



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water



First Nations Strategy

2025–2030



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Secretary's Foreword

I am proud to share our department's First Nations Strategy 2025–2030 – a document that represents our department's deep commitment to embedding First Nations perspectives, knowledge and aspirations into the fabric of our work.

Central to this Strategy is our vision to have Country at the heart of everything we do.

As the custodians of Australia, First Nations people hold a unique and enduring relationship with Country, having cared for this continent – its lands, skies, waters and seas – for over 65,000 years. First Nations people in Australia hold rights and interests in over 50 per cent of the country's lands and seas.

By 2030, this Strategy will guide a transformation in how we deliver on government priorities across climate change, energy, the environment, heritage and water. This is more than just setting a direction – it's about rethinking how we engage, collaborate and operate as a department.

It is my expectation that all staff actively develop and demonstrate strong First Nations cultural capability in their work. This expectation is essential to our success as a department and in delivering our vision. With a strong foundation of cultural capability across our workforce, we will ensure we can effectively deliver our policy, program and regulatory responsibilities in ways that genuinely consider and elevate First Nations people's experiences and aspirations. Strong First Nations cultural capability will also establish our department as a place where First Nations staff are valued, supported and inspired to be part of our workforce.

I'm particularly proud of the way this Strategy supports the priority reforms outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap). It builds on our Statement of Commitment to First Nations people, sets an ambitious direction and highlights our role in delivering on Closing the Gap.

The development of this Strategy was a truly collaborative effort. It draws on insights from our staff across the country – captured through workshops, site visits and surveys. This thoughtful and considered engagement has shaped a Strategy that is both practical and grounded in real-world understanding, giving me great confidence in its ability to deliver outcomes. I am certain this collaboration will continue in the delivery and implementation of our Strategy.

This is our opportunity and our responsibility. This is how we will make a meaningful difference.

It is my great pleasure to share this Strategy with you all.

David Fredericks PSM

Secretary

**Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water**



Acknowledgement of Country

The department acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters, and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

In delivering our First Nations Strategy we recognise and respect the over 65,000 years of knowledge that First Nations people hold as custodians of Australia's land and natural resources and its essential role in achieving our vision as a department.

We acknowledge all First Nations people that provided input and their knowledge in the development of this Strategy. This includes input from First Nations staff, and advice from the First Nations Advisory Committees of the department.

Terminology

Throughout the Strategy we use the term 'First Nations people' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Why we developed a First Nations Strategy

Our department has wide-ranging responsibilities in leading the integrated delivery of the Australian Government's agenda across climate change, energy, the environment, heritage and water.

First Nations partnerships and knowledge are critical to our efforts and our success will directly affect First Nations people as custodians of our land and waters.

We have developed a First Nations Strategy to build on our *Statement of Commitment to First Nations people*, recognising we need to set clear direction on how we:

- incorporate the expertise, experiences and aspirations of First Nations people into the delivery of our policy, program and regulatory work
- create a culturally supportive environment for First Nations employees and
- align our work with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Strategy will transform the way we work, both internally as an employer, and externally through delivery of the government's priorities.



How we developed the Strategy

Our Strategy has been informed by a comprehensive engagement process with departmental staff across Australia. This has been important in developing a deeper understanding of where we are starting from and where staff see opportunities for achieving better outcomes.

In 2024 we engaged with staff through:



Divisional Workshops



Dedicated workshops for First Nations staff



Remote site visits to our National Parks



All staff questionnaires

During our interactions, staff provided insights on the operations of the department and their work across a diverse range of policies and programs. They also told us about their needs and expectations for the Strategy.

The department's Indigenous Advisory Committee, who provide advice to the Minister for the Environment and Water, also reviewed the draft Strategy and provided an independent, external perspective on its content. Our approach to engagement ensures we have a relevant Strategy and pragmatic implementation pathways that will help turn our vision and ambition into impactful action.

What we heard

Strong themes emerged from our engagement process. Staff told us:

- Our **decision-making structures need to meet the needs of First Nations people** and allow us to respond to the feedback they provide us.
- **Staff are eager to engage with First Nations people, businesses and communities** across a variety of policies and programs, and **they want additional guidance** on how and who to engage with.
- **Bespoke, place-based cultural capability training is important** for those who work with First Nations people across diverse work streams and geographic locations.
- **Leaders and managers must have strong cultural capability** as they play key decision-making roles and help set organisational culture and authorising environment for staff.
- We can do more to **harness broader economic participation for First Nations people in our future work**, such as the net zero transition.

