

# Hon Linda Burney MP

## Federal Member for Barton

28 April 2022

Mr Paul Wright  
National Director  
Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation

By email: [paul@antar.org.au](mailto:paul@antar.org.au)

Dear Mr. Wright,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Labor Party's position on these important policy issues.

Starting with our commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full, an Albanese Labor Government will renew our national commitment to Reconciliation and work in genuine partnership with First Nations people for better outcomes.

We recognise that First Nations peoples hold the solutions and should lead the way on policies, legislation and practices that affect them.

Labor has begun this task from inside, becoming the first and only political party to agree a Reconciliation Action Plan, building an Indigenous Labor Network that spans the country and embedding our First Nations Caucus Committee in decision-making at the federal level.

We benefit from the strength of our First Nations representatives, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians, Linda Burney MP, and Senators Patrick Dodson, Malarndirri McCarthy and Jana Stewart. We hope to see more First Nations caucus members join us following this election.

We have a range of policies to support justice, economic opportunities, and self-determination for First Nations people, some of which are outlined below in response to your questions.

We also invite you and your members to view the full suite of Labor's policies as set out on [our website](#).

### 1. Closing the Gap – National Agreement

Labor established the first Closing the Gap framework in 2008. We will maintain and strengthen the current National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Under the Morrison Government only 3 of the current targets are on track. And some still don't go far enough.



Office: 203 / 13A Montgomery Street, Kogarah NSW 2217

Mail: PO Box 32, Kogarah NSW 2217

Phone: (02) 9587 1555 Email: [Linda.Burney.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Linda.Burney.MP@aph.gov.au)



We need to make the investments and programs that are required to deliver that change – and we need a government that believes in self-determination as the path forward.

An Albanese Labor Government will work with the Coalition of Peaks and all levels of government to raise ambitions and ensure sustained progress on the current National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including the four priority reforms.

Labor has already announced several policies that will deliver greater national leadership on Closing the Gap. Among other initiatives, this includes:

- Our landmark commitment to [justice reinvestment](#) as a means of supporting communities to turn the tide on overincarceration.
- Our pledge to [strengthen First Nations health](#) by training 500 new First Nations health workers, increasing access to lifesaving dialysis treatment for those living with chronic kidney disease and expanding efforts to eradicate rheumatic heart disease in remote communities. This package also includes funding to improve water quality in remote communities.
- Our investment of \$100 million for [urgent housing and infrastructure](#) on Northern Territory Homelands and our [Housing Future Fund](#) that will provide \$200 million to improve housing in remote First Nations communities. We have also committed to renegotiate the remote housing agreement with the Northern Territory when it expires in mid-2023.
- Our [plan to teach First Nations languages](#) schools across the country to help keep languages alive and promote school attendance.
- Our commitment to [scrap the Liberals' failed Community Development Program](#) (CDP) and replace it with a new program with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions – developed in partnership with First Nations people.
- Our pledge to abolish the discriminatory Cashless Debit Card and instead support First Nations communities to make their own decisions about the way forward.
- Our plan to strengthen First Nations jobs and [employment opportunities](#) by setting a 5% employment target in the public sector and requiring public reporting on the proportion of First Nations employees from our largest 200 employers.

## **2. Addressing the injustice of disproportionately high incarceration rates**

An Albanese Labor Government will commit \$79 million to expand justice reinvestment initiatives across the country, helping to turn the tide on incarceration and deaths in custody.

Labor's landmark funding commitment for justice reinvestment will enable up to 30 communities to establish locally tailored initiatives that address the underlying causes of incarceration and deaths in custody.

To support these efforts, Labor will also establish an independent national justice reinvestment unit, as recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission. The unit will assist community to develop and evaluate justice reinvestment initiatives, ensuring valuable lessons can be learned and shared across the country.

In addition, Labor will establish consolidated, real-time reporting of all First Nations deaths in custody at a national level and provide \$13.5 million in specific, standalone funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services to represent families in coronial inquests.

