nominate to stand for election in 2016, at 2.7 per cent (tables 5.2.1, 5A.2.8). (Caution should be used in interpreting the representation in parliament due to the small numbers involved.)

| Table 5.2.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in parliament, relative to the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the population eligible to enter parliament, as at June 2016**a, b** |
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|  | NSW | Vic | Qld | WA | SA | Tas | ACT | NT | Aus Gov.  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of parliament (no.) | 1 | – | ­­­2 | 2 | – | – | 1 | 6 | 4 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members as % of all members (%) | 0.7 | – | 2.2 | 2.1 | – | – | 5.9 | 24.0 | 1.8 |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population as % of population (%)c | 2.6 | 0.8 | 3.8 | 3.5 | 2.0 | 4.2 | 1.6 | 29.2 | 2.7 |

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| a Current as at 30 June 2016. b Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of parliament are counted in the jurisdiction of the parliament (e.g., NSW parliament counted in NSW, Parliament of Australia counted in Aust.). c Population is aged 18 years and over and eligible to enter parliament. – Nil or rounded to zero. |
| *Sources*: Gobbett, H. (2016) *Indigenous parliamentarians, federal and state: a quick guide* and unpublished (2016) jurisdictions; ABS (2014) *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2001 to 2026, Cat no. 3238.0.55.001; AEC (2016) *Size of the electoral roll and estimated participation rate as at 30 June 2016*; table 5A.2.7. |
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#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the State and Territory parliaments

As at 30 June 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in State and Territory parliaments ranged from:

* over parity in the ACT Legislative Assembly (5.9 per cent representation in parliament compared with 1.6 per cent representation in the eligible population)
* below parity for all other State and Territory governments (table 5.2.1).

### Felt able to have a say on important issues within the community

The extent to which people feel that they have a say on important community issues is a proxy for personal autonomy — control over decisions that affect them, and a feeling that their ideas and input are valued by the community.

Nationally in 2014‑15, one‑quarter (25.5 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over felt they were able to have their say within the community, on issues that were important to them, all or most of time. A larger proportion (42.5 per cent) felt they could have a say some or a little of the time. These data are consistent with 2008 NATSISS data (tables 5A.2.1 and 5A.2.2). (The terms ‘have a say’ and ‘issues that are important to you’ were not defined in the survey, and respondents interpreted these terms based on their personal views (ABS 2016)).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over:

* in 2014‑15, a larger proportion in remote areas (29.1 per cent) felt they were able to have their say within the community on issues that were important to them all or most of time, compared to those living in non‑remote areas (24.6 per cent). This difference was consistent over time (tables 5A.2.3 and 5A.2.4)
* in remote areas, there was a decrease in the proportion who felt they could have a say some or a little of the time within the community on issues important to them (from 45.5 per cent in 2008 to 38.1 per cent in 2014‑15), and an increase in those who felt they had a say none of the time (from 26.6 per cent in 2008 to 32.9 in 2014‑15) (tables 5A.2.3 and 5A.2.4).

Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were more likely to indicate they were able to have their say within the community on issues that were important to them all or most of time compared with younger age groups, following a similar pattern in 2008. For example, in 2014 15 those aged 35 years and over were more likely to feel they had a say than those aged 15–24 years (figure 5.2.1). This may in part be explained by the role of elders in decision making in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Child Family Community Australia 2014; McIntyre 2001; Walker 1993), which may provide some context for the difference between the younger and older age groups, noting that there is ‘deep respect for the wisdom of elders, who are at the time … both teachers and guides while they are participating in collective choosing’ (McIntyre 2001).

Data on participation within the community on important issues are also reported by State and Territory (tables 5A.2.1 and 5A.2.2).

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| Figure 5.2.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over that felt they had an opportunity, all or most of the time, to have a say on issues important to them, by age, 2008 and 2014**a**  |
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| Figure 5.2.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over that felt they had an opportunity, all or most of the time, to have a say on issues important to them, by age, 2008 and 2014  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |

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| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008 and 2014‑15; tables 5A.2.5–6. |
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### Things that work

| Box 5.2.3 Things that work — participation in decision making |
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| **Australian Electoral Commission’s (AEC) electoral participation program** is aimed at empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in exercising their right to vote, to improve levels of knowledge of democratic and electoral processes and to increase enrolment, through more than 20 AEC Indigenous and Community Engagement Officers, the majority of whom are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The program began in April 2010 and is funded as part of the Australian Government’s Closing the Gap initiative (AEC 2016). A 2011 evaluation found that the program’s early results were positive, that it ‘has a significant role to play in addressing the barriers to participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in democratic processes’ and made a number of recommendations to improve the program’s performance (Markiewicz and Patrick 2012).  |
| *Sources*: AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) 2016, *Indigenous Electoral Participation Program*, Australian Electoral Commission, http://www.aec.gov.au/indigenous/iepp.htm (accessed 13 May 2016). Markiewicz and Patrick 2012, *Final Report Evaluation* IEPP Volume 1 September 2012, http://www.aec.gov.au/about\_aec/Publications/files/iepp-volume-1.pdf (accessed 13 May 2016). |
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### Future directions in data

The Steering Committee has identified as a key measure for this indicator the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who wanted to participate in decision making and felt they could. However, no currently available data source incorporates the aspect of choice in participation — some data are available on whether or not a person participated, but not on whether lack of participation was voluntary or caused by some barrier. The development and collection of data to inform this indicator would assist in measuring Australia’s progress in meeting domestic expectations and international human rights obligations.

Australia has over 560 local councils responsible for managing their region and district, yet there is little publicly available information on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian councillors. The Steering Committee would like to include information on levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in local government in future reports.

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5.3 Engagement with services**[[4]](#footnote-4)**

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| Box 5.3.1 Key messages |
| * Engagement with services is critical to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Engagement covers both accessibility of services and the appropriate delivery of services.
* In 2014‑15, around one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over (24.2 per cent) reported that they had problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months, down from 29.9 per cent in 2008. The largest contributing decrease was in the proportion who had trouble accessing legal services (2.1 per cent, down from 5.5 per cent in 2008), dental services (7.9 per cent, down from 19.5 per cent in 2008) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers (2.5 per cent, down from 5.6 per cent in 2008) (figure 5.3.1).
* Those in remote areas were more likely to indicate problems accessing services in the previous 12 months, compared with those in non‑remote areas (33.2 per cent and 21.6 per cent, respectively). Barriers to access varied by remoteness, with the most common reason in remote areas being no services (17.7 per cent) and the most common reason in non‑remote areas being waiting time/not available in time (10.7 per cent) (figure 5.3.2).
* Cultural barriers may also impact on access to services. Around one in 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over spoke an Indigenous language as their main language, and of this group over one‑third (37.9 per cent) indicated they had experienced communication difficulties (table 5A.3.5).
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| Box 5.3.2 Measures of engagement with services |
| There are three main measures for this indicator. * *Accessing services* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who reported having problems accessing services. Data are sourced from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), with the most recent available data for 2014‑15 (national; all jurisdictions; remoteness).
* *Communication with service providers* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who reported having difficulties communicating with service providers. Data are sourced from the NATSISS, with the most recent available data for 2014‑15 (national: sex; age groups; remoteness).
* *Discharges against medical advice* is defined as the proportion of hospitalisations where patients left hospital against medical advice or discharged themselves from hospital at their own risk. Data are sourced from the AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database, with the most recent available data for 2014‑15 (all jurisdictions: remoteness; sex).
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Engagement with services is critical to improve the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Flaxman, Muir and Oprea 2009). Poor access to programs and services and ineffective service delivery can compound the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (CGC 2001; Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs 2005). Access to primary health care is covered in section 8.1.

Engagement with services is a broad concept that encompasses:

* accessibility (including barriers to access and the availability of services)
* appropriate delivery (including cultural perspectives in designing and delivering programs, and communicating effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients).

Effective services are a key component of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has stipulated that governments will reform service delivery systems to ensure that government investments:

* deliver effective and accessible services that are taken up by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban and regional locations
* deliver culturally competent services that achieve good outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
* maximise linkages between Indigenous‑specific and mainstream services
* deliver service models that respond to high levels of mobility amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (COAG 2012).

In January 2009, the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery, which aimed to improve coordination of remote service delivery (COAG 2009b). In his final report on progress, the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services outlined a number of lessons for both governments and communities, which included:

* for government — have locally based and well trained staff, develop cultural competence of government and employ specific local knowledge; and government engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be transparent, accountable and well administered
* for communities — governance and leadership must be strong and sustainable; communities should understand how to work with government, invest in planning with stakeholders in community and in government, and develop and deliver local cultural awareness programs to build the local capability and knowledge for those living and working in these communities (CGRIS 2014).

More information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and government governance is in section 5.4. Examples of effective service delivery are highlighted throughout this report in ‘things that work’ case studies.

### Accessing services

Access to services can be affected by the way programs are designed, how they are presented and the cost to users (ANAO 2014; CGC 2001; Stewart, Lohoar and Higgins 2011). In remote areas, this can be exacerbated by lack of services, lack of commercial competition and difficulties caused by lack of reliable infrastructure — transport and telecommunications — to enable access to services (Altman and Ward 2002; CGC 2001; Hudson 2010; Rennie et al 2013).

Failure to register births can make it difficult to obtain other forms of identification such as a driver’s licence, passport, tax file number or other proof of identification later in life, which can create further difficulties with accessing services (Castan and Gerber 2015; Orenstein 2009). Centrelink and Medicare have arrangements that assist people to obtain identification documents for access to government services (Australian Government 2010).

