



## Senior Indigenous Public Servant Forum

Canberra, 9-11 December 2018

**ANZSOG Summary Report**



## Acknowledgements

ANZSOG acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and First Peoples of Australia and Māori, as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

The 2018 Senior Indigenous Public Servant Forum was held at Old Parliament House, Canberra on the lands of the Ngunnawal people.

Welcome to Country was provided by Ngunnawal Elder Aunty Louise Brown.

The Forum was made possible by the generous financial support of the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the support of the New South Wales and Tasmanian Governments. All other governments contributed the conference through their support for delegations representing the various jurisdictions.

This report was prepared by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) to capture the discussions and themes of the 2018 Indigenous Public Servant Forum (the Forum).

All views in this report are the views of individual delegates provided in their personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views of their Departments or the Australian and New Zealand governments.

ANZSOG acknowledges the artwork of Bigambul artist Jordan Roser commissioned by ANZSOG and used throughout this report.

This report was designed by Reanna Bono, a Wemba Wemba and Wiradjuri woman from Yakuwa Graphic Design.



Left to Right: Professor Ken Smith (Australia and New Zealand School of Government), Professor Ian Anderson (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), Dr Mary Graham (University of Queensland), Phillip McIntosh (Qld Fire and Rescue), Professor Catherine Althaus (Australia and New Zealand School of Government), Sean Choolburra, Craig Ritchie (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) at the opening night dinner.



## Statement of the 2018 Delegates

Yama, Kia Ora, Wominjeka, Kaya, Welcome.

We, the Senior Indigenous Public Servants from across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand represent many Indigenous nations.

We recognise and support the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Treaty processes underway across many Australian jurisdictions. We support the Treaty of Waitangi and the ongoing work to reset Māori-Crown relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are guided by the principles of human rights and specifically the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Valuing First Peoples, our knowledge and ways of being is critical to the success and sustainability of public services across Australia and New Zealand. Our insights can help build a more collaborative, just and trusted public sector, and improve outcomes not just for Indigenous peoples, but for all peoples across Australia and New Zealand.

As Senior Indigenous Public Servants, we are committed to:

- Embedding cultural competence across public services
- Growing stronger networks of Indigenous public servants across jurisdictions
- Developing and supporting more Indigenous leaders in the public service
- Achieving better outcomes for our communities
- Supporting self-determination for communities

To achieve these outcomes, we commit to support our brothers and sisters across jurisdictions, to share best practice, be leaders in our agencies, nurture the development of future leaders, and continue to support our agencies to affect positive change. We are governed by the principles of accountability, inclusion and respect.

# Forum 2018 Summary

## How the Forum began

In December 2017, ANZSOG held the inaugural Indigenous Senior Public Servant Forum in partnership with the Australian Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C). The 65 Delegates from 8 jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand took the opportunity to discuss ways to improve Indigenous representation and retention in the public sector, as well as ways to develop Indigenous leadership through the Senior Executive (SES). A key message from the 2017 Forum was the need for further opportunities for Senior Indigenous public servants to connect and share their experiences, challenges and aspirations. You can read more about these discussions in the [2017 Forum Report](#).

Building on the successes of 2017, and the desire for more opportunities to connect as a group, ANZSOG and PM&C once again partnered to deliver the Forum in 2018. The December 2018 Forum was held on Ngunnawal country at Old Parliament House, Canberra. The Forum grew with more than 78 Delegates attending in 2018, representing all ten jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand. The goal of the 2018 Forum was to strengthen the network of Indigenous public servants and to build on 2017 discussions, with a focus on outcomes and action.



Wendy Ah Chin,  
Department of the Prime  
Minister and Cabinet





Mason Atkinson, Victorian Public Sector Commission and Joanne Borg, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (Qld)

## The 2018 Program

The Forum kicked off with a formal dinner and entertainment from Aboriginal comedian **Sean Choolburra**, reminding us of the motivating power of laughter. The keynote speaker, **Dr Mary Graham**, a Yugambeh Kombu-Merri and Waka Waka woman, and Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Queensland, grounded the Delegates with her cultural and academic wisdom.

The following two days were a mix of presentations and group work, facilitated by **Craig Ritchie** and **Kerry Arabena**. Mr Ritchie is an Aboriginal man of the Dhungutti and Biripi nations and the Chief Executive Officer at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. Professor Arabena is a descendant of the Meriam people from the Torres Strait and was most recently the Chair for Indigenous Health and Director of the Indigenous Health Equity Unit at the University of Melbourne.

Day 1 rounded out with a networking event for delegates and invited guests including the New Zealand High Commissioner to Australia, and long serving senior Minister in New Zealand, **Dame Annette King** on her first day in the job, the Australian Public Service Commissioner, and previous High Commissioner to New Zealand, **Peter Woolcott AO**, ANZSOG Dean and CEO **Professor Ken Smith**, and members of the Australian Public Service Indigenous Champions Network.

