

23 September
2022

Shared Identity:

Bridging Relationships



Acknowledgement

I acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of Australia's land and its waters.

I pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and to **the youth**, for the future.

I extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reading this document.

I also **recognize all First Nation peoples** participating in today's summit

Introduction to Prof Tom Calma AO FAA

- 🌀 Aboriginal man of **Kungarakan and Iwaidja** descent just outside of Darwin in Northern Territory.
- 🌀 Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **Social Justice Commissioner** and **senior Diplomat** to India and Vietnam.
- 🌀 **Chancellor** of the University of Canberra, National Coordinator **Tackling Indigenous Smoking** and a part time **professor** at the University of Sydney
- 🌀 Member of the Government's **Referendum Working Group** and have been involved in major activities associated with the Voice to Parliament.
- 🌀 **Chair** of an Indigenous company called **Ninti One** that operates **domestically** and **internationally**, the **Living First Languages Platform Co** and many other roles in the government, **philanthropic** and non government sectors.

Indigenous peoples' advancement through economic empowerment

- Since the advent of the **IPP (Indigenous Procurement Policy)** in 2015, there has been an **uplift in** the participation of First Nations Australians in **diplomacy and development** – including via **participation in DFAT aid activities**. Ninti One Limited, has become active across the Indo-Pacific. In the last couple of years, through a competitive tendering process, we have become **responsible for developing Indigenous participation** on about **one billion \$s** of DFAT aid activities. These are **long-term activities** (4-8 years), where we are a **sub-contractor to some of the big commercial aid companies** (more about lessons learnt late in the presentation).
- To demonstrate the **new-ness** of this, we placed the **first ever Indigenous – identified 'long-term adviser'** on a DFAT project earlier this year – Braiden Abala, as the **'Inclusion Adviser'** on the **Partnerships for Infrastructure project** in SE Asia.

‘Fresh and innovative approaches are required for a stable and prosperous Pacific’

- ① “A **stable and prosperous Pacific is essential** to Australia’s security and foreign policy. However, the complexity of **regional challenges demands fresh and innovative approaches.**” (GAP website)
- ① **Pacific Island nations** are characterised **by traditional cultures**, with **distinct ethnic groups**. For example, the Solomon Islands (population of 580,000) comprises diverse cultures, languages, and customs, and about 120 vernaculars are spoken
- ① This is very similar to ‘First Nations’ in Australia, especially when one considers that most nations have had **recent colonial histories** including **indentured labour** to Australia
- ① **Traditional cultures** in the Pacific have **many parallels with present-day Australia**, where the remoteness of Pacific communities is broken up by blue oceans; whereas communities in Australia are separated by vast ‘red dirt’ deserts (**SPORTS**)

Engagement ‘demand’ from Pacific Island Nations

- Research by the **Whitlam Institute** at [Western Sydney University in 2020](#) revealed a view across stakeholders in Pacific Island Countries that *“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders **were almost invisible in Australia’s relations with the Pacific** and this has **limited our understanding of – and potential for engagement with – the region**”*.
- **Ninti’s experience** on aid programs across the Indo-Pacific has demonstrated **the high value placed on the two-way transfer of traditional (Indigenous) knowledge**, at both the Partner government level and at the community level.
- Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme allows eligible Australian businesses to hire workers from **9** Pacific islands and Timor-Leste

Engagement

- ① The creation of a **First Nations Ambassador** provides the opportunity to extend an existing focus on Indigenous participation in Australia's development assistance program through **stronger leadership** and a clear focus on First Nations Australians and their valuable role in Australian diplomacy.
- ① This builds on **DFAT's 2021 Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda**, which has **four aims**
 1. Shape international norms and standards to benefit Indigenous peoples
 2. Maximise opportunities for Indigenous peoples in a globalised world
 3. Promote sustainable development for all Indigenous peoples
 4. Deploy Indigenous Australian diplomats to advance Australia's national interests
- ① The **Office of the Pacific** in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Lessons learnt from Ninti's work

- ① **Traditional Knowledge exchanges** are highly valued across all sectors in Pacific Islands nations
- ① To the extent appropriate, Australian government policies **should encourage and support Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities to have a voice in programming and policy decisions** relevant to their communities or interests.
- ① All actors should utilise their influence (through development programs and diplomacy) to **actively promote and encourage** Partner Governments and Development Partners to **engage with Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities**
- ① There is a need to **enrol 'gate keepers'**. This begins with the policymakers in Australia and Pacific Nations; then the funding bodies, then implementers on-the-ground
- ① **Indigenous participation fosters safeguard measures** that **respect the identity**, dignity, human rights, livelihood systems, and cultural uniqueness of Indigenous peoples in program designs
- ① Requires a **coordinated approach to build a pool of First Nations development and diplomacy professionals**, such as establishing and supporting 'feeder' career pathways into international work, accompanied by professional development plans

