



QUICK GUIDE

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Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Government representative and advisory bodies: a quick guide

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Executive Summary

Previous elected representative national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies supported by the Australian Government are the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) (1973–77), the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) (1977–85), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) (1989–2005) and the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (NCAFP) (2009–19). The Torres Strait Regional Authority has continuously represented the people of the Torres Strait since being separated from ATSIC in the 1990s.

There were no equivalent organisations before the NACC. The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), a non-government organisation, played a leadership role among Indigenous and associated organisations in the 1960s and early 1970s, particularly in campaigning for the 1967 referendum.

Previous Australian Government-appointed advisory bodies include the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (1967–1976), the National Conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Councillors (1972), the National Indigenous Council (2005–07), and the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council (2013–c. 2019).

While not fitting the definition of a government-created elected or appointed representative and advisory body, also relevant are the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1991–2000), the Special Envoy on Indigenous Affairs (2018–19) and the Coalition of Peaks (2018–present).

Representative organisations at the state and territory level include the Torres Strait Regional Authority in Queensland (which separated from ATSIC during the 1990s in a multi-stage process), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in the ACT (2008–present) and the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria (2019–present). These are not further discussed in this quick guide.

Appendix A provides a list of all Ministers with an Indigenous Affairs portfolio since 1967.



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Chronological overview

Council for Aboriginal Affairs: 1967–76

In response to the [1967 referendum](#), which enabled the Australian Government to pass special laws (including budget measures) for Aboriginal people,¹ Prime Minister Harold Holt [announced](#) on 2 November 1967 that a Council for Aboriginal Affairs, chaired by Dr HC ‘Nugget’ Coombs, and an Office for Aboriginal Affairs would be established, reporting to the Prime Minister. On 24 November, he [announced](#) the other 2 members of the council: anthropologist Professor WEH Stanner, and former Ambassador to Laos Barrie Dexter, who also served as the Director of the Office for Aboriginal Affairs. None of these men were Aboriginal people.

Prime Minister Holt [discussed the council’s role](#) in the House of Representatives in 1967:

The Government wishes to have continually available to it the best advice on Aboriginal affairs it can get on a national level, and it has therefore decided that the new office should serve a Council for Aboriginal Affairs, which will have two particular functions: (a) It will advise the Government in the formulation of national policies for the Aboriginal citizens of Australia, (b) It will consult with Commonwealth departments and authorities whose activities have a bearing on Aboriginal welfare. It will also act as the Commonwealth agency for ensuring co-operation between Commonwealth and State authorities at the official level. It will, like the Office, be within my jurisdiction as Prime Minister and associated with the Prime Minister’s Department in Canberra... The Council will draw upon the knowledge and experience of anthropologists and other academic specialists as well as State and Commonwealth officials working in the field. It will also call into counsel members of Aboriginal communities and others concerned with their welfare and advancement. The council will concentrate at the outset on fully establishing the new Office of Aboriginal Affairs and, in consultation with other departments and with the States, but also will move as soon as possible to the formulation of proposals for Commonwealth policies in relation to Aboriginals.

After Holt’s death, the Council and Office for Aboriginal Affairs were redirected to report to a new Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs, [William Wentworth](#), rather than directly to Prime Minister John Gorton, and received [little co-operation](#) from the rest of government. The council’s role remained semi-formal and advisory only until the Whitlam Government created the Department of Aboriginal Affairs out of the Office for Aboriginal Affairs, with Dexter as its permanent Secretary. The council subsequently played significant ‘behind the scenes’ roles in advocating for land rights legislation, and in protecting the interests of Torres Strait Islanders in negotiations over the border with the newly independent Papua New Guinea.² It was [dissolved by the Fraser Government](#) on 30 November 1976.