Data on the number of unregistered births are currently not available. For future editions of the report, data may be available from an Australian Research Council Linkage Project ‘Closing the gap on Indigenous birth registration’, which aims to quantify the number of births not registered from 2000 to 2009 in Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia (Freemantle 2013).

Telecommunications have become increasingly important in accessing services, particularly with the rise of online service provision. Telecommunications in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are complicated by geographic distance, harsh conditions and cost of infrastructure (ACMA 2008). The Productivity Commission is undertaking an inquiry into the future directions for the telecommunications Universal Service Obligation, with a final report due to the Australian Government in April 2017.

In 2009, the Australian, State and Territory governments signed the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access, recognising the importance of improved increased access to ‘online resources and services, principally for financial, educational, health, economic and social purposes’ as well as to e‑government services (COAG 2009a). In 2011, almost two‑thirds (62.6 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households[[5]](#footnote-5) had an internet connection (up from 40 per cent in 2006), compared with 77.2 per cent for non‑Indigenous households (ABS 2012).

In 2014‑15, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, 24.2 per cent reported that they had problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months, down from 29.9 per cent in 2008 (tables 5A.3.1‑2). The largest decrease from 2008 was in the proportion who had trouble accessing dental services (from 19.5 per cent in 2008 to 7.9 per cent in 2014‑15) (figure 5.3.1).

| Figure 5.3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over who reported problems accessing services, by selected services, 2008 and 2014‑15**a** |
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| Figure 5.3.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over who reported problems accessing services, by selected services, 2008 and 2014-15   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
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| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each proportion.*Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008, 2014‑15; tables 5A.3.1‑2.  |
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Those in remote areas[[6]](#footnote-6) were more likely to indicate problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months, compared with those in non‑remote areas (33.2 per cent and 21.6 per cent, respectively) (table 5A.3.3). Respondents were asked to indicate the barriers to the top three services they most had problem accessing. The barriers to services differed for remote and non‑remote areas:

* in remote areas, the most common barriers were the absence of services (17.7 per cent), not enough services in the area (14.6 per cent), a long wait time/not available at the time required (12.0 per cent), and transport issues or distance to the service (10.5 per cent).
* in non‑remote areas, the most common barriers were a long wait time/not available at the time required (10.7 per cent) or an absence of services in the area (6.8 per cent) (figure 5.3.2).

| Figure 5.3.2 Selected types of barriers to accessing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over, by remoteness areas, 2014‑15**a** |
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| Figure 5.3.2 Selected types of barriers to accessing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over, by remoteness areas, 2014-15   More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
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| a Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each proportion.*Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15; table 5A.3.3.  |
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Cultural barriers, including lack of cultural awareness on the part of service providers, racism, social inequality and social exclusion, may also lead to reduced access to services (NMHC 2012; PC 2011; Reilly et al 2008; Scrimgeour and Scrimgeour 2008; Zubrick et al 2010). In 2014‑15, 1.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians reported ‘services not culturally appropriate’ as a barrier for accessing selected services (table 5A.3.1).

Data by State and Territory are reported in tables 5A.3.1‑2.

### Communication with service providers

Difficulties in communicating with service providers can create barriers to accessing available services. These barriers may be minimised by effective use of Indigenous language interpreters to improve communication between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and service providers (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2011; HoRSCoATSIA 2012). Effective communication is not limited to language difficulties, but extends to issues including (but not limited to) knowledge of the subject matter, emotional response, body language, and cultural and linguistic nuances. Difficulties can be compounded, as miscommunications may not always be recognised (Cass et al. 2002).

The 2014‑15 NATSISS asked people aged 15 years and over whose main language was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language about communication difficulties. Of those that spoke an Indigenous language as their main language (10.5 per cent), over one‑third (37.9 per cent) reported that they had experienced communication difficulties — an increase from about one‑quarter in 2008 and 2002 (27.7 per cent and 25.0 per cent, respectively) (table 5A.3.5). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who lived in remote areas were more likely to speak an Indigenous language as their main language (43.6 per cent of males and 38.5 per cent of females), than those living in non‑remote areas (0.9 per cent of males and 3.3 per cent of females) (table 5A.3.6).

Indigenous language interpreter services can be useful to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and service providers are engaged with, and have equal access to government services.

### Discharges against medical advice

According to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework (AHMAC 2015), this measure ‘provides indirect evidence of the extent to which hospital services are responsive to Indigenous patients’ needs’.

For this report, hospitalisations data are presented for the non‑Indigenous population from 2012‑13 onwards (for prior years the data are presented for ‘other’ which includes non‑Indigenous Australians and those for whom Indigenous status is unknown or not stated). Prior to 2010‑11, six jurisdictions (NSW, Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA and the NT) were considered to have acceptable quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Indigenous identification in hospitalisation data. The attachment tables for this report include hospitalisations data for all jurisdictions for 2012‑13 to 2014‑15 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non‑Indigenous Australians, as well as data for the six jurisdictions for 2004‑05 to 2014‑15 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians.

Between 2004‑05 and 2014‑15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who left hospital against medical advice or discharged themselves at their own risk decreased slightly (from 2.6 per cent to 2.2 per cent), while the proportion for other Australians increased slightly (from 0.3 per cent to 0.4 per cent) (table 5A.3.7).

The differences in the proportions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous Australians may reflect cost and access to healthcare (including continuity of care), particularly for people living in remote areas (Humphreys and Wakerman 2008). In 2014‑15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian s leaving hospital against medical advice or discharging themselves at their own risk increased as remoteness increased (1.9 per cent in major cities and regional areas compared to 2.7 per cent in remote and very remote areas). A similar pattern was observed for non‑Indigenous Australians (0.4 per cent in major cities and regional areas compared to 0.6 per cent in remote and very remote areas) (table 5A.3.8).

### Future directions in data

The 2008 and 2014‑15 NATSISS only asked people who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language about problems communicating with service providers. Data on communication problems amongst all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians would be beneficial, as communication problems are not limited to those whose main language is an Indigenous language.

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## 5.4 Case studies in governance**[[7]](#footnote-7)**

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| Box 5.4.1 Key messages |
| Research over many years has identified the following six determinants of good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and government governance: |
| * governing institutions
* leadership
* self‑determination
 | * capacity building
* cultural match
* resources.
 |
| The existence of these determinants contributes to the success of organisations, and leads to improved health, wellbeing and prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. |
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Many successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations contribute to improving the social and economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (ORIC 2013; RA 2006, 2013). Good government governance is particularly important to ‘drive real change on the ground’ (CGRIS 2011).

### Defining governance

What does ‘governance’ mean? A five year (2004–08) Indigenous Community Governance Project (ICGP) defined governance as:

… the evolving processes, relationships, institutions and structures by which a group of people, community or society organise themselves collectively to achieve the things that matter to them. To do this they need to make decisions about:

* their group membership and identity (who is the ‘self’ in their governance)
* who has authority within the group, and over what
* their agreed rules to ensure authority is exercised properly and decision‑makers are held accountable
* how decisions are enforced
* how they negotiate their rights and interests with others
* what arrangements will best enable them to achieve their goals (Hunt et al. 2008).

Identifying common principles or determinants that underpin governance, and encouraging the application of these determinants, are the keys to strengthening governance.

### Determinants of good governance

Drawing on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development in the US (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development 2010), the ICGP and broad consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, as well as governments and service providers, the Steering Committee has identified the following six determinants of good governance — relevant to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations and government itself:

* *governing institutions* — the way structures of governance are created, leaders chosen, and the extent of constituents’ confidence and support
* *leadership* — the process for which an individual influences group members to attain group or organisational goals
* *self‑determination* — for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, having the right and ability to determine their own priorities and design their own instruments of governance, within broad governing institutions
* *capacity building* — having the capabilities (such as knowledge and skills) to get things done
* *cultural match* — respecting processes within different communities to work towards a common ground between the governing structures wanted and the culture of the community
* *resources* — the economic, cultural, social and natural resources, and information technology necessary to underpin successful governance.

The determinants are inter‑dependent. No one principle in isolation will lead to good governance — all determinants are necessary for sustained success.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance

This section draws on four case studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance from the 2014 Reconciliation Australia (RA)/BHP Billiton Indigenous Governance Awards (IGAs): the two winners (boxes 5.4.2 and 5.4.3), and the two highly commended finalists (boxes 5.4.4 and 5.4.5). The winners of the latest round of the IGAs were announced in November 2016, too late for inclusion in this report. Case studies drawn from the 2016 awards will be featured in future reports. Additional research is drawn from the AIGI (formerly RA) Indigenous Governance Toolkit online resource, which is a key source of information for building the governance capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

