



Consequences for Ethics in Social Work

The impact on Australian First Nations peoples' health and wellbeing through 'Closing the Gap'

Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

I am located on the land of the the **Whadjuk people** of the **Noongar Nation**, and I acknowledge that the traditional owners remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land, and continue to practise their values, languages, beliefs and knowledge.

I pay my respects to their Elders and Cultural Leaders past and present.



The weather today in Perth...

Winter's day



Maximum temperature: 17 degrees Celsius





Australia to Europe

Size comparison

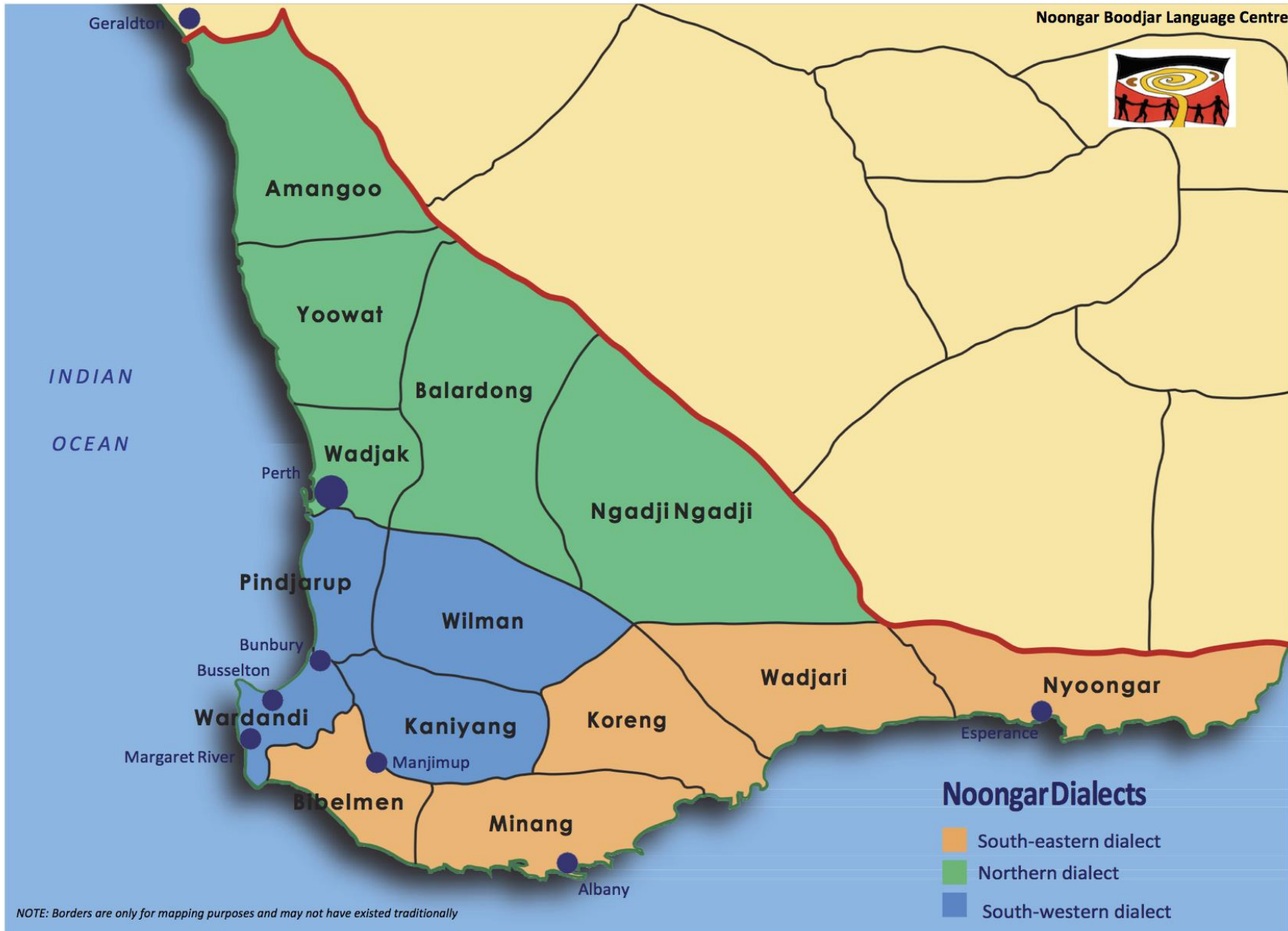
Australia and Europe Area size comparison

Darwin to Perth 4396km • Perth to Adelaide 2707km • Adelaide to Melbourne 726km
Melbourne to Sydney 887km • Sydney to Brisbane 972km • Brisbane to Cairns 1748km