First Nations staff views were integral to these engagement themes. First Nations staff also raised specific points around employment arrangements in the department:

- **Managers need to have strong cultural capability and awareness of employment conditions** in place to help First Nations staff meet their community and cultural obligations and to feel comfortable in the workplace.
- **Roles and responsibilities in the department should be clear to reduce the cultural load** placed on some First Nations staff.
- There need to be **more targeted career opportunities** across the department and **greater visibility of those already in place**.
- Affirmative measures and identified recruitment activities are important for First Nations candidates, and it is **important applications and interviews are accessible and culturally sensitive**.



How does the Strategy work?

The Strategy is guided by our department’s **vision** and key **principles** for how we will keep First Nations matters front-of-mind in undertaking our work and supporting our workforce.

The Strategy **outcomes** describe the capabilities and characteristics we want to achieve by 2030. The Strategy also maps these outcomes against the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms (refer Appendix A).

The Strategy is underpinned by a 2-stage maturity uplift model – a **Foundations stage** (2025–2026) and an **Embedding stage** (2026–2030).

Each stage will include a **Strategy Implementation Plan** with **actions** to achieve our outcomes.

Outcomes



- **Foundations stage (2025–2026)**

In the first 2 years of Strategy implementation we will create a foundation of capability for the way we work with and for First Nations people and support First Nations staff. We will develop a baseline to assess the impact of the Strategy on the way we respond and are accountable to the needs of First Nations people.

In our 2025–2026 Strategy Implementation Plan we have identified actions that will build these foundational capabilities and transform departmental systems and processes.

- **Embedding stage (2026–2030)**

The Embedding stage will see us leveraging our foundational capabilities to achieve our Strategy outcomes.

In mid-2026, we will review progress, re-evaluate priorities, make necessary changes, and embed our foundations into business-as-usual operations.

In this way, we will continue to drive transformation in the way we work and partner with First Nations people in the design and delivery of policies and programs for climate change, energy, environmental and heritage protection, and water management initiatives.

How the Strategy aligns with other departmental strategies and initiatives

Our First Nations Strategy establishes an overarching framework and provides clear direction for how we approach First Nations matters:

- in delivery of our policy, program and regulatory work and
- in our role as an employer.

Given the nature of our department, First Nations matters are already core considerations across our work, and our internal strategies and initiatives that shape who we are as an employer.

We will work to maximise the benefit of synergies between our First Nations Strategy and our other activities.



Photo credit (right): Simpsons Gap, NT. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Arrernte people.





First Nations Strategy 2025–2030

Vision

Our vision is for an Australia that is prosperous because it is sustainable, with community and Country at the heart of our actions.

Our Statement of Commitment to First Nations people recognises it is essential we incorporate the expertise, experiences and aspirations of First Nations people to deliver our vision.

Building on this Statement, we have developed a First Nations Strategy to guide us towards a future where First Nations people are front-of-mind across all our activities and where we create a culturally supportive environment for First Nations employees.

Photo credit: Mount Field
National Park, Tas.
We acknowledge the
Tasmanian Aboriginal people
as Traditional Owners of
Lutruwita (Tasmania).



Principles

Our principles are a guiding light for all our activities - they are our reference point when conducting our day-to-day work, making decisions and when supporting our First Nations staff.

Acknowledge

We acknowledge First Nations people's deep personal, spiritual and cultural connection to Australia's land, inland waters and sea. We reflect that connection meaningfully in our work.



Adapt

We adapt our approaches, recognising the diversity of First Nations people's histories, experiences and cultures.



Photo credit: Parks Australia staff and Anangu Traditional Owners, complete annual Tjakura survey at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park aiming to increase tjakura (great desert skink) habitat.

Build

We build relationships with First Nations people based on respect and mutual benefit. We communicate honestly, and we acknowledge the past.

Implement

We work to implement the priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, recognising that all Australian governments have committed to their implementation.



Outcome 1:

We elevate First Nations matters to the centre of our decision-making structures and business planning.



Linked priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority reforms provided at Appendix A.

PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4
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Overview

We see strong, respectful and genuine partnerships with First Nations people as critical to progressing the government’s agenda across our work and achieving better outcomes.

Our ambition is to ensure First Nations people and matters are front-of-mind across all our activities.