National Conference of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Councillors: 1972

In response to the creation of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy and other Aboriginal rights campaigns, the McMahon Government [created a National Conference](#) of 66 appointed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Councillors which it stated would provide ‘a truly representative expression of Aboriginal views’. However, the [National Conference embarrassed the McMahon Government](#) (p. 11) by granting the Tent Embassy members voting rights and passing resolutions calling for land rights, dedicated Indigenous seats in federal and state parliaments, and for the

1. At the time, the Australian Government did not distinguish between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. Barrie Dexter, [Pandora’s Box: The Council for Aboriginal Affairs 1967-1976](#) (Southport, Queensland: Keeaira Press, 2015), 450–60, 461–70.

Tent Embassy to be re-established on the lawn of Parliament House. The National Conference does not appear to have met after 1972.

National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC): 1973–77

To support the aim of Aboriginal self-determination, in 1973 the Whitlam Government [created Australia's first elected Indigenous representative body, the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee \(NACC\)](#), to provide advice on Aboriginal policy. More than [27,000 Indigenous people voted to elect 41 members](#) of the NACC. Notwithstanding [Whitlam's achievements](#) in Indigenous affairs, [the NACC clashed frequently with the government](#) (p. 4) over the slow pace of land rights legislation and its desire to have some executive power rather than a purely advisory role. The NACC continued to clash with the Fraser Government.

After the change of government in 1975, the Fraser Government commissioned a review of the NACC. [The role of the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee: Report of the Committee of Inquiry](#) (the Hiatt review), published 4 November 1976, provides many examples of the NACC's advice to Government, including on: Aboriginal representation and control; anthropological research; education; employment; housing, amenities, and relief; land rights and compensation; police and prisons; and Queensland state legislation regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (pp. 18–22).

Notwithstanding these positive findings, the Hiatt review was critical of both the NACC's ability to fulfil its role, and government's relationship with it, stating (p. viii):

The National Aboriginal Consultative Committee has not functioned as a consultative committee and, to that extent, has not been effective in providing advice to Government on policies and programs in Aboriginal affairs. We attribute the absence of effective consultation largely to the failure on the part of the previous Government to provide a clear statement of aims, duties and procedures prior to the elections, the disinclination of the elected members to accept a role that was merely consultative, and the state of mutual hostility that prevailed between the NACC and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs from the beginning.

The Hiatt review recommended establishing a new, statutory body, with more representatives and an increased budget (pp. viii–x).

Minister Ian Viner [concluded that the NACC had not been an effective mechanism](#) for providing advice to the minister, or for consulting with Indigenous people. It was [abolished in May 1977](#) and replaced with the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC). As the NACC had been created administratively, no parliamentary action was needed for it to be abolished.

National Aboriginal Conference (NAC): 1977–85

The elected 35 member [National Aboriginal Conference \(NAC\)](#) was [established by the Fraser Government](#) in November 1977 to provide a forum for the expression of Aboriginal views. Like the NACC, it was created as an administrated program of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs rather than by legislation.

Makarrata

In 1979, the NAC [raised the idea of a treaty or Makarrata](#) 'between the Aboriginal Nation and the Australian Government'. In response to the NAC's advocacy, the Fraser Government established a Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs inquiry 'on the feasibility of a compact, or 'Makarrata', between the Commonwealth and Aboriginal people'. The NAC made a submission stating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had maintained their

sovereignty and nationhood and should be treated as equal in political status with the Commonwealth if a Makarrata was to be pursued. The submission concluded:

We are aware of Australian ambition to be one nation, one people. However, this cannot be achieved if our people are denied justice in accordance with international opinion relating to a people's right of self-determination ...³

The Senate Committee's report [Two Hundred Years Later...](#), released in 1983, rejected the word 'treaty' as unrealistic given Indigenous peoples' lack of international standing, but recommended that a compact or Makarrata could be created based upon a proposed new constitutional section 105B, granting a power for the Commonwealth to enter into a compact with representatives of the Aboriginal people (existing [section 105A](#) provides for financial agreements between the Commonwealth and the states). The committee also recommended that the NAC be made an independent statutory body with increased funding and membership.

