



EMPOWERING AND SUPPORTING Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Creating a better future for Australia's first peoples

The Greens support approaches that empower and invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to create community driven solutions. This process must start by addressing Australia's unfinished business – we need a national conversation about sovereignty and treaties; justice targets; better funding and meaningful representation.

Despite living in a wealthy nation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still experience health, education and life expectancy outcomes more likely to be found in the developing world.

The latest data suggests there is still around a decade difference in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and non-Indigenous Australians.¹ Education outcomes are unequal, with only 60 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students finishing year 12, in comparison to 86 per cent of non-Indigenous students.² At the same time, even after a long history of injustice, too often Aboriginal voices struggle to be heard. Government decisions are often made without meaningful consultation, including cuts to critical services that communities across Australia rely on.

The Greens will continue working with and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The Greens will:

- Provide \$30m to advance the national conversation on sovereignty and treaties;
- Set a national justice target, develop a national strategy to address incarceration rates, and provide \$40m for projects to reduce incarceration rates;
- Provide \$15m to refund the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples;
- Provide an additional \$556m in funding for key services;
- Develop a plan to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and provide \$20m for projects to support domestic implementation.

> SOVEREIGNTY, TREATIES, AND CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

Australia has unfinished business; the Greens acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a strong and unbroken connection to the land and sea. To be a truly reconciled nation, it is crucial that we address the issues of sovereignty and treaties. It is past time for these issues to be resolved.

Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be more than a purely symbolic change and must have the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Greens want more action from Government on these complex issues, and we want to see more active conversations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Greens will **provide \$30 million in funding** to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities to help advance the national conversation on sovereignty and treaties.

> CHANGING THE RECORD ON INCARCERATION

Twenty-five years after the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, there are still too many Aboriginal people incarcerated, and dying in prison.³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are imprisoned at a rate 13 times higher than that of the non-Indigenous population, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent 27 per cent of the prison population, despite only being 3 per cent of the population. Tragically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are twice as likely to be in prison as in university, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles are 24 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous juveniles.⁴

¹ [Progress and priorities report.](#), p. 10.

² [Closing the Gap: Five numbers that should shame Australia.](#)

³ Parliamentary Library, [The 25th Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#), 15 April 2016.

⁴ [Change the Record.](#)

To see meaningful change, the Greens will adopt *Change the Record* campaign recommendations, including:

- **Setting a national target** to reduce incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Developing a national, whole of government strategy** to address incarceration rates.
- **Undertaking an independent review of laws and policies** which contribute to unequal incarceration rates, working to fix the problems in the system.

The Greens will **provide \$40 million in grant funding** for projects to help reduce the rate of incarceration.

The Greens support the abolition of mandatory detention, and will work to reverse this policy that disproportionately impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We also support a justice reinvestment approach, which will be outlined in a forthcoming initiative to support access to justice.

> FUNDING THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST PEOPLES

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples was established in 2010 as a national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, following recommendations from the Social Justice and Native Commissioner, and others.⁵ The National Congress provides an important voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and has campaigned on key challenges.

Cuts by the Coalition have made it harder for the National Congress to operate and advocate on the key issues. Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma has said it is important not to undermine the important work of National Congress, through a disappointing failure to fund National Congress appropriately.⁶ The Greens will reverse the impact of cuts by the Coalition by **providing an additional \$15 million over four years**, to support the operation of the National Congress as a national, representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

> FUNDING KEY SERVICES

In the 2014-15 Budget, the Coalition cut more than half a billion dollars from funding Aboriginal services across Australia.⁷ These cuts were made without consultation. A rushed process, and little transparency, had a devastating impact on many service providers. As a result, key services such as health, domestic violence shelters, legal services, and training providers across

Australia have been impacted, with some organisations losing all of their funding and services closing.⁸

The Greens will offset the impact of Coalition cuts by **providing an additional \$556 million in funding over four years**. This will enable key services to keep operating or be re-established. Additional funding for key health priorities will also be included in forthcoming announcements.

> FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

As part of additional funding announced in our mental health initiative, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will benefit from:

- A **\$400m increase** to Primary Health Networks' flexible mental health funding pool,
- **\$280m in additional mental health funding** for regional, rural and remote communities,
- **\$40m in funding for a series of strategies to reduce mental health stigma**, including a targeted campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This funding will recognise the needs of regional and remote communities, including **allocating at least \$24m to regional Western Australia over four years**, and a minimum of **\$17m in additional funding for services and workforce in the Northern Territory**, including remote communities.

The Greens are disappointed that funds previously committed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention strategies have not been spent. The Greens want to see this money (now worth **\$25m**) **immediately spent on suicide prevention**.⁹ Given recent tragic suicides by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important to build resilience in young people through cultural education programs. We need to support on-country community-led programs such as mentoring and youth leadership.

> AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS

Australia endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2009,¹⁰ but it is crucial to make sure that our domestic legal frameworks fully reflect the international commitment.¹¹

The Greens will:

⁸ [Senator Rachel Siewert condemns Indigenous Advancement Strategy after report](#); [Croakey](#); [ABC](#).

⁹ [Senate Estimates](#), p. 64.

¹⁰ [Amnesty](#).

¹¹ Report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people, [Situation of indigenous peoples in Australia](#), 2010, p. 19.

⁵ [Our future in our hands](#), 2009, p. 1.

⁶ [Lack of funding for First People's Congress 'disappointing', says Tom Calma](#).

⁷ [Budget Paper No. 2](#).

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- **Develop a comprehensive National Action Plan**, to implement the UNDRIP in Australian law and policy-making.
 - **Provide \$20 million in funding** to non-government organisations to facilitate participation in the National Action Plan, and raise community awareness of the process.

This will help ensure that Australia lives up to its commitments, and that government laws and policies protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

> SUPPORT WHERE IT'S NEEDED

Other policies will be or have been released to address some of the specific challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face, including justice reinvestment, key health priorities, and **\$20m for projects to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children going into out of home care.**

> LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES

The Australian Greens are committed to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination. The Greens have stood against the Northern Territory Intervention imposed by the old parties, including the Stronger Futures legislation. The Greens will abandon the Stronger Futures process. The Greens have also consistently stood against cruel income management measures imposed by the old parties that harm vulnerable people and communities, and disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.¹²

¹² [Social Justice and Native Title Report 2015](#), p. 61.