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| Box 5.4.2 Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation2014 Winner Category A: Incorporated organisations |
| Waltja has its origins in 1993 as a family resource centre and is an initiative of women leaders from Central Australian communities. It supports communities to address economic disadvantage and ensure local voices are heard. Waltja provides services to help the community grow, including training and employment opportunities and projects to maintain family and culture and encourage greater economic independence as well as disability support care, emergency relief and a ‘culture car’ that can be hired by families to attend significant cultural events.Waltja shows the influence and leadership of women in communities, and improves outcomes for families in 90 000 km2 of very remote Central Australia. |
| *Sources*: RA 2014, *Indigenous Governance Awards | Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation*, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/iga/past-finalists/657/ (accessed 4 May 2016), Waltja 2016). |
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| Box 5.4.3 The Marruk Project2014 Winner Category B: Non‑incorporated projects and initiatives |
| The Marruk Project, which commenced in 2009, connects members of its local community in the northern Victorian town of Swan Hill, using performing arts to strengthen culture and create opportunities for elders, young people, artists and cultural leaders to get to know each other by sharing their histories.The Project uses acting, puppetry, dance, live music and video to raise cross‑cultural awareness and develop the skills of performers. The group started with Aboriginal performers and now involves non‑Indigenous people from the Swan Hill community, including Afghan and Sudanese refugees.Marruk connects people to culture through creative productions, empowers individuals and keeps age‑old dreaming stories alive. |
| *Source*:(RA 2016). |
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| Box 5.4.4 Girringun Aboriginal Corporation 2014 Highly commended Category A: Incorporated organisations |
| Girringun Aboriginal Corporation represents traditional owners in part of coastal north Queensland. It works to promote traditional cultures, support traditional owners and has social and economic programs including land and biodiversity management and an art centre.Girringun is widely respected in the community and all members have an opportunity to participate in major collective decisions. Culture and heritage are fundamental parts of its governance. |
| *Source(s)*: Girringun Aboriginal Corporation 2016, *Girringun Aboriginal Corporation | Strong Aboriginal People, Strong Culture, Strong Country*, http://girringun.com.au (accessed 4 July 2016); Reconciliation Australia 2014, Indigenous Governance Awards: Girringun Aboriginal Corporation, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/iga/past-finalists/girringun-aboriginal-corporation/ (accessed 4 July 2016). |
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| Box 5.4.5 Muntjiltjarra Wurrgumu Group**2014 Highly commended Category B: Non‑incorporated projects** |
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| The Muntjiltjarra Wurrgumu Group based in Wiluna, WA, provides a voice at the decision making table and aims to address barriers to communication between the Aboriginal community, government agencies and industry. The group’s work is based on the results of a survey of the views of local community members.The group has been ‘designed, created and delivered with complete ownership of local Aboriginal people, giving local people greater control over how external agencies and industry work with the local community’. |
| *Sources*: Reconciliation Australia 2014, Indigenous Governance Awards: Muntjiltjarra Wurrgumu Group, https://www.reconciliation.org.au/iga/past‑finalists/muntjiltjarra-wurrgumu-group/ (accessed 4 July 2016). |
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#### Governing institutions

Governing institutions are made up of both formal mechanisms (such as policies, rules, regulations, constitutions, legal and judicial systems) and informal ways of doing things (such as taboos, gender norms, religious beliefs, values, kinship and marriage systems) (Hunt and Smith 2006). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) analysis of the shortlisted 2012 IGA applications showed that 95 per cent of organisations held board meetings, and all organisations had their accounts audited, held annual general meetings and produced annual financial reports (if required). They also had clearly outlined and documented internal dispute resolution processes … [and] ‘all organisations outlined mechanisms and processes for resolving external complaints’ (RA 2013).

Waltja comprises Aboriginal women who are permanent residents of remote Central Australian communities. A board of directors is elected at the annual general meeting. The annual general meeting and board meetings are conducted using several languages. Directors are careful to avoid conflicts of interest. An important role for directors and staff is communication both within the organisation and with members and communities face‑to‑face, in a regular newsletter and via the organisation’s website (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

Good corporate governance that is coupled with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values, relationships and systems of authority produces governing order and good outcomes (Hunt et al. 2008; Hunt and Smith 2007). An assessment of the 2012 IGA shortlisted organisations found they were flexible in their approaches to dispute resolution and decision making, but were supported with clearly outlined and established processes. Approaches included ‘mediation, traditional law and cultural practices, codes of conduct and informal discussions’ for internal disputes, with external disputes primarily addressed via formal processes’ (RA 2013).

Good governing institutions do not just spontaneously arise. They are the result of often lengthy processes of developing capacity and leadership, and ongoing training and development (see ‘Capacity building’ below). Good governing institutions support ‘board and staff training and development … [and] compulsory governance training for board members’ (RA 2006).

#### Leadership

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are critical to the development of a strong governance culture. While there is a specific cultural aspect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, leadership often requires people to walk confidently and with influence in two worlds — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous leadership (AILC 2013).

Leadership needs to be nurtured and leaders require training and support to help them fulfil their responsibilities. Sustained leadership requires succession planning, so new people can take over from current leaders over time. The AIHW analysis of shortlisted applicants in 2012 noted that all organisations had ‘internal development and training programs, whether for staff, board members, or young people in the community’ (RA 2013).

Drawing on the IGA examples and research by the Indigenous Community Governance Project, some lessons for developing leadership and succession planning can be identified:

* training, leadership, personal and professional development, including cultural training builds competent and highly skilled staff (RA 2006, 2013)
* board election processes adapted to cultural, social, local conditions (RA 2013)
* staggering elections and mentoring new board members
* developing potential board members and board succession planning to ensure board continuity, skill retention and organisational stability (RA 2006, 2013)
* developing the communication skills and self‑confidence of young people by providing role models, mentoring and experience to nurture future leaders (RA 2013).

#### Self‑determination

A critical element of governance is self‑determination. Self‑determination is a fundamental human right contained in articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (AHRC 2013). Self‑determination as a human right is also reaffirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and endorsed by the Australian Government in 2009 (AHRC 2012).

Self‑determination has also been given different definitions by different researchers (Calma 2006; Hunt et al. 2008; Hunt and Smith 2006; RA 2006) but, put simply, ‘self‑determined people are actors in their own lives instead of being acted upon by others’ (Wehmeyer 2002). An important aspect of self‑determination is ‘cultural legitimacy’ — the extent to which there is:

* culturally legitimate participation and control of decision‑making (participation in decision making is discussed in section 5.2)
* community participation in community governance institutions (RA 2013).

A key feature of success is that ‘culture is at the very core of what Waltja does. It responds to the needs of its community by being inclusive and doing things the Waltja way’ (Reconciliation Australia 2014). Communication with members and communities is also an essential part of how Waltja operates (Waltja 2016).

A related concept to self‑determination is empowerment. The *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report* (2015) defined empowerment:

Empowerment, in our meaning, has two aspects. It means Indigenous people empowering ourselves by taking all appropriate and necessary powers and responsibilities for our own lives and futures. It also means Commonwealth, state and territory governments sharing, and in some cases relinquishing, certain powers and responsibilities, and supporting Indigenous people with resources and capability building.

#### Capacity building

There are two important aspects to capacity building. The ‘public management’ approach emphasises the need to develop a community’s ability to meet accountability requirements, and has strong links with the ‘governing institutions’ and ‘leadership’ determinants of good governance. The ‘community development’ approach emphasises empowering communities to take responsibility and control over their own futures, and is closely linked with the ‘self‑determination’ aspect of good governance (Gerritson 2001; Hunt and Smith 2007).

Capacity building for good governance can take many forms. Individuals, groups and organisations can build on their strengths through both formal and informal governance training, for example through governance courses run by the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre. Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi has consistently funded and supported staff professional development since incorporation. New staff members undertake a three‑month probation period with induction, training and supervision by a senior worker. All staff have yearly performance appraisals. Together these processes make sure Waltja staff are performing at the best level possible and quickly identify any potential problems (Indigenous Governance Toolkit 2014).

#### Cultural match

Cultural match refers to the match between the governance structures a group wants to develop and the culture of the community that is the development target (CAEPR and RA 2004; Sullivan 2007).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live with two systems of governance, their own and that of non‑Indigenous Australia. The Indigenous Governance toolkit (2014) describes this as ‘two‑way governance’, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians balance and negotiate dual ‘culture, laws, rules and forms of accountability’ and support bringing ‘two ways together’. Box 5.4.6 provides an example of integrating culture into project governance.

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| Box 5.4.6 Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre Cultural Governance Programme |
| A recent evaluation of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre’s Cultural Governance Programme in the Ardyaloon community in WA showed the importance of working in cooperation with local Aboriginal law and culture to successfully achieve the repatriation of sacred objects and remains in a way that met the cultural needs of elders while also working cooperatively with the institutions that had been holding the objects and remains. |
| *Sources*: Sullivan, P. and Kinnane, S. nd, *An Evaluation of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) Cultural Governance Programme 2013–2015. Repatriation of Sacred Objects and Ancestral Remains to the Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) Community*, Nulungu Research Institute, the University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome, http://www.kalacc.org.au/docs/default-source/ statements/kalacc-cultural-governance-evaluation-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=2 (accessed 16 August 2016). |
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For IGA finalists, culture is the foundation of their success: it is ‘embedded in every aspect of their organisation‑from program delivery and board arrangements, to decision making and community consultation processes’ and means both being true and responsive to their community, and also being accountable ‘externally to stakeholders, funding sources, and government’ (RA 2013).

‘One of the unique things about [the Marruk Project] is its ability to bring the whole town together. It’s what we should be seeing across the world. We need things like this to co‑exist — to build understanding. To actually witness it bringing the town together is something that’s almost beyond belief.’ — Mick Dodson, IGA Chair (RA 2016)

#### Resources

The ‘resources’ determinant focuses on the economic factors necessary to underpin successful governance arrangements. Hunt et al. (2008) noted that, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service organisations have increasingly taken on service delivery responsibilities from government, these have come with multiple, complex and costly reporting and accountability requirements. Chaney (2013) argued that these onerous approaches to service contracts often contribute to organisational failure, as resource uncertainty, particularly insecure and ad hoc funding, makes it difficult to recruit and retain staff or to build capacity. More recent research with successful Aboriginal controlled organisations confirms the importance of sustained funding (Hunt 2016).