The NAC also [campaigned at an international level for a treaty](#) (pp. 386–7). At the United Nations, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the World Assembly of First Nations, the NAC put forward suggestions for a Makarrata including:

- land rights over former reserves and national parks and recognition of traditional rights to hunt, fish and gather on Crown lands
- a National Aboriginal Bank, tax exemptions and payment of 5% of Australia's gross national product for 195 years as reparations
- one seat per state in the House of Representatives and the Senate to be reserved for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- self-government of Aboriginal communities and respect for Aboriginal customary law
- return of artefacts and artworks and control over research on Aboriginal people
- dedicated Aboriginal schools, medical centres and legal aid.⁴

The Hawke Government [responded to the Senate Committee report in May 1985](#) (after the NAC's abolition had been announced) that it considered a Makarrata would be 'difficult at this stage' in the context of 'efforts required to promote community acceptance for the concept of national land rights legislation'.

Abolition

After the 1983 election, the Hawke Government commissioned Dr HC ('Nugget') Coombs to review the NAC. In 1984 he produced [The Role Of The National Aboriginal Conference Report](#) (the Coombs report).

The Coombs report was critical of the NAC's role, stating that it had failed to connect with the local level concerns which were of most importance to Aboriginal communities, that its 'first past the post' voting system undermined the members' claims to democratic representativeness, and that

3. National Aboriginal Conference, Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, extract reprinted in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, [The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: A Documentary History](#) (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 294.

4. R Nichols, 'A summary of concerns of the Aboriginal People of Australia', presentation to World Assembly of First Nations, Regina, Canada, 1982, reprinted in Attwood and Markus, [The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights](#), 297–301. It is worth noting that many Aboriginal leaders outside the NAC, including Gary Foley, Charles Perkins, and Neville Bonner, felt the NAC's treaty proposals, particularly the demand for a percentage of GDP, were naive and unrealistic: Peter Read, 'Doubts about the treaty: some reflections on the Aboriginal Treaty Committee' Ch 3 in Peter Read, Gary Meyers et al, [What Good Condition? Reflections on an Australian Aboriginal Treaty 1986–2006](#) (Canberra, ACT: ANU Press, 2006), 33–34.

it had not made effective use of its (limited) resources or managed its own affairs effectively (pp. 81–82). Dr Coombs recommended it be reformed and replaced by a new body, provisionally called the National Aboriginal Congress, with stronger regional representative structures or assemblies which would then elect members for a national assembly (p.84, 85–104). As well as the critical Coombs report, a [1984 Auditor General's report](#) into the NAC's administration found numerous accounting deficiencies and unapproved financial practices. While the majority of these were attributed to the 'growing pains' of an inexperienced and expanding organisation seeking to serve a widely distributed Aboriginal population (p. 9), there were also several cases of self-serving and possibly fraudulent conduct or expenditure (p. A2).

These two reports [led to](#) Minister Holding [announcing on 2 April 1985](#) that the NAC would cease operations on 30 June 1985, to be replaced with a new organisation at a future date. As the NAC was not a statutory body, it could be abolished without parliamentary action.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC): 1989–2005

The Hawke Government passed the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989](#) to create the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a statutory authority to both represent, and deliver services to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unlike the previous NACC and NAC which had been advisory and representative only, ATSIC was intended to combine representative and executive roles by taking over the responsibilities of the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

ATSIC's creation was opposed by the Howard-led Opposition, with [John Howard stating](#) that 'the ATSIC legislation strikes at the heart of the unity of the Australian people' and 'if the Government wants to divide Australian against Australian, if it wants to create a black nation within the Australian nation, it should go ahead with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) legislation and its treaty'.

ATSIC's programs included [employment](#), [housing](#), [legal aid](#) and [family violence](#) services, [Army Community Assistance](#), and [municipal infrastructure services](#) in remote communities.⁵ It played a key role in informing the Hawke and Keating governments' [responses](#) to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and the Mabo (no. 2) decision via the [Native Title Act 1993 negotiations](#).

