



Closing the Gap 'Refresh' Rejigged

Available for Immediate Release

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National Congress and Redfern Statement Alliance leaders meeting in Canberra today have expressed dismay over last minute changes to a high-level Aboriginal peak body meeting for the Closing the Gap Refresh consultations.

The Closing the Gap Refresh agenda stated: 'Australian governments acknowledge they need to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.'

Our Redfern Statement called for the government to 'commit to better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their representative national peaks.' More specifically, the recommendation focused on 'convening regular high level ministerial and departmental meetings and forums with the National Congress and the relevant peak organisations and forums.'

National Congress has only recently learnt that no longer will Aboriginal peak bodies be given the much-anticipated exclusive opportunity to voice their views on the Refresh project. Now we understand that the government organisers have opened the doors to a range of non-indigenous NGOs to participate on the same day.

In response, Co-Chair Rod Little expressed his frustration, saying 'it is critical that the government respects the need for Aboriginal peak bodies to share their expert views without having to accommodate other powerful voices such as NGOs. Whilst these organisations have valuable contributions to make, this may not be the appropriate forum. The consultation process is already compressed enough without our organisations having to abbreviate our important contributions.'

What is potentially being overlooked by consultation organisers is how having NGOs present might impact on critical evaluations of the influence of NGOs themselves on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. It should not be taken for granted that NGOs and Aboriginal peak bodies see eye to eye on a range of issues, and the sensitive issue of setting targets for Closing the Gap may well be such an issue.

National Congress reminds the government that the Redfern Statement Alliance is an excellent framework with which to engage Aboriginal peak bodies. No member of this alliance wants to see its perspectives on Closing the Gap Refresh watered down or diminished by competing organisations.

Our peak organisations are calling for the full attention of the government and an exclusive opportunity to have our voices heard. The government is not meeting its own expectations and working 'differently' by having powerful NGO representatives share this key consultation. We would like this to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

ENDS

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