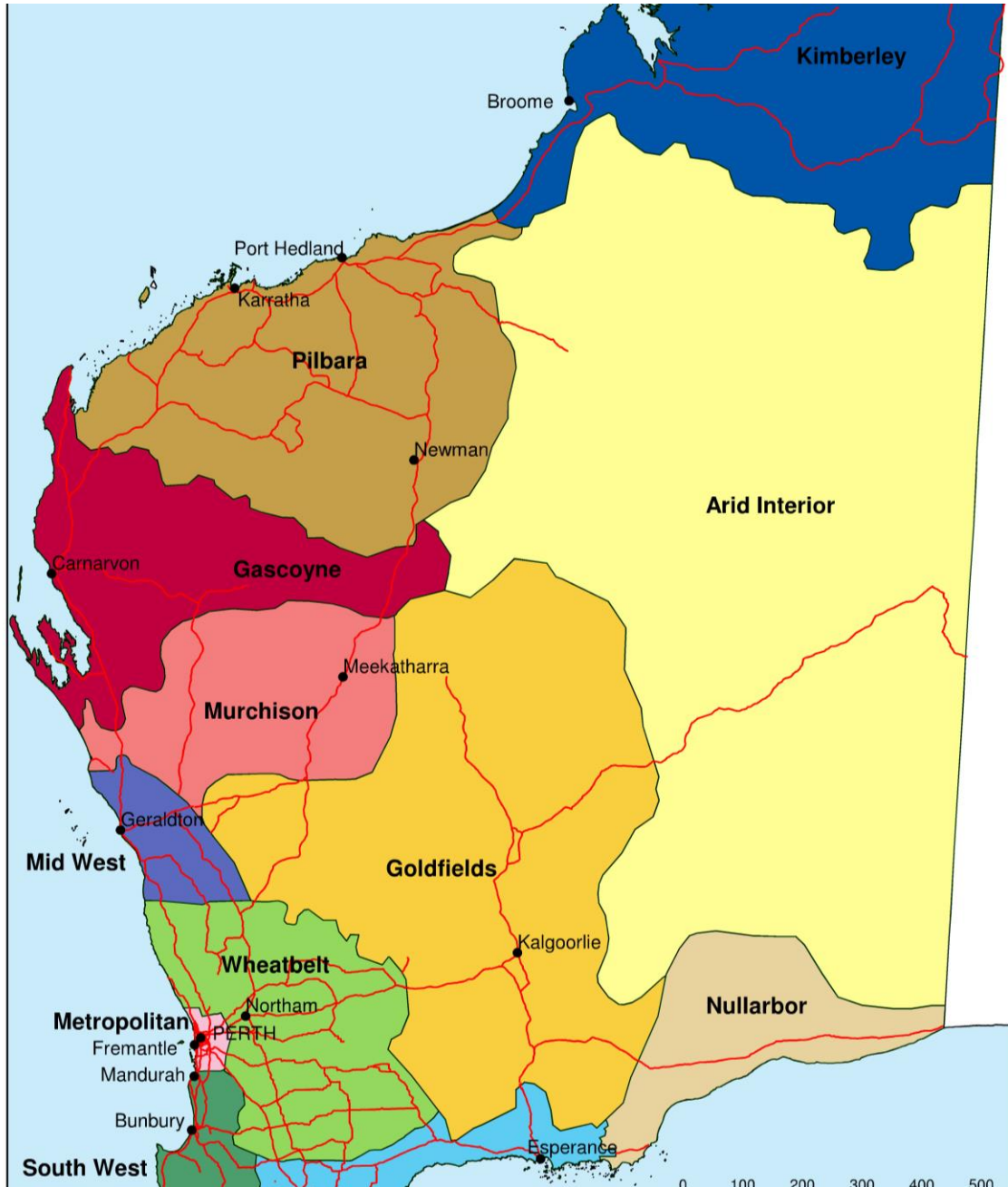


Australian Aboriginal Language Groups (before colonisation)