While ATSIC placed many services in Aboriginal hands, it was frequently [caught between 2 masters](#) (p. 8), as its executive council was elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voters but it was staffed by public servants who reported to, and were responsible to, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (see Appendix A). Furthermore, [ATSIC was frequently blamed for broader failings](#) (pp. 9–10) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy, such as poor health outcomes, over which it had little or no control. [Over 85% of ATSIC's budget](#) (p. 9) was non-discretionary funding for delivering programs set by the Australian Government, principally the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program and the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP). Indigenous health budgets and services were for the most part [controlled by the Department of Health](#) (p. 14). Perceptions of problems stemming from ATSIC's dual role substantially influenced [design proposals for successor Indigenous representative bodies](#) (p. 15).

5. Alison Holland, '[Many claim Australia's longest-running Indigenous body failed. Here's why that's wrong](#)', *The Conversation*, 2023

When Howard became Prime Minister in 1996, ATSIC's [discretionary funding was substantially cut](#) (p. 13). Several [reviews](#) (p. 15) and a [special audit](#) of the organisation were launched – which [did not uncover](#) any instances of fraud.

Abolition

In 2003, the Howard Government separated ATSIC's service delivery roles into [a new organisation](#), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). Later that year, the [In the Hands of the Regions - A New ATSIC](#) review recommended that ATSIC be restructured, and that ATSIS and ATSIC be reunited with a renewed focus on regional bodies and regional governance. Instead, following allegations being aired in the media that ATSIC's CEO Geoff Clark and Deputy Chair Ray Robinson had engaged in criminal acts and fraud,⁶ and Australian Labor Party (ALP) leader Mark Latham [announcing that the ALP would abolish ATSIC](#) if it won government, the Howard Government [announced in 2004 that ATSIC and ATSIS would be abolished](#). [Legislation abolishing ATSIC](#) and transferring some of its functions to 2 new organisations, Indigenous Business Australia and the Indigenous Land Corporation, was passed with ALP support in 2004, with the ATSIC regional councils continuing in an advisory role until 30 June 2005.

The [Torres Strait Regional Authority](#), which had previously been the Torres Strait ATSIC regional body, was separated from ATSIC between 1994 and 1997 and survived the abolition of ATSIC. It continues to this day to provide local and other government services and a representative structure for Torres Strait Islanders in the Torres Strait.

Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation: 1991–2000

In 1991, bipartisan support was achieved for [an Act setting up the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation \(CAR\)](#) and setting in motion a formal 10-year 'process of reconciliation'. Creating a reconciliation process was the final recommendation of the [Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#), and [was seen by the Hawke and Keating governments](#) (pp. 7–15) as a way of advancing an Indigenous policy agenda which had stalled on land rights and treaty issues.

CAR was a government-appointed body including both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous members, with a majority of Indigenous members. While CAR was focused upon the specific topic of 'reconciliation' rather than being a general advisory body, the scope of 'reconciliation' meant that CAR's work touched on many different aspects of Australian society. One 'practical' focus of its work was promoting better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the mining and pastoral industries in the wake of the Mabo decision.⁷

CAR canvassed several options for achieving recognition or representation. In its 1995 report, [Going Forward: Social Justice for the First Australians](#), CAR proposed a new preamble to the *Constitution*, removing [section 25 of the Constitution](#), adding a new constitutional clause prohibiting racial discrimination (save for beneficial measures), and proposed a treaty or document of reconciliation be negotiated 'by the Commonwealth Government or Parliament and