The mix of networking, workshops and discussion provided for an enriching and productive meeting for delegates.



Andrew Jackomos,  
Department of Jobs,  
Precincts and Regions (VIC)

**"Everyone here - whether in the mainstream or an Indigenous position - is a champion and agent of change. You can impact and influence programs and policies. You are an agent of change, and as a collective we are strong."**

Andrew Jackomos, Executive Director Aboriginal Executive Development, Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions



Jenni Collard (PM&C)



Samantha Faulkner, National Health and Medical Research Council



## Attracting and retaining Indigenous talent

Delegates identified the need to attract and retain greater numbers of Indigenous employees in the public service, particularly at senior levels. A presentation by **Samantha Faulkner** on her joint research with Julie Lahn, identified the barriers and enablers to Indigenous employment in the Australian Public Service. The findings of this research have now been published in the *Navigating to Senior Leadership in the Australian Public Service* report.

Some of the key enablers identified were:

- informal relationships with mentors and managers
- individual resilience
- the availability of study and development programs and
- affirmative measures.

Barriers included:

- failure to recognise and reward Indigenous skills and leadership styles
- limited progression opportunities in regional areas and
- operational restraints including staffing caps.

The messages resonated with delegates who felt similar barriers and enablers existed in their own jurisdictions.

In terms of next steps, delegates discussed several ways to ensure more enablers and less barriers exist for Indigenous staff in the public service. One delegate noted that we need to rethink the pipeline to attract Indigenous talent to the public service, noting that the private sector has an aggressive recruitment and development strategy in universities, but the public sector is not offering the same opportunities. Another delegate saw the key to change was in high level targets across government, including at the Secretary, CEO or Director General level: “If you have a good Aboriginal person at the top, the rest will follow”.



Lisa Charles, Community Services Directorate (ACT) and  
Rhett Butler, Department of Environment and Science (QLD)

## Building culturally competent workplaces

Central to the discussion of Indigenous employee retention was a dialogue around the cultural competency of the public service. All agencies need to build the cultural competency of their organisation and workforce to ensure Indigenous staff are supported and feel culturally safe. Agencies must also improve the way they work with Indigenous communities. Delegates concurred that the responsibility for the cultural competency of an organisation often rests solely with Indigenous staff, who are expected to perform this role on top of their other work. Another delegate remarked that not all Indigenous staff have cultural competency or feel confident to undertake the role, and that we often leverage the cultural competency and connections of less senior staff. We need to recognise and properly remunerate the cultural competency of these staff members. Delegates agreed that creating a culturally safe and competent workplace is the responsibility of organisations and every manager, not just Indigenous employees.

**Wayne Ngata**, New Zealand Ministry of Education, Raukura, spoke of his experience implementing unconscious bias training in his agency. He emphasised that the path to cultural competency is often about confronting racism in a structured manner, and that the best impact is when non-Indigenous people can see their privilege first hand.

Building the cultural competency of the public service also requires accountability. Several delegates stressed that senior managers must be held individually responsible both for building cultural competency and attracting and retaining Indigenous staff. This accountability can easily be incorporated into performance agreements.



Left: Wayne Ngata,  
Department of Education (NZ)

Right: Carla Dorante-Johnson,  
Department of Employment,  
Small Business and Training (QLD),  
and Shane Holland, Primary  
Industries and Regions (SA)







Jennifer Mar Young, Family and Community Services (NSW)



Marama Edwards, Ministry of Social Development (NZ)

## Developing as leaders

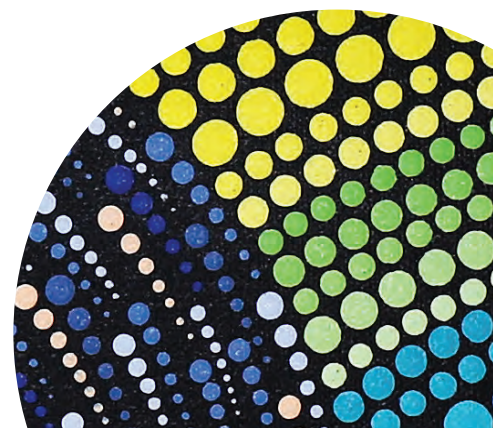
Another key theme that emerged from the Forum was the need for public service agencies to invest more thoughtfully in leadership development for Indigenous staff to ensure they succeed in non-Indigenous institutions. The Forum was considered an avenue where leadership, coaching and mentoring opportunities could be developed for Indigenous public servants.

In addition to discussing ways to succeed through western models of leadership, delegates also turned their minds to the unique leadership approaches and qualities they had as Indigenous peoples. Communication, relationship-building, courage, kindness and excellence were all considered central to Indigenous leadership.