Our opportunity is to enhance our decision-making and planning processes to ensure First Nations matters are explicitly considered and informed by First Nations perspectives.

2025–2026 Implementation Plan Actions

- Appoint a First Nations Advisor to the Executive Board to elevate First Nations matters in decision-making processes. The department’s First Nations SES will undertake this role on a rotational basis.
- Review our department’s First Nations advisory committee arrangements to elevate advice received through our decision-making structures.
- For all Divisions to include First Nations considerations as a specific element of their divisional business plans.

Photo credit: Departmental staff and the Indigenous Advisory Committee, meet with the Traditional Owners of the Booderee National Park, the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council.





Outcome 2:

We engage early and genuinely with First Nations people and communities. We communicate consistently and facilitate First Nations participation. We harness opportunities for participation in our relevant international systems. Our relationships with First Nations people and communities are mutually beneficial.



Linked priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority reforms provided at Appendix A.

PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4
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Overview

To deliver our department’s vision, it is essential we incorporate the expertise, experiences and aspirations of First Nations people in everything we do. We need to appropriately engage with First Nations people and communities to achieve enduring relationships which are mutually beneficial.

Our opportunity is to be a government leader in best-practice engagement with First Nations communities by developing new policy guidance and systems. Better engagement will create mutual benefits and reduce consultation fatigue. Improving engagement processes inherently improves our programs and helps us better meet First Nations needs and priorities.

2025–2026 Implementation Plan Actions

- Develop policy and guidance for the department on Free, Prior Informed Consent; Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property; and remuneration of First Nations people.
- Work with the National Indigenous Australians Agency over the next 12–18 months to develop a plan to support implementation of the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.
- Develop a departmental relationship management model for First Nations engagement. The model will prioritise the establishment and maintenance of ongoing relationships with First Nations communities.

Photo credit: Jervis Bay headlands, Booderee National Park, NSW. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council.



Outcome 3:

First Nations cultural capability is a core skill for our staff, embedded and recognised in our performance and employment systems. Our program and policy designs reflect strong understanding and respect of First Nations cultures.



Linked priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority reforms provided at Appendix A.

PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4
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Overview

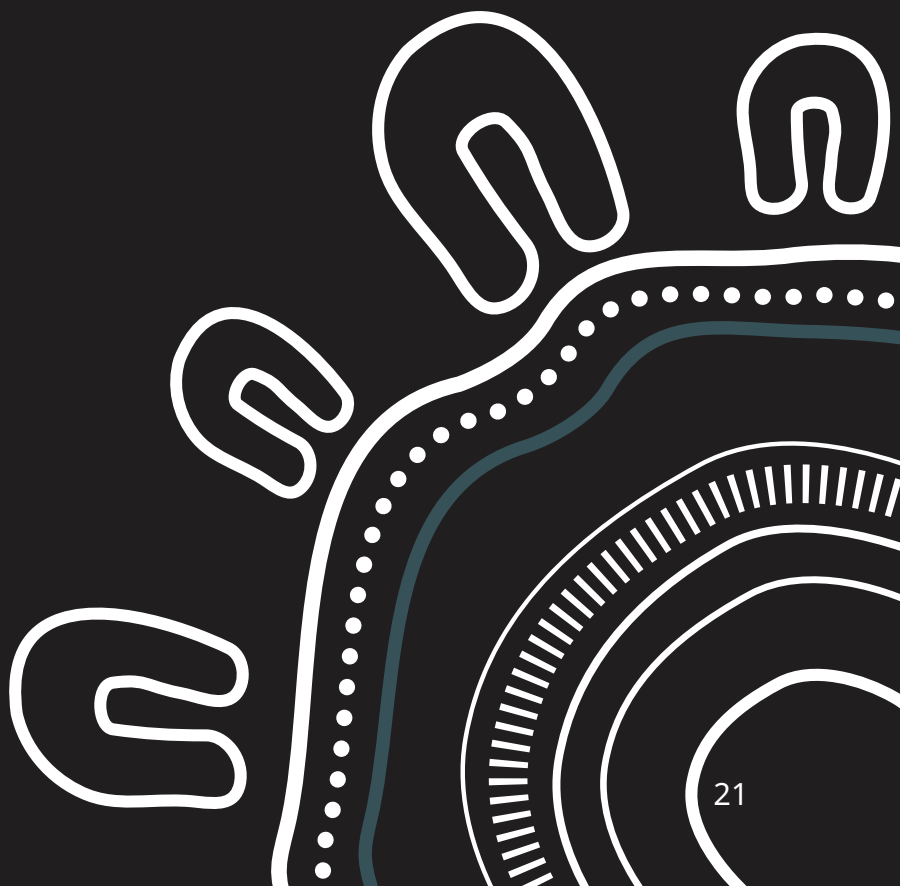
Our workforce must be culturally competent to ensure we have a supportive environment for our staff, to elevate First Nations cultural considerations in policy design and engagement processes, and to progress reconciliation.