Financial diversity can give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations a degree of independence to run programs as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want them to be run (RA 2006). Flexible funding that facilitates the development of appropriate programs at the community level, and clarity about the roles and responsibilities of both funding agencies and service providers is vital for success (Hunt 2013).

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| Table 5.4.1 Sources of income of the top 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations, 2007‑08 to 2014‑15 (per cent)**a** |
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| Financial year | 2007‑08 | 2008‑09 | 2009‑10 | 2010‑11 | 2011‑12 | 2012‑13 | 2013‑14 | 2014‑15 |
| Government funding | 46.9 | 44.5 | 45.8 | 38.2 | 39.9 | 36.9 | 39.5 | 39.3 |
| Self‑generated income | 38.2 | 38.8 | 39.0 | 39.6 | 39.8 | 40.1 | 44.8 | 43.0 |
| Other income sources | 14.9 | 19.7 | 15.2 | 22.2 | 20.3 | 23.0 | 15.7 | 17.4 |
| Philanthropic gifts | <0.1 | <0.1 | <0.1 | <0.1 | – | <0.1 | – | 0.3 |

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| a Percentages are of funding against the total income for each financial year. – Nil or rounded to zero. |
| *Source*: ORIC (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations) 2016, *The Top 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations 2014‑15*, Canberra, ACT. |
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Data from the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) shows a cautiously positive story — self‑generated income increased from 38.2 to 44.8 per cent of the total income of the top 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations from 2007‑08 to 2013‑14, with a slight decrease to 43.0 per cent for 2014‑15 (table 5.4.1), with ORIC noting that ‘the amount of self‑generated income has steadily taken over from government‑derived income and the leading source of income’ (ORIC 2016).

### Government governance

Government governance refers to governments’ engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This section examines formal arrangements for ‘high level’ engagement between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, in the light of the determinants of good governance.

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory bodies

The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (National Congress) was established in April 2010. The National Congress is an independent company limited by guarantee and registered under the Corporations Act (National Congress 2016). National Congress advocates and represents its members, but does not engage in service delivery (Calma and Dick 2011). Congress members include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, and national and local organisations, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals. The National Congress board’s co‑chairs and directors are member‑elected (National Congress 2016). The National Congress was represented on the working group that advised the Steering Committee on the production of this report.

Some jurisdictions have also established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory bodies to provide advice to governments on Indigenous policy issues (box 5.4.7).

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| Box 5.4.7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory bodies |
| The Australian Government’s Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council was established in November 2013, and comprises both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non‑Indigenous members. Council members were appointed jointly by the Prime Minister, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. The Council’s brief includes a focus on schooling, employment and justice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Australian Government 2013)In WA, key advisory bodies include the WA Aboriginal Advisory Committee, the Aboriginal Lands Trust, the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee and the WA Aboriginal Education and Training Council. These bodies provide relevant advice to the portfolio ministers on matters relating to the interests and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, management of land held in trust, heritage protection and education and training. (Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2016, WA Government unpublished.)The South Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (SAAAC) was established under a policy decision by the Premier in December 2005. The SAAAC is the peak advisory body to the State Government on Aboriginal affairs policy, programs and service delivery. (SA Government unpublished.)This ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body was established by legislation in 2008. It comprises seven members representing the interests and aspirations of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and provides advice to the ACT Government (ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body 2016) |
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#### Determinants of government governance

Good government governance, such as improved coordination among agencies, removing duplication of services, adapting to change, a stable policy environment and effective processes, and learning from evidence drawn from past evaluations, affect the governance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Henry 2007; Howse cited in Hunt 2013; Phillips-Brown, Reddel and Gleeson 2013).

Several major reports have identified the lack of robust evaluations of government programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and encouraged a much greater investment in evaluation (Australian Government 2010, PC 2015, Productivity Commission 2013). Accountability through evaluation is an important part of government governance. A key element for good government governance is to ensure that where evaluations are conducted, the findings and lessons from these are made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and governments (Cobb-Clark 2013; Phillips-Brown, Reddel and Gleeson 2013).

Australian governments have made several collective commitments to improve government governance, including: commissioning this report (COAG 2002); agreeing to the ‘Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians’ (COAG 2012), which drew upon the ‘National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians’ (COAG 2004); and establishing a national framework for reporting expenditure on services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (IERSC 2009, 2010, SCRGSP 2012, 2014).

At the program level, Australian governments have committed to sharing their learning about what works to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, although no longer funded, maintains the existing collection of evidence‑based research on what works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (AIHW and AIFS nd).

There is information on the use of mainstream services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (see the Indigenous Expenditure Report (SCRGSP 2014) and the Report on Government Services (SCRGSP 2016) but limited information on the barriers to access and use of services faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (see section 5.3 on engagement with services, which contains data on access and barriers and section 5.1 which includes information on discrimination and racism).

There are similarities between the determinants of good government governance, the ‘things that work’ success factors in this report (see chapter 3), the international community development principles that Hunt (2010) identified as important in the way non­‑government organisations work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the factors behind the success of Aboriginal controlled organisations (Hunt 2016). They all reflect the ‘bottom‑up’ approach and the self‑determination and capacity building determinants of good governance.

Moran (2016) suggested that poor development practice and the failure of good governance and by governments is the reason why many programs aimed at improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians fail to make an impact. Moran pointed out at that despite good intentions and carefully thought out policies, actual practice on the ground in communities determines whether programs achieve improvements in wellbeing and outcomes for people. Key characteristics of government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy pointed out by Moran include:

* continual purging of previous policies as new policies are implemented often without evaluation or learning from what has gone before
* periodic swings in policy, such as from more decentralised to more centralised approaches without consideration of what would work best in a particular place
* mimicking of a policy that may have worked in one place and implementing it elsewhere without consideration of local contexts
* contradictions in policy between one program, agency or level of government and another so that what one policy aims to achieve is undermined by another program or policy.

A series of case studies presented by Moran (2016) demonstrate these characteristics and illustrate the importance of the determinants of good governance. Moran observes that governments often make decisions on policies and programs with little input from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians on programs and policies designed for them, and often suddenly cut funding to programs without any assessment of their effectiveness — aspects of the governing institutions, self‑determination and resources determinants of good governance used in this report. Moran also discusses the challenges and importance of the intersection of Aboriginal and non‑Indigenous cultures, and how those successfully implementing programs must navigate the differences.

Governance is also at the centre of the *Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report* ((Empowered Communities 2015). The Report prepared by a consortium of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations from eight regions across Australia, makes recommendations to governments across the spectrum of the determinants of good community, organisational, and government governance, particularly self‑determination and leadership. The Report called for empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and changes in the relationship between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations and proposes reforms for achieving this.

A recent Senate Committee report (Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Administration 2016) made recommendations for improving the process of funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services (that are often provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations) that are particularly relevant to the resources and self‑determination determinants of governance and the ‘things that work’ success factors identified in chapter 3 — specifically ongoing government support, community involvement in program design and decision‑making and cooperative approaches.

### Future directions in data

There has been significant progress in examining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance since the first report in 2003. The introduction of the Indigenous Governance Awards has helped identify and highlight many examples of good practice. The Indigenous Community Governance Project by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and Reconciliation Australia has provided academic rigour to the examination of governance practices. Among governments, evaluations and studies of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reform initiatives (Dwyer et al. 2009; FaHCSIA 2012; OIPC 2006; Yu, Duncan and Gray 2008) have helped identify aspects of government governance that can assist or impede Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance. That said, there is still more to be done before future reports can include an objective measure of governance.

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5.5 Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance**[[8]](#footnote-8)**

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| Box 5.5.1 Key messages |
| * Language is an important cultural signifier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and plays a significant role in the promotion of resilient communities.
* From 2005 to 2012, the number of spoken Indigenous languages decreased from 145 to 120, while the number of languages spoken by all generations decreased from 18 to 13 (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).
* In 2014‑15, similar to 2008, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over:
* 10.5 per cent were learning an Indigenous language, with the proportion highest for younger age groups (19.3 per cent for those aged 3–14 years) (figure 5.5.2)
* 16.0 per cent spoke an Indigenous language (table 5A.5.1), with this proportion highest in remote and very remote areas (50.2 per cent) (table 5A.5.3).
* From 2002 to 2014‑15, there was a decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who could speak an Indigenous language, from 21.1 per cent to 18.3 per cent (figure 5.5.3).
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| Box 5.5.2 Measures of Indigenous language revitalisation and maintenance |
| There are two main measures for this indicator.* *Indigenous language revitalisation* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are *learning* an Indigenous language (national; by geographic location [location as proxy for individual languages]).
* *Indigenous language maintenance* is defined as the number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are Indigenous language speakers (national; age; geographic location [location as proxy for individual languages]).

The main data source is the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), with the most recent available data for 2014‑15. Supplementary data are available from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS), with the most recent available data collected in 2012. See box 5.5.3 for further information on these data sources. |
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, as with all languages, transmit cultural practices and beliefs, and strengthen a sense of identity and belonging (DEEWR 2009; McLeod, Verdon and Sturt 2015). In particular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are closely linked to culture, land and law, and all are connected to wellbeing (Dockery 2011; HoRSCoATSIA 2012). Language also plays a meaningful role in thecontinuation of culture and promotion of resilient communities (AHRC 2010), and is an important cultural signifier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, even for those who do not speak an Indigenous language or who are not actively engaged in language programs (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014). (Section 11.5 has additional information on community functioning). An analysis of the NILS survey conducted in 2012 found that of the 288 respondents:

* 98 per cent agreed that the use of traditional languages improves the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
* 95 per cent agreed that it was important for their children to learn and use traditional language, and when asked why, 46 per cent said that they wanted the languages to be passed to the next generation
* 74 per cent ‘expressed a desire for traditional languages to be strong, widely spoken, used or known in communities and passed on to younger generations’ (Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014).