6. Despite often-repeated claims of 'widespread' corruption, the only commissioner ever charged with or found guilty of fraud or corruption in ATSIC's affairs was Ray Robinson (Erin Pearson, '[Indigenous leaders seek Price apology over ATSIC call](#)', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 2022; Tony Keim, '[Court of Appeal dismisses former ATSIC commissioner Robert Robinson's bid to overturn jury finding on Commonwealth fraud](#)', *news.com.au*, 13 November 2012). A [2003 paper](#) by the Parliamentary Library concluded 'at least some of ATSIC's 'problems' – in accountability, in transparency of decision-making, and in overall effectiveness – are perceived rather than actual' (p. 1). See also the comments by Lowitja O'Donoghue in '[The uses and abuses of accountability](#)', *ATSIC News*, 1998: 'The audit uncovered no instances of fraud, but it did discover a system of grant administration that was so detailed as to make breaches of grant conditions almost inevitable ... the "tabloid approach" tends to equate breaches with fraud. In this area of government, too, breaches are "exposed" more frequently because of the very frequency and intensity of audit activities ... A rhetoric of accountability has developed within national politics, which is totally divorced from the reality of accountability in Aboriginal affairs or the reality of ATSIC's record'.

7. Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR), [Exploring for common ground: Aboriginal reconciliation and the Australian mining industry](#) (Canberra, ACT: CAR 1993).

appropriate national representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples'. It also suggested assessing the prospects of [dedicated Indigenous seats in Parliament](#) (based on the New Zealand model) and entrenched Indigenous rights in the *Constitution* (in the context of contemporary debate about an Australian Bill of Rights). Since then, [many proposals for constitutional recognition and representation](#) have echoed this set of proposals.

In May 2000, CAR organised [Corroboree 2000](#) for National Reconciliation Week, at which several speakers called for a treaty, and which included the [Walk for Reconciliation](#) across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

In its [final report to Parliament](#), CAR again [recommended](#) preparing legislation for a referendum seeking to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples of Australia in a new preamble to the *Constitution*, a constitutional clause prohibiting racial discrimination, and removing section 25. It also recommended that each Australian government and parliament negotiate agreements or treaties to advance reconciliation. However, the recommendations for treaty, as well as other proposals for constitutional reform and recognition of land and other rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, were not acted upon by Prime Minister Howard, who instead favoured [an approach he called 'practical reconciliation'](#).

After CAR's statutory term ended, the task of promoting reconciliation was taken up by the non-government organisation [Reconciliation Australia](#).

National Indigenous Council (NIC): 2005–07

In 2005, Prime Minister Howard [appointed](#) a hand-picked National Indigenous Council (NIC) to provide advice to the government. The NIC was chaired by Aboriginal magistrate Sue Gordon. It [reportedly](#) clashed with Minister for Indigenous Affairs Mal Brough over failure to take its advice, and was [perceived as lacking a mandate](#). This body was [dissolved by the Rudd Government](#) in early 2008.

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (NCAFP): 2009–19

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (NCAFP) was founded in November 2009 after a [design process led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma](#), as a stand-alone corporation to function as the representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. It was created as a corporation rather than a government body, so that it could not be dissolved by government fiat. In 2010, it [announced its members and appointed its first national executive](#). The same year, its co-chairs [served on the Expert Panel](#) on Constitutional recognition.

However, under political and budget pressure to cut costs following the 2007 response to the global financial crisis, the Rudd and Gillard governments declined to act on the NCAFP's request to create a permanent endowment to fund its ongoing operation, instead [funding the NCAFP through the Budget process](#). This left the NCAFP potentially vulnerable to future funding cuts.

After the 2013 election, the Abbott Government appointed a new [Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council](#) (PMIAC), and also appointed a [National Commission of Audit, which subsequently criticised](#) the NCAFP as 'duplicat[ing] existing Indigenous representative advisory bodies' (p. 176), apparently referring to the PMIAC. The NCAFP was subsequently [defunded in the 2014–15 Budget](#). While this did not abolish the NCAFP (which had been set up as a non-government corporation, in order to prevent it being abolished), it meant that the NCAFP had insufficient funds to operate effectively, which thus limited its representational ability.

