

FUNDING FIRST NATIONS BENEFITS ALL OF AUSTRALIA



The recent release of 10 recommendations tabled in a Commonwealth report “The engagement of traditional owners in the economic development of northern Australia, urged governments to outlay long-term funding agreements to help Traditional Owners engage in and benefit from economic opportunities and development.

Since the Native Title Act 1993 was established, Native title holders are legally forced to form a Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) to hold their native title rights and interests. To meaningfully exercise their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as endorsed by Australia in the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, the National Native Title Council (NNTC) has long pushed for Prescribed Body Corporates (PBCs) to be adequately funded and resourced by the Commonwealth and states.

“Supporting the development of a strong and sustainable PBC sector is a strategic intention of the NNTC” says Gundjitmara Djabwurrung man and NNTC CEO, Jamie Lowe. “PBCs have been chronically underfunded over the past 30 years, with 70% of PBCs having little or no income or funding.”

Working with the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University, the NNTC has developed a model for a PBC Future Fund that would provide annual funding to PBCs and support their rights to protect cultural heritage, as well as fulfill other statutory obligations set out under national and state based legislative frameworks.

Under a nation (re)building approach that supports local decision-making, “PBCs do not just require Commonwealth funding – they require ongoing and secure annual funding to use as individual PBCs decide” argues Mr Lowe.

Australia needs a sustainable PBC sector. With Native Title expected to cover 60% of Australia, strong and well-funded PBCs are vital for unlocking the economic potential of native title lands and waters, while protecting and strengthening Indigenous rights and knowledge; agreement making with various sectors including extractive industries, and developing Australia’s infrastructure.

With flow on economic effects that will aid in the development of strong and robust regional and transitioning economies, such as climate change responses and renewable industries, a well-funded PBC sector can build resilient and diverse regional economies for their communities, that will ultimately benefit all Australians.

END

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country on the lands on which we work, and we pay our respects to Elders past and present.

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