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes the right to:

‘ … revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.’ (UN 2008)

The Declaration was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, and endorsed by the Australian Government in 2009 (AHRC 2012). Projects aiming to maintain and revive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are being supported and implemented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, language professionals, governments and community organisations in urban, regional and remote locations across Australia (Hobson et al. 2010; HoRSCoATSIA 2012).

Language revitalisation and maintenance is crucial to preserving and strengthening culture. Culturally appropriate services can address difficulties in communication (such as through the use of Indigenous languages or interpreters), as communication difficulties may magnify barriers to education (section 4.5, 4.8 and 7.2), employment (section 4.7) and access to services (section 8.1 on primary health care). The indicator on engagement with services (section 5.3) includes information on difficulty understanding, or being understood by, service providers.

Schneirer et al. (2011), in their literature review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, state that evidence is compelling about the endangered state of traditional languages, and highlights the need to *revitalise* languages and to *maintain*, using an assessment of ‘language vitality’. The assessment of language vitality was developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, and adopted in 2003, and comprises several interrelated factors (figure 5.5.1).

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| Figure 5.5.1 Nine factors for assessing language vitality**a** |
| Figure 5.5.1 Nine factors for assessing language vitality  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Diagram reproduced from the *Endangered Languages,* 2009 – 2014 website, which summarises the UNESCO document on Language vitality and Endangerment, adopted at the International Expert Meeting on the UNESCO Programme of Safeguarding of Endangered Languages, in Paris on 10‑12 March 2003. |
| *Source*: UNESCO (2003). |
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The UNESCO document (2003) cautions that the factors are not prescriptive, but rather provide a guide and scales to be adapted to local contexts. Due to a lack of robust Australian data for the majority of items in the language vitality assessment, two main measures were distilled and adopted by the Steering Committee for this indicator: the *revitalisation* and *maintenance* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

The NILS report estimates that, in 2012, around 120 languages were spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, a reduction from the 145 languages reported in 2005 (and the estimated 250 languages before European settlement) (AIATSIS and FATSIL 2005; Marmion, Obata and Troy 2014). However, whilst some languages have been lost, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are learning Indigenous languages. An analysis of wave one and three of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) found that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have rich language learning opportunities (including through oral storytelling and social activities such as swimming) among a number of languages including English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and other languages (McLeod, Verdon and Kneebone 2014). Analysis of wave five of the same longitudinal study indicated that 16 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children spoke traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (close to 25 per cent with Kriol[[9]](#footnote-9)), including 37 languages that are classified as no longer being spoken, critically endangered or having very few speakers (Kikkawa 2015).

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| Box 5.5.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language data sources |
| Two sources of data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language are used to report against this indicator: the NILS and the NATSISS. Whilst the Census provides some data on speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, the question is only asked in relation to the main language spoken at home, and so does not include people whose main language is English but who also speak an Indigenous language (see appendix 2 for more information).The 2012 **NILS** had two components:* the *Language Activity Survey*, which asked organisations about community‑based Australian language activities — 75 organisations responded (primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander but also some universities and other non‑Indigenous bodies)
* the *Language Attitude Survey*, which asked Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians about their thoughts about their languages — a total of 288 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians responded.

Due to different methodologies and survey instruments, unless otherwise noted, data from the 2012 NILS are not directly comparable to the 2005 NILS. The 2014‑15 **NATSISS** collected information from respondents about the main language spoken at home (for those aged 3–5 years, an additional response category was available for those ‘not yet speaking’). Respondents whose main language was not an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language were asked whether they spoke any of these languages, and if not, whether they would understand what was being said if someone were to speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language to them. All respondents were also asked whether they were currently learning any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and, if so, how they were being taught. For children aged 3–14 years, responses were provided by their proxy.  |
| *Sources*: ABS 2016, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey: Users Guide*, Cat. no. 4720.0; Marmion, D., Obata, K. and Troy, J. 2014*, Community, Identity and Wellbeing: the Report of the Second National Indigenous Languages Survey*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. |
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### Revitalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

In 2014‑15, 10.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over indicated they were learning an Indigenous language. The proportion was higher in WA (19.2 per cent) and SA (16.3 per cent) compared to other states and territories (table 5A.5.1), and in remote areas (15.0 per cent) compared to non‑remote areas (9.3 per cent) (table 5A.5.3).

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians learning an Indigenous language was higher for younger age groups, with the largest proportion aged 3–14 years (19.3 per cent) and the lowest proportion for those aged 55 years and over (3.0 per cent) (figure 5.5.2).

Proportions for 2014‑15 are similar to those for 2008 for all age and remoteness categories (figure 5.5.2, tables 5A.5.1­­–6).

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| Figure 5.5.2 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 3 years and over learning an Indigenous language, by age group, 2008 and 2014‑15**a,b** |
| Figure 5.5.2 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 3 years and over learning an Indigenous language, by age group, 2008 and 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a People whose main language spoken at home was an Indigenous language were not asked whether they were learning an Indigenous language. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15; tables 5A.5.5–6. |
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and older who were leaning an Indigenous language were most likely to be learning from a relative (62.1 per cent), followed by a learning institution (27.5 per cent), and from a community elder or another person in the community (22.9 per cent) (table 5A.5.9).

Data on where Indigenous language was being learnt are also available for states and territories in tables 5A.5.1–2, for remoteness in tables 5A.5.3–4 and 5A.5.7–8, and by age in tables 5A.5.5–6 and 5A.5.9–10.

### Maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

Nationally in 2014‑15, 16.0 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 3 years and over spoke an Indigenous language (with 9.6 per cent speaking it as their main language at home) — similar to 17.2 per cent in 2008 (data for those under 15 years are not available prior to 2008). At the state and territory level, the NT had the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander speakers of Indigenous languages (63.0 per cent), followed by SA (20.8 per cent), WA (20.7 per cent) and Queensland (15.8 per cent) (table 5A.5.1).

People living in remote and very remote areas were more likely to speak an Indigenous language (50.2 per cent), than those living in non‑remote areas (6.8 per cent) (table 5A.5.3). The proportion of Indigenous language speakers was also higher in older age groups (between 19.0 and 21.5 per cent for people aged 25 years and over) compared to younger age groups (10.7 per cent for those aged 3–14, and 14.1 per cent for those aged 15–24) (table 5A.5.5). This difference may be because younger people are still learning language (see figure 5.5.2).

Comparable time series data on language speakers are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over. Nationally from 2002 to 2014‑15, there was a decrease in the proportion of Indigenous language speakers (from 21.1 per cent to 18.3 per cent), with decreases in the following age groups:

* 15–24 years, from 18.2 per cent in 2002 to 14.1 per cent in 2014‑15
* 25–34 years, from 22.3 per cent in 2002 to 19.0 per cent in 2014‑15
* 55 years and over, from 26.1 per cent in 2002 to 19.8 per cent in 2014‑15 (figure 5.5.3).

Analysis of the 2012 NILS data are presented in the 2014 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* *2014* report (SCRGSP 2014).

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| Figure 5.5.3 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over speaking an Indigenous language, by age group, 2002, 2008 and 2014‑15**a,b** |
| Figure 5.5.3 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over speaking an Indigenous language, by age group, 2002, 2008 and 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a People whose main language spoken at home was an Indigenous language were not asked whether they were learning an Indigenous language. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate.  |
| *Sources*: ABS (2016) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, Australia 2014‑15, ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008, ABS (2004) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002; table 5A.5.11. |
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### Future directions in data

Data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language use are limited. Consistent and comparable collection of data on learners and speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is important to enable meaningful analysis of change over time.

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5.6 Indigenous cultural studies**[[10]](#footnote-10)**

| Box 5.6.1 Key messages |
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| * Culturally appropriate education does not mean that different standards should apply to academic outcomes. Rather, cultural studies can enhance educational achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, as well as educate all students about Indigenous peoples and cultures, and a shared national identity.
* In 2014‑15, and consistent with 2008, over two‑thirds (68.4 per cent) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 5–14 years who attended school, stated that they were taught Indigenous culture at school, and a similar proportion (64.1) per cent of those aged 15–24 years indicated they had been taught, or were currently studying Indigenous culture as part of further studies (figure 5.6.1).
* Having been taught Indigenous culture decreased as age increased, with the lowest proportion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 45 years and over (26.3 per cent) (figure 5.6.1).
* In 2013, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians made up a much lower proportion of teachers and leaders (primary 2.2 per cent and secondary 1.0 per cent) than students (primary 5.7 per cent and secondary 4.9 per cent) (table 5A.6.1).
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| Box 5.6.2 Measures of Indigenous cultural studies |
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| There is no main measure for this indicator.Information in this section includes qualitative examples of culturally inclusive curricula, and two supplementary measures:* *Teaching Indigenous cultures* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies (national; state and territory; remoteness; age). The most recent available data are from the 2014‑15 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). Data are not available to provide a comparator for non‑Indigenous people
* *Indigenous employment in schools* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff. The most recent available data are from the national 2013 Staff in Australia’s Schools survey (SiAS).
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Student outcomes are influenced by many factors, including student attendance (section 4.5), teacher quality (section 7.1), school engagement (section 7.2) and the home environment (chapter 10). Research shows that learning about Indigenous cultures in school and being taught by Indigenous teachers can improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ educational achievement (Rahman 2009). Where cultural perspectives are incorporated into the school curriculum and culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ performances have been found to be better than those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in other schools (Munns, O’Rourke and Bodkin-Andrews 2013).

