



**MINISTERIAL COUNCIL  
FOR  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**



**PERTH  
15 JULY 2008**

**COMMUNIQUE**

The Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) held its meeting today in Perth. The Council is chaired by the Western Australian Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Michelle Roberts MLA. The Commonwealth Government, State and Territory ministers for Indigenous Affairs met to discuss the national Indigenous reforms led by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Ministers discussed important challenges across the Indigenous Affairs portfolio, including demographic data on Indigenous issues, Indigenous governance, arrangements for a national Indigenous representative body and enhancing emergency management in remote Indigenous communities.

Ministers confirmed the close linkages between the work of COAG and MCATSIA. In particular, findings from the MCATSIA Governance Project are being used to inform COAG's work on remote service delivery and findings from the MCATSIA Populations Project will inform the work of COAG on building an evidence base for closing the gap.

**Indigenous Early Childhood**

Ministers agreed that Indigenous Early Childhood Development is an urgent area for action. Evidence shows that Indigenous children across the country suffer higher rates of preventable illness and death, lower birth weights and lower rates of school readiness, enrolment and participation. Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child protection system, and many are exposed to significant levels of family and community violence. The combination of poorer outcomes in health and education and exposure to trauma places Indigenous children in an unacceptably vulnerable position compared to non-Indigenous children.

Ministers welcomed COAG's agreement in principle to a National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development with joint funding of \$547.2 million. Governments are now developing plans to implement the measures.

Ministers agreed that the Indigenous Early Childhood Development funding would contribute significantly to improving the outcomes for Indigenous children and families in urban, regional and remote areas.

**Recognition of Urban Needs**

MCATSIA notes that the population distribution of Aboriginal people nationally indicates that some three-quarters live in urban and regional centres. Ministers noted the need for

a strong focus on urban and regional areas if the COAG targets on lifetime expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment are to be achieved. MCATSIA will work closely with the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform in this regard.

### **Indigenous governance**

Ministers acknowledged that effective governance is critical to improving Indigenous service delivery and longer-term outcomes. Ministers agreed to further work on Indigenous community governance with a focus on Indigenous organisations. MCATSIA will further report to COAG on this element of the Indigenous reform agenda. Work on improving governance is being undertaken on many fronts, including the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) training and legislative reform, Commonwealth Government work on streamlining administrative and accountability requirements, and work by MCATSIA and the Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Community Governance research and initiatives at a jurisdictional level.

Ministers have agreed to progress work on Indigenous governance as a priority, identify clear findings and apply them to future government strategies.

### **National Indigenous Representative Body**

Ministers acknowledged that the Commonwealth Government is committed to establishing an Indigenous representative body. The Commonwealth Government will announce a consultation process, including grass roots consultations with Indigenous people in every state and territory, a call for public submissions and a roundtable of Indigenous representatives to discuss options.

Ministers have agreed that state and territory governments will also be involved in the consultation process. Ministers discussed their representative bodies and consultative mechanisms and a possible link between those and a national body.

MCATSIA noted the significant value of the discussion paper released by Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, which canvasses a range of issues that require consideration.

### **Emergency management in Indigenous remote communities**

MCATSIA endorsed the National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous communities. These communities are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. The Strategy will improve community safety by focussing on preparedness and prevention.

### **Improving Indigenous data collection**

Ministers agreed to all jurisdictions improving the quality of Indigenous demographic data collection in remote, regional and urban areas. This data will be critical to tracking progress in meeting the targets agreed by COAG, including measuring progress in closing the gap in life expectancy. Priority will be given to improving the quality of data relating to life expectancy, including mortality data.

#### **MCATSIA Secretariat**

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