Our opportunity is to develop a strong foundation of First Nations cultural capability which informs all we do.

2025–2026 Implementation Plan Actions

- Include First Nations cultural capability as a core capability for our staff in the department’s Capability Framework.
- Develop a pilot cultural immersion program for our leadership, drawing on Parks Australia’s unique relationships with First Nations communities.

Photo credit: Tommy Moore, a Booderee National Park staff member, cleansing himself in a smoking ceremony as Traditional Owners welcome visitors to the park.





Outcome 4:

We are a culturally safe and supportive workplace where First Nations people want to work. We support First Nations people to develop their careers, and we work to eliminate unconscious bias and racism.



Linked priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority reforms provided at Appendix A.

PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4
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Overview

Creating a culturally supportive environment for employees is essential. To progress reconciliation within our workplace, we must foster an environment where First Nations people feel culturally safe, and which supports their needs and careers.

Our opportunity is to foster a culturally supportive workplace by facilitating cultural capability uplift and providing career development opportunities and flexible work arrangements.

We also have an opportunity to achieve broader representation of First Nations staff across our department and to increase representation of First Nations people in leadership and managerial roles. Broader First Nations representation will help us integrate First Nations perspectives into our policies, programs and decision-making processes.

2025–2026 Implementation Plan Actions

- Develop a departmental First Nations Employment Action Plan that reforms our recruitment and employment arrangements to ensure they support First Nations people. The Action Plan will be developed under the department’s Inclusion Strategy and support achievement of Australian Public Service Commission targets for First Nations representation.

Photo credit: Daintree Rainforest, QLD. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people.





Outcome 5:

We harness opportunities for meaningful economic participation for First Nations businesses, people and communities.



Linked priority reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority reforms provided at Appendix A.

PR1	PR2	PR3	PR4
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Overview

Our department can contribute to economic empowerment of First Nations people and communities, ensuring they have access to effective economic participation with real benefits.

Our opportunity is to extend our efforts beyond the government’s Indigenous Procurement Policy targets, and to look for ways to meaningfully advance broader economic participation of First Nations people through the design of our programs and by supporting capacity development of First Nations organisations.

2025–2026 Implementation Plan Actions

- Develop guidance and support on how we can better identify economic participation opportunities for First Nations people and organisations in our work.
- Develop additional guidance to help purchasing officers understand First Nations procurement opportunities.
- Continue to meet and exceed our department’s Indigenous Procurement Policy targets for both the value and number of procurements with First Nations businesses.

Photo credit: Murray River, Renmark, SA. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Naralte people.

Implementation and monitoring

Implementation

Implementation plans will set key actions to help us achieve Strategy outcomes. Our first Implementation Plan covers the period 2025–2026. The next Implementation Plan will be developed after a Strategy review in 2026.

Robust implementation planning for the First Nations Strategy will ensure the department has a clear pathway to achieve Strategy outcomes.

The foundational actions outlined in the First Nations Strategy form the basis of our 2025–2026 Implementation Plan. Delivery of these foundational actions will be coordinated and monitored centrally.

After the delivery of the 2025–2026 Implementation Plan, a review of overall First Nations Strategy progress will be conducted. The review will consider implementation planning arrangements for 2026–2030.

Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluation will assess our progress towards our Strategy outcomes. Evaluation reports will be developed annually.

We will regularly monitor our progress towards Strategy outcomes and develop an annual evaluation report.

The first evaluation report will develop a baseline for each outcome. Subsequent evaluation reports will examine the impact of Strategy actions.

Appendix A: Priority Reforms from the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap has been built around four Priority Reforms that have been directly informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These reforms are central to the National Agreement and will change the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Priority Reform 1: Building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.

Priority Reform 2: Building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap.

Priority Reform 3: Systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Priority Reform 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