A four year longitudinal study of growth in literacy and numeracy among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students found the following key factors led to improved educational attainment:

* quality teaching (with appropriate professional development in strategies for working with Indigenous students and promoting understanding of cultural issues)
* developing a school culture in which Indigenous students feel included and supported to learn (incorporating the perspectives of Indigenous and other cultures in the curriculum) (Purdie et al. 2011).

More information on some of these key factors can be found in section 13.2 ‑ Factors related to primary education achievement, and Productivity Commission (2016).

Indigenous cultural studies are also important in their own right, educating all Australian students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures. In 2014, the Reconciliation Australia Barometer found that 92 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample and 85 per cent of the general community sample believed it was important to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture (Polity Research & Consulting 2015).

Numerous studies have also emphasised the importance of Aboriginal studies as part of pre‑service teacher training (Craven 2012; DEEWR 2009; Mooney, Halse and Craven 2003; Pridham et al. 2015). The 2013 Staff in Australia’s Schools (SiAS) survey found around 26 per cent of primary and secondary teachers with 5 or fewer years of experience, and around 18 per cent with more than 5 years of experience, indicated a need in the area of teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The survey also reported that participation in professional learning for the category ‘teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ was comparatively lower than for other professional development activities for both primary and secondary teachers (McKenzie et al. 2014).

Yunkaporta (2009) found that there is little information on how to teach using Aboriginal perspectives, rather than simply teaching Aboriginal content from a western perspective. A research study over the period 2009 to 2012, of 201 schools in all states and territories except NSW, found that for teachers, everyday face‑to‑face engagement with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community was a more significant driver of reform of curriculum and teaching than a general knowledge of Indigenous cultures (Luke et al. 2013).

### Culturally inclusive curricula

The Australian Government established a review of the Australian Curriculum in early 2014, with the final review report and initial Australian Government response released in October of the same year. The review report included recommendations on the teaching of cross‑curriculum priorities, which are embedded in all learning areas (DoE 2014).

An Australian curriculum spanning subjects from foundation to year 10, developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), was endorsed by Australian Education Ministers in September 2015, and is being progressively implemented by states and territories. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is identified as one of three ‘cross‑curriculum priorities’. The organising ideas behind this priority include the underlying elements of identity and living communities, and the key concepts of country/place, culture and people (ACARA 2015).

### Teaching Indigenous cultures

Schools exist in different contexts and have varying numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children often attend schools where they are the minority[[11]](#footnote-11), and there are benefits for all students (and local communities) to receive an education that acknowledges and incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture (Biddle 2010; Wilson 2016).

In 2014‑15, 68.4 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 5–14 years who attended school, stated that they were taught Indigenous culture at school, and 64.1 per cent of those aged 15–24 years indicated they had been taught, or were currently studying, Indigenous culture as part of further studies tables (table 5A.6.2). Proportions decreased as age increased, with about 1 in 4 people (26.3 per cent) aged 45 years and over stating that they were taught Indigenous culture at school or as part of further studies. These data are consistent with 2008 NATSISS data (figure 5.6.1).

Data for 2014‑15 and 2008 on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught Indigenous culture in schools are also reported by State and Territory in tables 5A.6.2‑3, and by remoteness in tables 5A.6.4‑5. In 2014‑15, across all age groups, there were no significant differences in the proportion taught Indigenous culture between remote and non‑remote areas (table 5A.6.4).

| Figure 5.6.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, 2008 and 2014‑15**a, b, c** |
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| Figure 5.6.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were taught Indigenous culture in school or as part of further studies, by age, 2008 and 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
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| a Proportions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 2 to 14 years are calculated as a percentage of the number of children who usually attend school. Proportions for people aged 15 years and over are calculated as a percentage of the number of people who ever attended school or undertook further studies. b Responses to ‘Whether taught Indigenous culture in schools’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 2 to 14 and some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 17 years were provided by an adult proxy. c Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008 and 2014‑15; tables 5A.6.2–3. |
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### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in schools

The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in schools act as a positive role model for students, and these staff may be ‘better positioned to understand and respond to the experiences of marginalised students’ (Purdie et al. 2011). These individuals are seen as a ‘bridge’ between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non‑Indigenous school community (Santoro and Reid 2006). However, Santoro and Reid noted that that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are expected to know and teach all aspects of culture in all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and are often also responsible for Aboriginal education issues from curriculum to pastoral care. These high expectations, and increased workload, often leads to ‘burn out’ and stress, and they advocate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, particularly at the early stage of their careers, be provided with professional development and support.

Data from the 2013 SiAS survey found that, nationally, 2.2 per cent of primary school teachers and leaders and 1.0 per cent of secondary school teachers and leaders identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (table 5A.6.1). The proportion of primary school leaders identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were near zero in 2010 and 1.1 per cent in 2013 (McKenzie et al. 2014). Around 2.1 per cent of students commencing teacher education programs in 2013 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, a higher proportion than the average across other fields of higher education (1.6 per cent) (AITSL 2015). By comparison, in the same year, 5.4 per cent of primary school students and 4.5 per cent of secondary school students were identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (table 5A.6.1).

### Things that work

While government‑directed initiatives, such as culturally inclusive curricula, can influence the cultural awareness and inclusiveness of education systems, other important factors include: management structures in schools (through the school philosophy and involvement in the community), and the actions of individual teachers (via their teaching methods and attitudes to Indigenous cultures). Box 5.6.3 describes one promising program that aims support schools and early learning services to develop a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

| Box 5.6.3 Things that work – Indigenous cultural studies  |
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| Although the final evaluation is yet to be completed, the Steering Committee has identified Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning (Narragunnawali) as a promising program worth further examination. Launched in 2015, Narragunnawali aims to support schools and early learning services to develop environments that foster greater knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. To evaluate the program’s effectiveness and impact, Reconciliation Australia contracted the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) to conduct an independent evaluation of Narragunnawali during the first four years of funding (2014–2017). CAEPR has completed two of an anticipated seven reports to date. These first two reports focused on identifying the engagement levels across schools in relation to reconciliation and factors that affect levels of reconciliation. Subsequent reports will evaluate the impact of Narragunnawali on increasing engagement with reconciliation. The first report focused on identification of schools and early learning services less engaged than other schools with reconciliation (based on whether a school had commenced a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)). Those less engaged schools will be the focus of the expansion of Narragunnawali. |
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| Box 5.6.3 (continued)  |
| The second report focused on those schools/early learning services that had commenced a RAP, and found that different aspects of reconciliation in services are reinforcing (for example, services that display a flag were more likely to have teachers that had completed cultural competency, proficiency or awareness training and are more likely to Acknowledge Country at events). |
| *Sources*: RA (Reconciliation Australia) 2016, Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning Evaluation Overview, http://www.reconciliation.org.au/schools/wp‑content/uploads/2016–02/Narragunnawali‑\_EvaluationOverview.pdf (accessed 25 May 2016). Biddle, N., 2016, *Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning – Factors associated with developing a Reconciliation Action Plan, November 2015*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences. Biddle, N., 2016*, Narragunnawali Research Report #2, Reconciliation in the classroom, around the school or early learning service, and with the community*, *March 2016*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences. |
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### Future directions in data

#### Indigenous culture in schools

Data on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians taught culture in schools or as part of further studies are only available every six years from the ABS NATSISS. More frequent data are desirable, as are comparable data for the non‑Indigenous population.

For students that are being taught Indigenous culture at schools, data on the quantity of lessons, and the content being taught, is also desirable as this may vary between schools.

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce employed in schools

Only limited data are currently available on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce employed in schools:

* National data on the school workforce were available from the three‑yearly SiAS survey, run by Australian Council for Educational Research on behalf of the Department of Education in 2007, 2010 and 2013. However, due to the small sample size, data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce are not available below the national level.
* The initial National Teaching Workforce Dataset, produced on behalf of the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Official’s Committee, collected data in 2012 on the Australian teaching workforce including qualifications, registration and employment status (data on professional development was generally not available). However, Indigenous status was unknown for just under half the workforce covered by the dataset.
* The Longitudinal Teacher Education Workforce study tracked a national cohort of teacher education graduates from 2011 to 2013. However, data were not available by Indigenous status, due to the small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the sample.
* Limited annual data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principals, teachers and education workers (Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers [AIEW] and equivalents) were reported by individual jurisdictions for 2010, 2011, and 2012 as part of the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–14 (SCSEEC 2013). The renamed Education Council endorsed the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 in late 2015, noting the importance of a well‑qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workforce, however reporting requirements remain unclear.

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5.7 Participation in community activities**[[12]](#footnote-12)**

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| Box 5.7.1 Key messages |
| * Involvement in community activities can lead to improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ long‑term health and physical and mental wellbeing, as well as improved social cohesion in communities.
* In 2014‑15, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, nearly two in three (62.6 per cent) had attended at least one cultural event in the last 12 months, down from 68.1 per cent in 2002 (table 5A.7.1). Whilst attendance decreased across all remoteness areas over this period, it remained higher as remoteness increased (ranging from 53.2 per cent in inner regional areas to 85.7 per cent in very remote areas in 2014‑15) (table 5A.7.2).
* International research identified that the participation of Indigenous children and young people in traditional activities can lead to positive emotions, cultural identity and aspirations. In 2014‑15, just over two in three (67.6 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 3–24 year olds participated in at least one cultural activity — compared to 63.1 per cent in 2008 (table 5A.7.4).
* Nationally in 2014‑15, 58.8 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over had participated in sporting and physical recreation activities in the previous year, an increase from 49.3 per cent in 2002 (table 5A.7.3).
* Playing in, or training for, organised sport was higher for all Australian children compared to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (60.2 per cent compared to 48.9 per cent). This pattern was observed across all remoteness areas except major cities, where there was no significant difference (figure 5.7.2).
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| Box 5.7.2 Measures of participation in community activities |
| There are two main measures for this indicator.* *Involvement in arts and cultural events and activities*, defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who participated in/attended an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, social or cultural activity.
* *Participation in sport and recreational activities*, defined as proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who participated in sporting and physical recreation activities.