**Marama Edwards**, New Zealand Ministry of Social Development Group General Manager, Community Partnerships and Programmes shared her own leadership journey and recommended delegates:

1. Be bold and courageous
2. Have authentic leadership
3. Always demonstrate love and compassion, don't judge others
4. Take time to build true partnerships, since co-governance means being accountable to each other
5. Come together as Indigenous peoples regularly to share and discuss your experiences and aspirations
6. Build a coalition of the willing of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to drive change in the public service
7. Nurture and develop others to become future leaders.

Delegates noted that non-Indigenous managers could also learn a lot from Indigenous leadership approaches.







Claire Beattie, Department of Education (NSW) and Patrick Chapman, Education Directorate (ACT)

## Indigenising the public service

In addition to recognising the unique offerings of Indigenous approaches to leadership, delegates felt the public service could learn much from Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. This message was particularly strong in **Dr Mary Graham's** keynote address at the Forum dinner. Dr Graham compared the values underlying British, French, Chinese, Australian and Indigenous governance models. She recommended the Australian Government:

1. "Put policy making regarding all aspects of Aboriginal affairs in the hands of Aboriginal people – the analysis of it, the planning, design, creation, operationalising, testing and monitoring of it. There should be a permanent dialogue or forum with Australians and the government to facilitate peaceful relations while making policies."
2. "Aboriginalise the Australian public service by incorporating Aboriginal values into and alongside the APS values, and within the training, examination methods and operations of the APS. Doing so will lift the conventional, administrative system out of the prosaic into the knowledgeable, mature and cultured."

Embedding Indigenous values and approaches across the public service can help build organisations that are culturally competent, innovative and serve communities to deliver better public value.

As a direct result of these discussions at the Forum, ANZSOG prepared a submission to the APS Review in May 2019 titled *Indigenous Values for the APS* which proposed casting an Indigenous cultural lens over the APS Act.





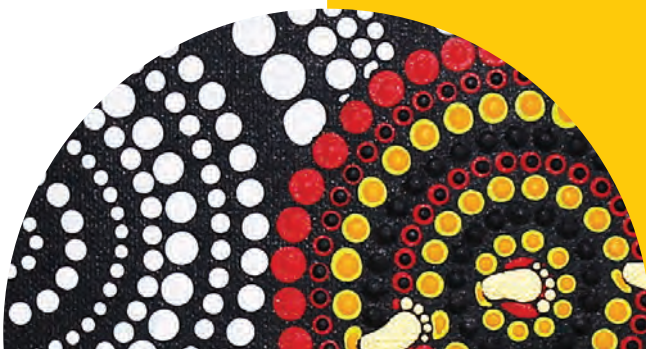
Paula Dixon, Land  
Information New Zealand

## Recommendations

The recommendations are intended explicitly for the heads of the Public Service Commissions, State Service Commission, and all public service Departments and Agencies across Australia and New Zealand. Many of these Agencies already have existing strategies, targets or plans for increasing Indigenous employment, developing Indigenous staff, and building culturally inclusive workplaces. Despite these strategies, delegates agreed public services still have a long way to go, and both collective and individual responsibility are required to set more ambitious targets and actively work to achieve them. Agencies must develop clearer implementation plans and agree standards to continuously monitor and measure success.

The public service commissions across Australia, the New Zealand State Services Commissions and other agencies should actively:

1. **Support Networks:** resource and support opportunities for cross-jurisdictional collaboration among Indigenous public servants, including the Forum
2. **Develop Leaders:** invest in leadership development for all Indigenous SES and executive staff demonstrating potential to progress to the SES
3. **Increase Representation:** set targets equalling at least population parity for Indigenous representation at all levels and across all agencies, including Secretaries, CEOs and SES and to take steps to achieve targets that have not been met
4. **Hold Individuals Accountable:** require all SES (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to demonstrate how they have attracted and retained Indigenous staff through Key Performance Indicators in their performance agreements
5. **Build Culturally Competent Workforces:** include cultural competency as selection criteria for new positions, and support and reward the cultural competence of existing staff.





## Next Steps

ANZSOG is committed to working with its owner governments to realise the recommendations from the 2018 Forum.

Our priorities for the next 12 months are to:

1.

**Connect** all Forum delegates across jurisdictions through an online platform - to network, share information, mentor, provide collegial support, develop 'change champions' and for ANZSOG to provide virtual support as required

2.

**Develop** the capability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous public servants through our education programs to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous communities

3.

**Work** with governments to *invest* in the leadership development of senior Indigenous public servants through tailored programs including future Forums

4.

**Inspire** governments to create professional development opportunities for middle management Indigenous public servants to participate in ANZSOG programs



Dr Mary Graham,  
University of Queensland

Visit [www.anzsog.edu.au](http://www.anzsog.edu.au) for more information regarding upcoming ANZSOG events and programs, and to also access the February 2019 *Reimagining Public Administration: First Peoples, governance and new paradigms* post conference resources.