In relation to the age of criminal responsibility, while this is primarily a state and territory responsibility, Labor recognises that 10 is too young and supports efforts by Federal, State and Territory Attorneys-General to review current laws. In contrast with the Morrison Government's years of dithering on this important issue, an Albanese Labor Government will work closely with the States and Territories to ensure the age of criminal responsibility reflects what is best for children, for families, and for the communities in which they live.

Labor is committed to working with First Nations women to address the unacceptable rates of family and domestic violence they experience. This includes funding 500 new frontline workers to support women in crisis, with a specific focus on plugging the gaps for First Nations women in rural and regional communities.

Labor supports calls for a separate national plan for First Nations people to end violence against women and family violence. The plan must be sufficient in scale and ambition and properly resourced to make a difference. More can be found about our commitment to addressing First Nations women's safety in our 2022 [Women's Budget Statement](#) and on [our website](#).

### **3. Constitutional reform – the Uluru Statement from the Heart**

Labor is the only political party committed to implementing the Uluru Statement in full.

An Albanese Labor Government will progress a referendum to constitutionally enshrine a Voice to Parliament as a matter of priority. If we want to change outcomes, First Nations voices must be heard. Five years after the Uluru Statement was presented to the Australian people, there should be no more delay.

Labor will also establish a Makarrata Commission with responsibility for treaty and truth-telling. The Makarrata Commission will support and fund local models of truth-telling, in partnership with First Nations communities and other levels of government. It will also develop a national framework for treaty-making, taking into account existing state and territory treaty processes.

You can read more about Labor's commitment to the Voice and the Makarrata Commission on [our website](#) and in Anthony Albanese's Closing the Gap [speech](#).

### **4. Protecting heritage, language and country**

Labor shares the national devastation at Rio Tinto's destruction of the 46,000-year-old Juukan rock-shelters. Labor engaged closely with First Nations representatives in response to the tragedy, and we have pursued answers and action in the Parliament, including helping to establish the Juukan inquiry. We are committed to achieving the change that is required. It should have been delivered some time ago but has been badly neglected by the Morrison Government.

In government, Labor will work with the First Nations Heritage Alliance and other stakeholders to reform our national heritage protection framework and prevent such destruction occurring in the future. Many reviews have highlighted the need for change and Labor's work to strengthen heritage protections will take into account the findings of the Juukan inquiry's *A Way Forward* report, the Samuels Review of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act, the Dhawura Ngilan best practice standards and the principles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Labor also has a strong commitment to supporting First Nations peoples in their efforts to protect their culture, languages and country. Labor has a range of policies to [protect the environment](#) and address the impacts of global warming, which disproportionately impact on First Nations people. We will invest in First Nations' conservation of our land and waters by [doubling the Indigenous Rangers program](#), boosting funding for Indigenous Protected Areas by \$10 million a year, and delivering the promised cultural water in the Murray Darling Basin.

As referred to above, we have announced a plan to teach First Nations languages in schools, investing \$14 million to partner with 60 primary schools across the country. First Nations communities will be placed at the centre of the program, deciding whether they want to share their language and culture with local schools. Where communities decide to participate, they'll be able to work with schools to appoint First Nations Educators.

As part of our package of policies to strengthen First Nations [economic and job opportunities](#), Labor will increase protection of First Nations cultural and intellectual property. We will get on with an inquiry into the unconscionable market in fake art, which robs many First Nations artists of income.

Labor will also work with First Nations to establish stand-alone legislation to protect First Nations peoples' traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, informed by the findings of the Productivity Commission inquiry. We will review the operation of the Indigenous Art Code, including how it can be better resourced and strengthened.

Thank you again for providing us with the opportunity to outline our positions on these important issues for our nation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Linda Burney', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**The Hon. Linda Burney MP**  
Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services  
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs  
Federal Member for Barton