The most recent data for both measures are from the 2014‑15 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) (all jurisdictions; age; remoteness).Supplementary measures on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s and young people’s participation in organised sport and selected art and cultural activities are also presented. The most recent available data are from the 2014‑15 NATSISS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the 2012 ABS Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey (CPiCLAS) for all children (all jurisdictions: age; sex; remoteness). These data are for non‑overlapping periods but are comparable. |
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Measuring participation in sport, arts or community group activities gives an indication of how connected an individual is to their local community, by mapping formal networks of social relations (Stone 2001).

For all Australian children and young people, participation in sport and cultural activities provides opportunities to develop physically, socially, emotionally and cognitively (The Smith Family 2013; Vella et al. 2015). An analysis of the Australian Youth in Focus Project conducted by Le (2013) found that participation in extracurricular activity such as organised or other sports, arts, or other activities including volunteer work or cultural activities, reduced risky behaviours such as smoking, drinking and marijuana use. Further to this, the Youth Activity Participation Study of Western Australia found that Australian students ‘at risk’ or from disadvantaged backgrounds benefited most from participation in extracurricular activities, whether it was sport, music, dance or drama (Annear 2010).

### Involvement in arts and cultural events and activities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ involvement in cultural events and activities has been shown to relate to a range of positive socioeconomic indicators, such as higher educational attainment, and higher probability of being employed, as well as better mental health, and to a lesser degree, increased happiness (Dockery 2011). Analysis of the 2008 NATSISS suggested that, in remote areas, feeling happy was associated with participating in cultural activities – with 83 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who were involved in art, craft, dance, music or story‑telling reporting that they felt happy some or most of the time. Of those who attended cultural activities at least once per week, 81 per cent were happy some or most of the time, compared with 71 per cent among those who rarely or never attended cultural events (ABS 2010b).

In 2014‑15, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, nearly two in three (62.6 per cent) had attended at least one cultural event in the last 12 months (table 5A.7.1). This varied across states and territories, and by remoteness. For example:

* attendance at cultural events in the NT (83.3 per cent) was significantly higher than for other states and territories (table 5A.7.1)
* attendance at cultural events increased with remoteness, from 53.2 per cent in inner regional areas to 85.7 per cent in very remote areas (table 5A.7.2).

Between 2002 and 2008, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, attendance at cultural events decreased nationally from 68.1 per cent to 62.9 per cent. Attendance rates were similar between 2008 and 2014‑15 (62.9 per cent and 62.6 per cent respectively) (table 5A.7.1).

Data on attendance at cultural events are also reported by age (table 5A.7.3).

In 2014‑15, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over, close to two in three (64.5 per cent) had participated in (rather than attended) at least one cultural activity, including, fishing, hunting or making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts, in the last 12 months (table 5A.7.4).

#### Children and young people’s participation in cultural activities

International literature shows that there is an association between Indigenous children’s participation in traditional activities and positive emotions, cultural identity and aspirations (Smith, Findlay and Crompton 2010). There is also a strong link between engagement in Indigenous culture and young people’s wellbeing and resilience (Wexler 2009).

In 2014‑15, just over two in three (67.6 per cent) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people aged 3–24 years had participated in at least one of the selected cultural activities in the previous 12 months:

* 52.8 per cent had fished and 21.0 per cent had hunted
* 22.0 per cent had made Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or crafts
* 15.3 per cent had performed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, dance or theatre
* 10.6 per cent had written or told Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories (table 5A.7.4).

### Participation in sport and recreational activities

Participation in sport and recreational activities has the potential to widely benefit individuals and communities by contributing not only to physical fitness, but also to improved mental wellbeing and social interaction (United Nations Sport for Development and Peace 2016). Sport and recreational activities can lead to (amongst other benefits) improved community bonds and cohesion (Cunningham and Beneforti 2005; Stronach, Maxwell and Taylor 2016), and increased validation of and connection to culture (Ware and Meredith 2013).

A parliamentary report on the contribution of sport to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing acknowledged that skills learnt in sport and physical activity include ‘life skills’ such as: teamwork, problem solving, resilience building, communication and social skills and responsibility. The report concluded that sport could be a positive force in achieving Closing the Gap targets in broad areas such as health, education and employment (HoRSCoATSIA 2013).

Participation in sport and recreation is more than being a player or participant, and includes being a coach, referee and committee member. Volunteering in supporting roles gives non‑playing participants an opportunity to develop their skills, self‑esteem and purpose, and also improves community cohesion (Cunningham and Beneforti 2002; Dinan-Thompson, Sellwood and Carless 2008).

Whilst there are positive benefits to sport and recreation, Ware and Meredith (2013) note that participation relies on interest, ability and skills, and that some sporting and recreation activities may be too expensive, and conversely, may contribute to social exclusion.

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| Figure 5.7.1 Participation in sport and recreational activities in the previous 12 months, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 3 years and over, 2002, 2008 and 2014‑15**a,b,c**  |
| Figure 5.7.1 Participation in sport and recreational activities in the previous 12 months, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 3 years and over, 2002, 2008 and 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Children aged 3–14 years were not included in the ABS NATSISS 2002. Responses for children aged 3–14 years were provided by an adult proxy. b Some responses for 15–17 year olds were provided by an adult proxy. c Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2002, ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2008; ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15; table 5A.7.3. |
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Nationally in 2014‑15, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over participating in sporting and physical recreation activities was 58.8 per cent, an increase from 49.3 per cent in 2002 (figure 5.7.1). Participation rates were similar in remote and non‑remote areas (58.2 and 60.8 per cent, respectively) (tables 5A.7.2).

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians participating in sporting and recreation activities increased for those aged 25 years and over from 2002 to 2008 (no significant change from 2008 to 2014‑15), though the pattern of decreasing participation with increasing age remained (figure 5.7.1).

#### Children’s participation in sport

Studies of all Australian adolescents have demonstrated an association between participation in structured sport and leisure activities and psychological wellbeing (Trainor et al. 2010) and increased school attendance (Blomfield and Barber 2010).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students surveyed by (Lonsdale et al. 2011) found that participation in sport was also linked to pride in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities. A 2009 study of urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people highlighted that many sporting and recreational activities were spoken of as points of connection with family, community and culture (Nelson 2009). Participating in organised sport and recreational activities also reduces unsupervised leisure time, and may divert young people from inappropriate or antisocial behaviour (Le 2013; Ware and Meredith 2013).

In 2014‑15, around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5–14 years (48.9 per cent) spent time playing or training for organised sports outside school hours, and nearly three‑quarters (74.6 per cent) were physically active for at least one hour every day in the previous week (table 5A.7.7).

Nationally in 2014‑15, participation in organised sport was higher for all Australian children than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (60.2 per cent compared to 48.9 per cent). This pattern was observed across all remoteness areas except major cities, where there was no significant difference (figure 5.7.2).

In 2014‑15, the main factors stopping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged
5–14 years from playing organised sport were: did not want to play sport (25.7 per cent); cost too much (21.6 per cent); not enough time (14.4 per cent) and organised sport was unavailable (10.4 per cent) (table 5A.7.7). There are no comparable data for non‑Indigenous children. Data on children participating in physical activities and organised sport are also available by State and Territory (tables 5A.7.7–8) and sex (tables 5A.7.11–12). Further data on participation in sporting, community and social activities are in tables 5A.7.13–16.

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| Figure 5.7.2 Participation in organised sport in the last 12 months, children aged 5–14 years, 2014‑15**a,b** |
| Figure 5.7.2 Participation in organised sport in the last 12 months, children aged 5–14 years, 2014-5  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Includes participation in sports organised through a school or a club, outside school hours. b Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each estimate. |
| *Sources*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15, ABS (unpublished) Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities 2012; table 5A.7.9. |
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Access to sporting facilities (including parks and reserves) may affect participation in sport and recreation (ABS 2012). Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in 2008, over 90 per cent had access to outdoor playing fields and play areas (ABS 2010a). There was reduced access to swimming pools (63.5 per cent) and indoor sporting facilities (58.9 per cent) in remote areas (ABS 2010a).

### Future directions in data

Data on participation in sport and physical activity (levels of exercise undertaken for fitness, recreation and sport) are available from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey component of the 2012‑13 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey. However, these data are not comparable to other data presented in this section. Where possible comparability across ABS surveys is recommended to enable comparative assessment of change over time.

Data on involvement in arts, cultural events and activities are only available every six years from the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. More frequent data are desirable. Inclusion of comparable questions in the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey would increase the frequency to three‑yearly.