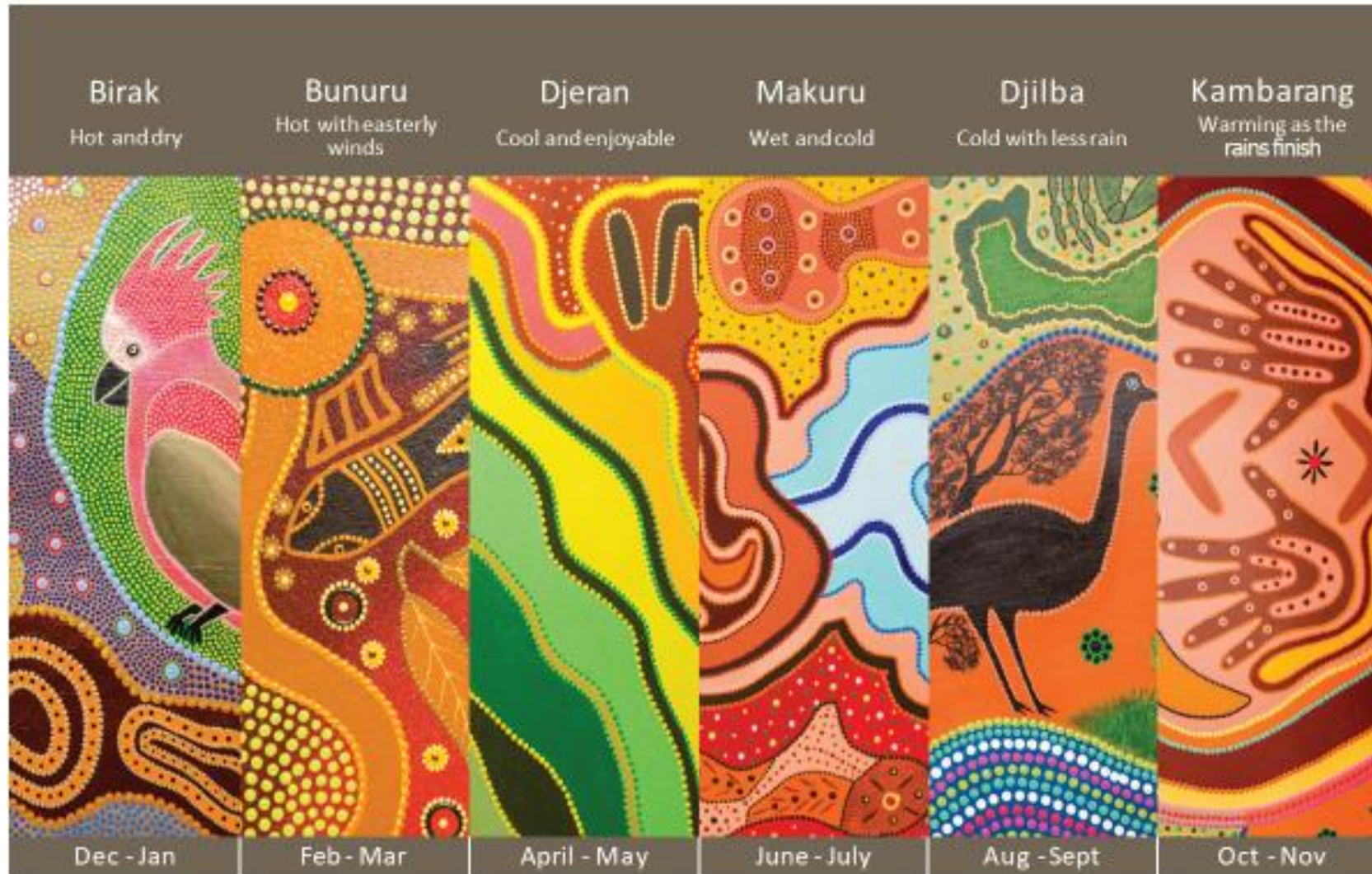


South-West Western Australia

Noongar language groups



Western Australia regions



Noongar seasons

Impressions of The University of Western Australia



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



UN Sustainable Development Goals

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all UN member states in 2015
- This provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet
- Urgent call to action by all countries in global partnership



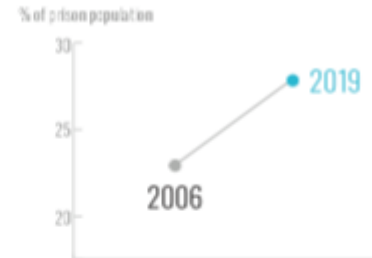
UN Sustainable Development Goals- Australia's progress

INDIGENOUS EQUALITY



LIFE EXPECTANCY

The life expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is not closing fast enough



INCARCERATION

Incarceration rate of Indigenous Australians is increasing

POVERTY

13.1%

The poverty rate has remained relatively stable since 2000 but breakthrough is needed to achieve the SDG target of halving the poverty rate by 2030

HOMELESSNESS



116.2

PER 10,000

Homelessness in Australia continues to increase

UN Sustainable Development Goals- Australia's progress



- The findings of the report show that Australia's progress on achieving the SDGs by 2030 was mixed.
- About one-third of the indicators were determined to be on track, more than one-third needed improvement or a breakthrough, and one-quarter are off-track or deteriorating.
- There is strong progress in the areas of health and education, but poor performance in addressing inequality, tackling climate change and housing affordability.
- The report also highlights key challenges in achieving Australia's economic goals, with relatively low investment in research and development and innovation, increasing underemployment, and high levels of household debt.

Journey of Health and Wellbeing

<https://youtu.be/cDYGjkcjUdg?si=H1tdXRrMvme7W0yd>

Closing the Gap- a policy response

- Successive Australian governments have recognised a gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- The Prime Minister Gough Whitlam acknowledged this in 1975 when he met with Vincent Lingiari.