Despite its financial limitations, the NCAFP played a significant organisational role when it coordinated many Indigenous sectoral peak bodies to issue the [Redfern Statement](#) prior to the

2016 election, in a precursor to the current Coalition of Peaks. NCAFP co-chairs Dr Jackie Huggins and Rod Little also participated in the Regional Dialogues and [Uluru Constitutional Convention](#) that gave rise to the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#).

On 13 June 2019, the NCAFP, which had been largely unfunded by government since the 2013 election and was relying on voluntary labour and paid subscriptions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and organisations, [went into voluntary administration](#). After Minister Wyatt [declined to fund it](#), its co-chairs were made redundant and it [ceased operating in July 2019](#).

Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council (PMIAC): 2013–2019

After the 2013 election, the Abbott Government appointed a new [Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council](#), which was initially chaired by [Warren Mundine](#), formerly a member of the National Indigenous Council. This body was never formally abolished, but it [appears to have ceased operating](#) at some point after the 2019 election. Its last meeting appears to have been on [13 February 2019](#) and all positions on it [were listed as ‘Vacant’](#) in 2020.

Special Envoy for Indigenous Affairs: 2018–2019

In August 2018, incoming Prime Minister Scott Morrison [appointed former Prime Minister Tony Abbott as the ‘Special Envoy for Indigenous Affairs’](#). Abbott [stated](#) that his focus would be on improving remote school attendance. The appointment of Abbott to this new role was [criticised](#) by the [co-chairs of the NCAFP](#) and [questioned by the PMIAC, whose co-chair, Roy Ah See, stated](#) ‘[the position is] a matter for Mr Abbott, but the experts on Aboriginal affairs and on advice to the prime minister is the IAC’. The role ceased to exist when Abbott was not re-elected in the 2019 election.

Coalition of Peaks: 2018–present

The [Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations \(Coalition of Peaks\)](#) is a non-incorporated non-government organisation, made up of over [80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak and member organisations](#) across Australia. Many of its members had previously collaborated with the NCAFP to issue the Redfern Statement in 2016. The Coalition of Peaks largely consists of sector-specific bodies, such as legal, health and housing peak bodies, rather than representational bodies, although the [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body](#) and several Land Councils are also members.

The Coalition of Peaks [began to form in 2018](#) around concerns governments were proposing a new Closing the Gap strategy without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ full involvement. In December 2018, 14 organisations [met with Prime Minister Morrison](#) to propose a shared decision-making model for the new Closing the Gap agenda. In early 2019, the Coalition of Peaks formally formed, and in March 2019 it negotiated a new [Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) with the Australian and state and territory governments and the Australian Local Government Association through the Council of Australian Governments. This led to a [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) in July 2020.

The Coalition of Peaks has stated that [it views the proposed Voice to Parliament](#) as complementary to its role:

There are many efforts underway to advance the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and these efforts are all important and can work alongside each other. The Coalition of Peaks supports these efforts and will strengthen these through our own mechanisms that advance self-determination for our people.

The work to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap will be strengthened by a more reconciled nation. As we embark on a historic referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution, we are seeking to address a historical wrong against our people.

The Voice is also about guaranteeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a say in matters that impact on us, something that is at the heart of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the work of the Coalition of Peaks.

A Constitutionally enshrined Voice won't negate the work governments are required to do under the National Agreement. Neither will the Voice change the necessary role of community-controlled peak bodies and organisations to deliver services and supports for our people, and to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the areas we have expertise. Alongside the National Agreement and the partnership between governments and the Coalition of Peaks, the Voice, Truth Telling, and Treaty will provide our nation with the complete roadmap to improve the life outcomes of our people.

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Appendix A: List of Indigenous Affairs Ministers (Federal)

This list includes all ministers, assistant ministers and parliamentary secretaries who held any part of an Indigenous, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Affairs portfolio. Before 1967, the Federal Government's Indigenous policy was largely confined to the Northern Territory. Aboriginal policy in the NT fell under the portfolio usually designated Territories or Internal Affairs.

A * next to the name indicates an [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person](#).

