Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy

1. The Commonwealth Government is committed to achieving better results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in three key priorities—getting children to school, adults into work, and building safe communities.

2. This Strategy addresses the priority to build Indigenous employment within the Commonwealth public sector\(^1\). It is also part of the Government’s initial response to Mr Andrew Forrest’s Review of Indigenous Training and Employment Programmes report, *The Forrest Review: Creating Parity*.

3. It is vital to improve the representation of Indigenous Australians in the workforce if the Commonwealth is to capably respond to the needs of the community. A large and geographically dispersed workforce providing services to all Australians means the Commonwealth public sector is well placed to establish itself as a leader in Indigenous employment.

4. Our goal is to increase the representation of Indigenous employees across the Commonwealth public sector to **three per cent by 2018**. We need to offer Indigenous Australians a range of entry pathways into the public service and better career development opportunities for existing Indigenous employees. We must also increase the representation of Indigenous Australians in senior leadership positions.

5. The Strategy provides a roadmap to achieve our goal. It has been informed by consultations with Indigenous employees and Commonwealth agencies.

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\(^1\) For the purpose of this Strategy, the “Commonwealth public sector” refers to all corporate and non-corporate Commonwealth entities under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* and any other bodies that employ staff under the *Public Service Act 1999*. 
Key actions to achieve our goal

6. All agencies are responsible for improving the representation of Indigenous Australians in their workforce. All employees have a mutual obligation to engage and contribute to the initiatives which improve Indigenous employment. The initiatives also require the support of Indigenous employees, whose ideas and participation in making the Commonwealth public sector as inclusive as possible are essential.

7. It is critical to implement a feasible plan that delivers results. The Strategy focuses on four key action areas. These four areas are:
   i. Expand the range of Indigenous employment opportunities.
   ii. Invest in developing the capability of Indigenous employees.
   iii. Increase the representation of Indigenous employees in senior roles.
   iv. Improve the awareness of Indigenous culture in the workplace.

Principles that guide agencies’ actions

8. Sustainable improvement in Indigenous representation will be driven by the following principles:
   • **Accountability**—the head of each Commonwealth agency is accountable for improving the representation of Indigenous Australians in their workforce.
   • **Leadership**—public sector leaders are to participate and take action to drive improvements in the employment of Indigenous Australians.
   • **Cultural Capability**—the public sector has culturally safe workplaces where Indigenous employees are supported and valued for their contribution and where managers are culturally aware.
   • **Partnership**—between Commonwealth public sector agencies, state and territory governments, non-government organisations and the private sector, to improve Indigenous employment outcomes and share best practice.
What public sector agencies need to do

9. Employment parity for Indigenous Australians in the Commonwealth public sector requires collaboration, a sustained effort and a different way of doing things. The Strategy aims to achieve measurable results in each of the key areas by providing a suite of actions for agencies to access.

10. The suite of actions will be implemented progressively over the first year of the Strategy.

11. The Australian Public Service Commission will develop a practical implementation guide to supplement the actions. The guide will direct agencies to the various resources, programmes and other initiatives available across the Commonwealth public sector.
Measuring and reporting against the Commonwealth target

12. The target of three per cent across the Commonwealth is ambitious but achievable if it is driven from the top.

13. The Commonwealth target will be achieved through specified agency-level targets. These targets will reflect an agency’s current Indigenous representation and regional footprint. Agencies with a capacity to employ a higher percentage of Indigenous employees will have higher targets. All other agencies will be set minimum targets that are challenging, yet achievable and realistic.

14. Agencies are required to report annually to the Australian Public Service Commission and in their annual reports on current Indigenous representation. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will publicly report agency by agency progress against the target from September 2015. The Prime Minister will also include this information in the Closing the Gap Report from February 2016.
Suite of Actions

15. Agencies have different needs. In recognition of this a suite of actions is provided under each of the key action areas. Agencies should adopt those actions best suited to their needs.

16. The Australian Public Service Commission will provide a guide to support agencies to implement these actions.

A. Expand the range of Indigenous employment opportunities

17. In order to create employment parity and achieve three per cent representation, agencies should review and expand the opportunities they offer to Indigenous employees. Agencies should adopt a mix of contemporary recruitment approaches to increasing their Indigenous workforce.

Actions

- Adopt a new Indigenous recruitment portal that brings together all Commonwealth employment opportunities and simplifies access to public sector jobs for Indigenous job seekers.
- Expand the number of pathways into Commonwealth employment, including direct entry from school, higher education, skilled employment and community.
- Work with Indigenous employment service providers to promote awareness of the range of jobs in the Commonwealth public sector and to reach disadvantaged Indigenous job seekers.
- Enter partnerships with educational institutions to increase the number of Indigenous students in the fields of study most relevant to the Commonwealth public sector.
- Participate in whole-of-Government Indigenous recruitment programmes to give Indigenous applicants the opportunity to be considered across a wider range of Commonwealth public sector positions.
- Engage existing Indigenous employees in promoting the benefits of a career in the Commonwealth public sector.
B. Invest in developing the capability of Indigenous employees

18. Indigenous employees should be equipped to progress their careers at the same rate as their non-Indigenous colleagues and have equal opportunities to demonstrate their suitability for promotion.

Actions

- Increase the number of development opportunities for Indigenous employees, particularly those in regional and remote locations.
- Participate in structured mobility initiatives for high performing Indigenous employees within and outside the Commonwealth public sector.
- Encourage Indigenous employees to become part of an alumni network to ensure that ex-Commonwealth public servants remain in contact and can access future opportunities.
C. Increase the representation of Indigenous employees in senior roles

19. A disproportionate number of Indigenous employees are employed at entry level and most remain at lower classifications across the service. Consequently, there is a lack of Indigenous representation in more senior management levels.

Actions

- Engage mentors across the Commonwealth public sector, including at senior management levels.
- Nominate Indigenous employees for existing talent management programmes.
- Offer targeted development initiatives, including scholarships, for Indigenous middle managers who demonstrate consistent high performance.
- Create opportunities to work more closely with Indigenous non-government organisations and private sector agencies to provide specific Indigenous development programmes.
- Participate in cross-agency Indigenous senior leadership recruitment processes.
D. Improve awareness of Indigenous culture in the workplace

20. Agencies should foster workplaces that respect and support the cultural needs of their Indigenous employees. Most importantly, deeper understanding and respect for Indigenous culture and heritage will contribute to an improved employment experience for Indigenous employees and this, in turn, will drive improved retention and attraction outcomes.

Actions

- Adopt a Cultural Capability Framework as a benchmark of cultural understanding for agencies, leaders and employees.
- Expand regional and local Indigenous employee networks and forums to include Indigenous employees across all Commonwealth public sector agencies.
- Integrate cultural awareness principles into existing management development and orientation programmes.
- Participate in the Indigenous Senior Management Champions network to promote and facilitate collaboration between agencies, and support the joint implementation of initiatives.
Contributing artist
Sarah Richards

I am a Nyiampaa descendant of the Wongaibon tribe which is located in the Riverine area of NSW. I am a mostly self-taught artist who paints modern Aboriginal artworks as a hobby. I draw my inspiration from my childhood spent by the sea and my trips back to the bush. Now that I live in Canberra, I make regular trips out to the Riverine area to find further inspiration for my paintings. These trips back are when I feel most at home.

‘Journeys’ artwork (pictured)

‘Journeys’ is about all the participants of the APS Indigenous Pathways programme and their journeys from their respective state or territory to the central meeting place, the Australian Capital Territory, to complete the programme and achieve their goals.