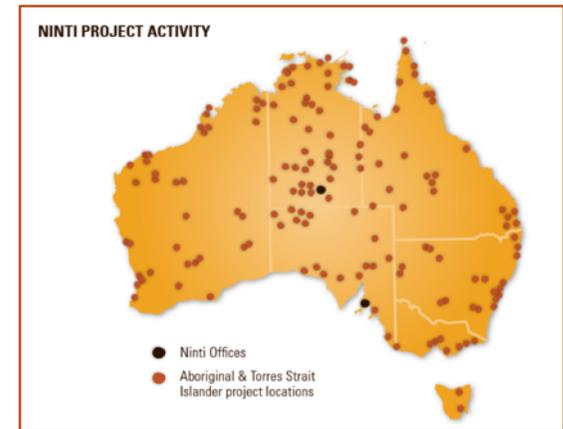
About Ninti:

Indigenous participation in DFAT's international development program

Ninti One is an Indigenous, Supply Nation registered, not-for-profit organisation. We work collaboratively with communities and agencies to achieve social and economic development outcomes across regional, remote and metro communities.

We are applying our domestic Indigenous expertise to international contexts.

- Established in 2003. Prof Tom Calma AO has been the Chair since 2010
- 200 contracts valued >\$300 million
- 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed to date
- Several 'firsts'** ... including being the first Indigenous company to:
 - lead an overseas DFAT contract (Australia Assists review in Bangladesh, Pacific)
 - place Long Term Indigenous advisers on DFAT projects, e.g., POM, BKK
 - be on the DFAT Research Monitoring & Evaluation (RME) panel
 - be responsible for aspiring for **3%** indigenous participation on over **\$1 billion** of DFAT aid activities across the Indo-Pacific



Ninti's experience

Ninti is Australia's **most active provider of Indigenous participation** on Australia's aid program.

Ninti draws on its long history of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and has developed the capacity to **translate learning** from this experience to a range of **development contexts**.

Ninti's history and expertise includes assisting head contractors to implement projects in areas of:

- Health
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Governance
- Regional development
- Economic empowerment
- Justice
- International relations
- Private sector development

CURRENT PROGRAMS:

- ASEAN Partnerships for Infrastructure
- PNG-Australia Transition to Health
- Specialist Health Service (global)
- Australia PNG Subnational Program
- Australia-PNG Economic Development Partnership
- PNG Institutional Partnership Program
- PNG Partnership for Improving Education
- Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice
- Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Governance
- Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda Review
- Emerging Markets Investment Fund Impact Study (Asia-Pacific)
- Impact Private Sector Partnerships

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT EXPERIENCE

- Papua New Guinea
- Bangladesh
- Cambodia
- Fiji
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Norway
- Pakistan
- The Philippines
- Samoa
- Solomon Islands
- South Africa
- Sri Lanka
- Sweden
- Thailand
- Timor-Leste
- Taiwan
- Vanuatu
- Vietnam



“Indigenous people have the right to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures.” – Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

It’s a global, cross-generational problem.

221 million children around the world lack access to education in their native tongue, resulting in early stage learning difficulties with irreversible, lifelong results.

We’re losing more than words.

Inadequate early childhood language development disconnects identity, and exacerbates inequality. Its social impact stifles cultures, hitting communities hard and placing a low ceiling on their potential for economic growth.

Existing solutions aren’t enough.

To embed a resource successfully in a community, it must be co-created with them. The majority of resources available at present haven’t been developed this way, and are either culturally irrelevant or inaccessible.

Ambassador for First Nations People

A key role of the Ambassador will be to undertake consultation with First Nations communities, leaders and advocates to **listen and engage directly on how** Australia's international engagement contributes to Indigenous community and economic development, supports First Nations businesses and exporters, **delivers practical action on climate change, builds connections across the Indo-Pacific region** and **supports Indigenous rights around the world.**

Quote attributable to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator the Hon Penny Wong:

"The Ambassador for First Nations People will lead work to embed Indigenous perspectives, experiences and interests into our foreign policy, including to help grow First Nations' trade and investment.

"The Ambassador will also lead Australia's engagement to progress First Nations rights globally.

"This role will enhance our engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by fostering cooperation on shared interests."

Quote attributable to Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney MP:

"Appointing an Ambassador for First Nations People is an opportunity to ensure the unique perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are included in our international engagements.

"An Ambassador for First Nations people will be supported to engage with likeminded countries to share our commitment to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and experiences of treaty and truth telling processes"

Quote attributable to Senator Patrick Dodson:

"This is the first time Australia will have a dedicated level of First Nations representation to inform the way we engage with the world."

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