Closing the Gap- a policy response

- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd also tried to advance the agenda by the National Apology to the Stolen Generations and attempting to push the Closing the Gap agenda.



Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generation



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RThkO3XBThs>

Key recommendations from the 1998 Social Justice Report included:

1. That the governments of Australia commit to achieving equality of health status and life expectation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people within 25 years
2. That the governments of Australia commit to achieving equality of access to primary health care and health infrastructure within 10 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments approved the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which set out six Closing the Gap targets:

- to close the life expectancy gap within a generation
- to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- to ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities within five years
- to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade
- to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment rates by 2020 and
- to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

Key focus areas of Closing the Gap:

- health
- housing
- early childhood
- education
- economic participation and
- remote service delivery.

Closing the Gap Targets

1. **Close the Gap in life expectancy** within a generation, by 2031 – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
2. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **babies with a healthy birthweight** to 91 per cent – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
3. By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) **early childhood education** to 95 per cent – shows good improvement and on track to be met. 😊
4. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **children assessed as developmentally on track** in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55 per cent – target worsening and not on track to be met (decrease of 35.2% since 2018). 😞 😞

Closing the Gap Targets

5. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) **attaining year 12 or equivalent** qualification to 96 per cent – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
6. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have **completed a tertiary qualification** (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
7. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in **employment, education or training** to 67 per cent – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
8. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 **who are employed** to 62 per cent – shows good improvement and on track to be met. 😊

Closing the Gap Targets

9.(a) By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people **living in appropriately sized** (not overcrowded) **housing** to 88 per cent.

(b) By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:

- within discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard
- in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a “town camp” or “town based reserve”).

- shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞

10. By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults **held in incarceration** by at least 15 per cent – target worsening. 😞😞

11. By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) **in detention** by at least 30 per cent – shows good improvement and is on track to be met. 😊

12. By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **children in out-of-home care** by 45 per cent – target worsening. 😞😞

Closing the Gap Targets

13. By 2031, the rate of **all forms of family violence and abuse** against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero – no new data. 😞
14. Significant and sustained **reduction in suicide** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero – target worsening. 😞 😞
15. (a) By 2030, a 15 per cent **increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests** – shows good improvement and on track to be met. 😊
- (b) By 2030, a 15 per cent **increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea** – shows improvement but not on track to be met. 😞
16. By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **languages** being spoken – no new data. 😊
17. By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have **equal levels of digital inclusion** – no new data. 😊

Why has Closing the Gap failed?

“The truth is that the existing Closing the Gap framework was doomed to fail when it was designed without the input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We know what will work best for our communities and the Prime Minister even acknowledges in this report that our voice was the missing ingredient from original framework.”

Pat Turner, Co-Chair of Joint Council on Closing the Gap

National Agreement- a change

- In 2019 and 2020 a Joint Council was established and engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples around Australia
- On 27 July, 2020 the National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed
- For the first time, the National Agreement has been developed in **genuine partnership** between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (the Coalition of Peaks).

National Agreement- priority reforms

- Strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- Build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector
- Transform government organisations so they work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Improve and share access to data and information to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make informed decisions.

The issue with SDGs and Closing the Gap

- Consultation with Indigenous peoples has been limited
- The approach continues the historic relationship between powerful and poorer communities
- Indigenous peoples have developed indicators of development significant for themselves
- The development of Closing the Gap has been described as a continuation of colonisation and assimilation
- Representing deficits and projecting existing stereotypes
- The ongoing colonisation is seen as one of the key issues for Closing the Gap targets not being met

The issue with SDGs and Closing the Gap

Table 1: Development indicators recognised by indigenous peoples and related SDGs.¹⁴

Indigenous Development Indicator	Related SDGs
Security of Indigenous peoples' rights to territories, lands and natural resources	2 No hunger 11 Sustainable cities and communities 14 Life on land 15 Life below water 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Integrity of indigenous cultural heritage	4 Quality education 8 Decent work and economic growth 14 Life on land 15 Life below water 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Respect for identity and non-discrimination	4 Quality education 8 Decent work and economic growth 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Fate control; self-determination	4 Quality education 8 Decent work and economic growth 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Culturally-appropriate education	4 Quality education 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Full, informed and effective participation	4 Quality education 8 Decent work and economic growth 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions
Extent of external threats to indigenous livelihoods	14 Life on land 15 Life below water 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions

Where to from here?

- Recognition of the social determinants of health is key
- Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise in response to SDGs and the environmental crisis
- True consultation, power sharing and encouraging First Nations leadership in SDGs and Closing the Gap
- Stronger involvement of Community Controlled Organisations
- Listening to and prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices

Any questions, comments?

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References

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