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5.8 Access to traditional lands and waters**[[13]](#footnote-13)**

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| Box 5.8.1 Key messages |
| * Access to traditional lands and waters gives an indication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ connection to country and, for some, is associated with improved health outcomes.
* Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and older:
* nearly three out of four recognised traditional homelands in 2014‑15 (table 5A.8.1), with recognition higher in remote areas (88.5 per cent) than non remote areas (70.2 per cent). Since 2002, the proportion of those living in non‑remote areas who recognise homelands has increased by about 7 percentage points, from 63.4 per cent (table 5A.8.2)
* around half of those living in remote and very remote areas who recognised traditional homelands, also lived on their traditional land, compared to about one in four for those living in non‑remote areas (figure 5.8.2)
* the proportion who identified with a clan, tribal or language group increased from 54.1 per cent in 2002 to 62.3 per cent in 2014‑15 (table 5A.8.1), with the proportion increasing as remoteness increased (from 55.6 per cent in major cities to 83.4 per cent in very remote areas in 2014‑15) (table 5A.8.2).
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| Box 5.8.2 Measures of access to traditional lands and waters |
| There is one main measure for this indicator. *Recognition and access to homelands and traditional country* is defined as the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who recognise areas as their homelands or traditional country. A supplementary measure on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who identified with a clan, tribal or language group is also reported.The most recent available data are from the 2014‑15 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) (national: age; remoteness). Data for those aged 14 years and younger are available for the first time, with limited data included in this report. Historical data for 2014‑15, 2008 and 2002 are directly comparable, but historical data for 1994, 2004‑05 and 2012‑13 are only available for people aged 18 years and over, and for 1994 and 2004‑05 are only available for non‑remote areas. There are currently no data specifically on access to traditional waters. |
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians report that they derive physical, spiritual, emotional and cultural benefits from their connection to country (Burgess and Morrison 2007; Dockery 2011). ‘Country’ refers to a specific clan, tribal group or nation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and incorporates all the knowledge, stories and resources within a particular area, including land, air and water (Fredericks 2013). Notion of country is central to self‑identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (Kingsley et al. 2013).

Bishop et al. (2012) states that, as country is intrinsically linked to self‑identity, the wellness of the people reflects the wellness of the country, while maintenance of country is important for maintenance of health (section 8.7 discusses the interaction with mental health).

The data in this section focus on recognition of, and access to country. The data do not show whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have control or ownership, rights to resources found on their homelands or access to particular sites that may be of cultural significance. Information on ownership and control of land is discussed in section 9.2.

The reported data are based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ own understanding of what constitutes their homelands or traditional country. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians may live on or visit Indigenous owned or controlled land but they may not consider it to be their own homelands or traditional country. Movement from traditional country may have been either voluntary or involuntary, with many people who were removed from their families (such as the Stolen Generations) not being able to find their families or to identify their traditional country (NMHC 2012).

### Recognition and access to homelands and traditional country

Access to traditional lands is conceptualised as a determinant of health (AHMAC 2015). Weir, Stacey and Youngetob (2011) summarised the literature on some of the positive associations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians living and accessing their traditional country, which included: positive health behaviours (increased exercise and physical activity, more nutritious diet, reduction in substance abuse) and a lesser burden on the health care system (savings in preventing disease, reduced hospital costs) as well as the overall economic benefits of a healthier population. Chapter 8 provides further information on health risk factors and outcomes.

Morphy’s (2008) work with Aboriginal Australians from North‑East Arnhem Land suggests that traditional homelands communities, where individuals are interconnected through multiple bonds, exhibit ‘an orderly system of leadership and succession’ according to established systems of governance. The stability and longevity of these governance systems were perceived by the Aboriginal Australians in the study as protective factors against ‘social breakdown and loss of culture and the loss of many of the younger generations to drugs and alcohol’.

However, living on homelands/traditional country, particularly in remote or very remote regions of Australia, sometimes equates to reduced or restricted access to services such as health, housing and education, with people from these communities temporarily relocating to larger centres to access these services (AHMAC 2015; AHRC 2010; AIHW 2014; Kerins 2010).

In 2014‑15, among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over:

* 74.1 per cent recognised homelands/traditional country — an increase from 69.6 per cent in 2002 (table 5A.8.1)
* recognition of homelands/traditional country was higher in remote and very remote areas (88.5 per cent) than non‑remote areas (70.2 per cent), though the proportion in non‑remote areas has increased significantly since 2002 (from 63.4 per cent) (table 5A.8.2)
* generally, as age increased, so did the proportion who indicated they recognised homelands/traditional country (from 49.3 per cent for those aged 14 years or less, to 85.2 per cent for those aged 45–54 years — those aged 55 years and over were slightly lower at 77.6 per cent), similar to the pattern seen in 2002 and 2008. Since 2002, there has been an increase in the proportion that recognised homelands/traditional country for those aged 35–44 and 45–54 years (figure 5.8.1).

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| Figure 5.8.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who recognise homelands/traditional country, by age, 2002, 2008 and 2014‑15**a,b,c,d** |
| Figure 5.8.1 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who recognise homelands/traditional country, by age, 2002, 2008 and 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
| a Includes respondents who recognised their homelands, but did not know if they were allowed to visit homelands or not. b Includes people who refused to answer, or who provided ‘do not know’ or ‘not stated’ responses. c Data for those aged 14 years and younger are only available in 2014‑15. d Error bars represent 95 per cent confidence intervals around each proportion. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2002, 2008 and 2014‑15; table 5A.8.4. |
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Recognition of homelands/traditional country is not restricted to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who live on their recognised land. In 2014‑15, 88.5 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over in remote areas recognised homelands (and around half of those lived on homelands), while 70.2 per cent of those in non‑remote areas recognised homelands (and around one in four of those lived on homelands) (figure 5.8.2). Whilst a return to country in the traditional sense is no longer an option for some Aboriginal Australians (AHMAC 2012), Fredericks (2013) argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians still maintain strong connections to their country even if they live on lands that belong to other Aboriginal Australians, or if they recognise lands where large urban centres have grown in post‑settlement Australia.

| Figure 5.8.2 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country, by remoteness areas, 2014‑15**a,b,c** |
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| Figure 5.8.2 Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country, by remoteness areas, 2014-15  More details can be found within the text surrounding this image. |
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| a ‘Recognises but does not live’ includes respondents that did not know if they were allowed to visit homelands or not. b Includes people who refused to answer, or who provided ‘do not know’ or ‘not stated’ responses. c Relative standard errors and 95 per cent confidence intervals should be considered when interpreting these data, and are available in table 5A.8.2. |
| *Source*: ABS (unpublished) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey 2014‑15; table 5A.8.2. |
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#### Traditional waters

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, water is an essential part of identity, culture and country (Birckhead et al. 2011; O’Bryan 2012). The Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians recommended that there should be an acknowledgment of the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with both their traditional lands and waters (FAHCSIA 2012).

The National Water Initiative (NWI), agreed by COAG in 2004, is currently the primary vehicle in Australia for recognising the relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians with water (O’Bryan 2012). Until its abolition in 2014[[14]](#footnote-14), assessment of progress of the NWI was undertaken by the National Water Commission (NWC), which published a review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians’ involvement in water planning in May 2014. The review found that:

… while approaches are variable across Australia, most governments have made significant advances in recognising the need to address Indigenous water issues … However, challenges remain and little progress has been observed in the allocation or licensing of water for Indigenous social, economic, spiritual or cultural purposes (NWC 2014).

### Identification with a clan, tribal or language group

Identification with a clan, tribal or language group is one aspect of connection to country (Fredericks 2013).

In 2014‑15, 62.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians aged 15 years and over identified with a clan, tribal or language group, an increase from 54.1 per cent in 2002. Across remoteness areas, the proportion increased as remoteness increased from 57.6 per cent in non‑remote areas to 78.9 per cent in remote areas. The proportion identifying in with a clan, tribal or language group in non‑remote areas has increased since 2002 (from 45.7 per cent) (tables 5A.8.1‑2).

### Future directions in data

Data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians recognising and living on their homelands or traditional country is provided three‑yearly through the ABS Indigenous survey program. Ongoing collection of these data, particularly in remote areas (for which data are only collected every six years), is desirable.

Given the importance of connection to country to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the collection of information on the reasons why a person does not identify with clan, tribal or language group or recognise homeland could assist in developing culturally appropriate responses.

The collection of additional information around recognition of traditional waters would complement the qualitative information formerly published in the National Water Commission assessments.

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1. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and Reconciliation Australia, for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Reconciliation Australia advised that the general community sample was selected to be representative of the general community, and included a small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians (1.5 per cent) in 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and Reconciliation Australia, for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and Reconciliation Australia, for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In ABS Census data, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander household is a household where at least one person has identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Remote areas includes the ABS categories of ‘remote’ and ‘very remote’. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, and to Reconciliation Australia for reviewing a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Kriol is an Australian creole language. Creoles are classified as separate languages, and in the Australian context evolved following white settlement, and mixing of traditional Aboriginal languages with the English language. Creoles are mainly used in Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and have been described as a modern Indigenous language — however, creole is also regarded negatively by some, and seen as diluting traditional Indigenous languages (Dickson 2016; Kikkawa 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up 5 per cent of all students across Australia, 77 per cent of all schools with primary school students have at least one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student. That is, most schools have at least some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but few have a large number. Of schools with at least one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student, 69 per cent have less than 20 in total and 70 per cent have less than 10 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their total student enrolment (Productivity Commission 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The Steering Committee notes its appreciation to Mr Jason Glanville, Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, who reviewed a draft of this section of the report. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The NWC was abolished in 2014. Assessment of progress under the NWI is split between a number of government agencies, with the Productivity Commission responsible for triennial assessments of progress toward achieving the NWI objectives. For more information, see http://www.nwc.gov.au/organisation/
closure-in-2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)