



The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP

**Minister for Indigenous Australians
Member for Hasluck**

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL APOLOGY TO THE STOLEN GENERATIONS

15 February 2021

Eo&e...

Thank you Mr Speaker.

I want to acknowledge the members of the Stolen Generation, and Indigenous people in this Chamber today, sitting and observing.

To my Parliamentary colleagues who are Indigenous members of this Parliament – thank you for the work that you do, it is important.

I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people who are the traditional custodians of the Canberra area and pay respect to the elders, past and present, of all Indigenous peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures have spanned 65,000 years.

Ours are cultures that care for country – land and water.

They are cultures that are sewn into the fabric of modern day Australia.

And they are cultures that has survived dispossession, disease and disruption.

Today I stand in our National Parliament, like Harry, as a son of a Stolen Generations survivor.

I stand here as the first Aboriginal elected to the House of Representatives, and a first on many other fronts. But I know that my mother would have been proud to have seen me stand in this Chamber.

I see all too often the disadvantage in our communities, the struggles of our people to be heard.

I have spent many hours over many years listening to the men and women of the Stolen Generations, whose experiences left them with indelible memories of the things done to them because of government policy – even well intentioned.

My own mother's story and that of her brothers and sisters affected my approach to life and what I fight for. I have read my grandparents and mothers Native Welfare files that outline the way in which they were controlled and managed by the government and institutions of the day.

On the 13 of February 2008 – Prime Minister Kevin Rudd – stood – at this Dispatch Box – and delivered a formal apology to Australia's Indigenous people, particularly to the Stolen Generations – victims of past government policies of forced child removal and cultural assimilation.

On that day, on behalf of all Australians he said – "I am sorry."

And I associate myself with the comments of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Today those words serve as an important reminder of the journey we have all walked – a significant moment on the path to reconciliation – an acknowledgment of our shared history – the importance of our contribution to this national story.

Following the National Apology came the effort to close the gap.

For over a decade, we saw mixed results – inconsistencies in outcomes and a failure to achieve permanent change.

This is not to detract from the commitment and motivation of former governments in their efforts to close the gap.

Under our Government, we are changing the way in which we work with Indigenous Australians, not just in our efforts to close the gap, but in everything we strive to do.

Our Government is committed to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians – because we know that the best outcomes occur when governments and Indigenous Australians work together.

From the landmark National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the ongoing work to empower Indigenous Australians through the Indigenous Voice co-design process and ongoing work to ensure the economic recovery provides opportunity for our people through skills, jobs and wealth creation.

The Prime Minister has made clear that the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a Whole of Government priority.

The targets and reforms agreed to in the National Agreement require Governments to change the way we work, and we as a Government we are changing the way we do business.

Our Ministers are working together and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver a Commonwealth Implementation Plan that will achieve better life outcomes in partnership with our people.

This includes the work underway to develop the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy – in concert with SNAICC as part of our implementation strategy.

Working in partnership our focus is to ensure young children have access to good quality, culturally safe and accessible care and education services.

This means that when children go to school they will have a better chance of success.

Across all jurisdictions, and with the Peak organisations, there will be shared accountability – and for the first time state and territory governments will need to present on their progress to Closing the Gap.

It is the job of all Australian governments to address Indigenous disadvantage and to implement programmes that contribute to Closing the Gap in all of the key and critical areas.

The Prime Minister will deliver the Commonwealth's Implementation Plan and report on progress we have made against targets, using the Productivity Commission's data review mid-year and it will clearly show:

- how our actions are contributing to achieving Priority Reforms and the targets
- how we are reprioritising and leveraging existing initiatives such as mental health, skills and job creation, to achieve targets and embed the four Priority Reforms
- the new actions we commit to take – actions to bring about the change imagined in the National Agreement

Significant progress is being made. It is about thinking differently.

But there is much more to do.

I again state that our commitment to working in genuine partnership is the foundation for the changes that we need to achieve.

As we implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap we will continue to work closely with our people.

As we continue the co-design of an Indigenous Voice.

There is much we can take from the past as we look to the future.

I ask that we all look at the role we can play in empowering Indigenous Australians, our Elders and Traditional Owners, and work to continue to improve the lives and futures of the next generation of Indigenous people.

And let's continue to walk, side-by-side, as one to reflect, respect and celebrate all that makes us Australian – Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

And I saw that reflected, in one of the recipients, Miriam, who talked about do things with us, walk with us, work with us, listen and then shape the future.

And to all the Stolen Generation members what we want to do is honour what they achieve, acknowledge what happened and ensure that it doesn't happen to future generations, and that is a challenge for every one of us in here.

Because when we are one we are strong.

And when we walk together we have limitless potential.

So I acknowledge in closing, all of those, who are still with us from the Stolen Generation, and to all the Indigenous Australians who aspire to a better future and better opportunities, and their rightful place in every facet of Australian life.

Thank you.

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