



24 June 2016

Election 2016: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders unite

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership organisations met today to map out the first steps towards a new relationship between Australia's First Peoples and the Federal Government.

Dr Jackie Huggins, Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples says, "Regardless of who forms government after 2 July, we see the next Parliament as an opportunity to reset our relationship with the Federal Government."

The meeting follows a previous gathering on 9 June, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations jointly signed the historic 'Redfern Statement'.

The 'Redfern Statement' made a series of overarching calls on the campaigning political parties concerning the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

"As we pointed out a few weeks ago, we have barely seen a mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy or issues this election campaign.

"There have been some positive commitments made in some areas by some of the contesting parties but otherwise, the needs of our people tend to be pushed even further to the margins during election campaigns," Dr Huggins said.

Mr Rod Little, Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples said, "While the issues continue to loom large for our people, we are encouraged by the ongoing bi-partisan support to close the many gaps in life and health expectancy.

"However, we all know that stated support must translate to meaningful policy responses that are evidenced-based and followed through."

Today's discussions resulted in some proposed steps for the incoming Federal Government to help establish a new relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

"We have an opportunity to start some new positive norms in the relationship between government and Australia's First Peoples. Ultimately, we want a strong relationship built on trust that delivers outcomes for our people," Mr Little said.

A Communique is attached which came from the discussion of today's Roundtable which outlines the key steps that the group agreed needs to be responded to in the final week of the Federal Election campaign.

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Communique

The Redfern Statement Organisations Unite Resetting the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the incoming Government and 45th Parliament

On Friday 24 June, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations that signed the Redfern Statement, and mainstream supporting organisations came together to discuss how best to reset the relationship with the next Federal Government.

The Redfern Statement set out clear policy expectations of all political parties across a range of areas and reminded an otherwise silent election campaign that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs must be a national priority for an incoming government.

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (National Congress) and a coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations are looking to establish, from day one, a new relationship with the incoming Federal Government and across the 45th Parliament. We are looking for a new narrative and substance for the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs is negotiated in this country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples demand an end to the status quo. Regardless of which party or coalition of parties forms Government after 2 July 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representatives are looking to establish a relationship with Government to ensure our people are supported.

We make a united and unwavering call for government to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – rather than to them – we are outlining some initial, achievable steps be taken to facilitate the beginning of a new relationship between Government and the First Peoples of this country.

We will establish a new norm in the depth and breadth of the relationship with the Federal Government. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are committed to working with government in a genuine and respectful way.

We stress the vital role and responsibilities of the State and Territory governments and will approach each of the State and Territory governments and invite each State and Territory Premier and leader to meet as a matter of priority.

First Steps for a new relationship

In the first 100 days of the 45th Federal Government of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders will pursue the following two (2) initiatives be undertaken to form a new relationship:

- 1) A meeting between the Prime Minister and a coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders

We call on the Prime Minister to prioritise a meeting with the First Peoples after the election. Within a month of forming the new Government, we propose a meeting between the Prime Minister and National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (National Congress) and a Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations.

The meeting will see the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders present the signed Redfern Statement and discuss priority steps that must be taken to reset the relationship. We call for the establishment of:

- a senior Cabinet Minister with overall responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs; and
- a Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

2) Host a National First Peoples Summit

We call on the new Federal Government to commit to join in our National First Peoples Summit to be held within the first 100 days of the 45th Parliament.

A National Summit will establish the overarching framework for how governments and Australia's First Peoples work together to solve the critical challenges we face together.

Beyond the First Steps

Following a National Summit, and after beginning the series of meetings with the Prime Minister and relevant Ministers, an ongoing plan for engagement at all levels will be agreed.

We look forward to the 45th Federal Parliament becoming the basis for relations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and all governments.