Gorton Government, 1968–1971

- [William Wentworth](#) (Lib), Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (28 Feb 1968–31 May 1971)

McMahon Government, 1971–1972

- [Peter Howson](#) (Lib), Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts (10 May 1971–5 Dec 1972)

Whitlam Government, 1972–1975

- [Gordon Bryant](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (19 Dec 1972–9 Oct 1973)
- [James Cavanagh](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (9 Oct 1973–6 Jun 1975)
- [Les Johnson](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (6 Jun 1975–11 Nov 1975)

Fraser Government, 1975–1983

- [Thomas Drake-Brockman](#) (Country Party), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (12 Nov 1975–22 Dec 1975)
- [Ian Viner](#) (Lib), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (22 Dec 1975–5 Dec 1978)
- [Fred Chaney](#) (Lib), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (5 Dec 1978–3 Nov 1980)
- [Peter Baume](#) (Lib), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (3 Nov 1980–7 May 1982)
- [Ian Wilson](#) (Lib), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (7 May 1982–11 Mar 1983)

Hawke Government, 1983–1991

- [Clyde Holding](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (11 Mar 1983–24 Jul 1987)
- [Gerry Hand](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (24 Jul 1987–4 Apr 1990)
- [Robert Tickner](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (4 Apr 1990–19 Dec 1991)

Keating Government, 1991–1996

- [Robert Tickner](#) (ALP), Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (19 Dec 1991–11 Mar 1996) and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Aboriginal Reconciliation (20 Feb 1991–24 Mar 1993)

Howard Government, 1996–2007

- [John Herron](#) (Lib), Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (11 Mar 1996–30 Jan 2001)
- [Christine Gallus](#) (Lib), Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (30 Jan–26 Nov 2001)

- [Philip Ruddock](#) (Lib), Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (30 Jan 2001–26 Nov 2001) and Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (26 Nov 2001–7 Oct 2003)
- [Amanda Vanstone](#) (Lib), Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (7 Oct 2003–27 Jan 2006) and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs (26 Oct 2004–27 Jan 2006)
- [Bruce Billson](#) (Lib), Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (6 Jul 2005–27 Jan 2006)
- [Mal Brough](#) (Lib), Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (27 Jan 2006–3 Dec 2007)

Rudd Government, 2007–2010

- [Jenny Macklin](#) (ALP), Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (3 Dec 2007–14 Dec 2011)
- [Warren Snowdon](#) (ALP), Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery (9 Jun 2009–14 Sep 2010)

Gillard/Rudd Governments, 2010–2013

- [Jenny Macklin](#) (ALP), Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (3 Dec 2007–14 Dec 2011) and Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (14 Dec 2011–18 Sep 2013)
- [Warren Snowdon](#) (ALP), Minister for Indigenous Health (14 Sep 2010–18 Sep 2013)
- [Mark Arbib](#) (ALP), Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development (14 Sep 2010–14 Dec 2011)
- [Julie Collins](#) (ALP), Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development (14 Dec 2011–18 Sep 2013)

Abbott/Turnbull/Morrison Governments, 2013–2022

Indigenous Affairs was moved to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, but continued to have a dedicated Minister.

- [Nigel Scullion](#) (Nats), Minister for Indigenous Affairs (18 Sep 2013–29 May 2019)
- [Ken Wyatt](#) * (Lib), Minister for Indigenous Health (24 Jan 2017–29 May 2019) and Minister for Indigenous Australians (29 May 2019–23 May 2022)
- Former Prime Minister [Tony Abbott](#) (Lib), [Special Envoy on Indigenous Affairs](#) (28 August 2018–18 May 2019)

Albanese Government, 2022–

- [Linda Burney](#) * (ALP), Minister for Indigenous Australians (1 Jun 2022–current)
- [Malarndirri McCarthy](#) * (ALP), Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians (1 Jun 2022–current) and Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health (1 Jun 2022–current)
- [Patrick Dodson](#) * (ALP), [Special Envoy](#) for Reconciliation and the Implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (1 June 2022–current)