

12 December 2025

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601

Via: haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/national-statement-first-nations

Re: National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper on the National Statement on First Nations in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Skills Insight acknowledges the importance of the National Statement to be driven by, and to meet the needs of, First Nations people, communities, organisations and businesses. Skills Insight prioritises working with the guidance of First Nations people, enterprises, organisations and industries, and stands ready to respond to the direction provided by any National Statement.

Introduction

Skills Insight Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) represents Australia's agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries – sectors that directly employ more than 667,800 workers (5% of the national workforce) with industry revenue of more than \$240 billion.

JSC responsibilities include contributing to Closing the Gap targets, and Skills Insight has been building relationships with First Nations stakeholders since the JSC program's inception, building on work undertaken by our organisational predecessor. Effective Closing the Gap outcomes require moving beyond consultation models to recognise First Nations people and communities as economic leaders and partners, not merely participants to be engaged.

The agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries are integral to First Nations communities and cultural connections to Country, as well as forming the backbone of regional, rural and remote communities. They provide jobs and underpin social cohesion, local service continuity and community identity. Their reach extends far beyond direct employment: they generate flow-on economic activity for small businesses, schools, transport, and health services.

The prosperity, security and resilience of all Australians also depend on these industries. They ensure national food security, environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation, biosecurity, and sovereign capability. They are also foundational to the development of other national priority industries, such as construction and aged care, through the provision of basic building materials and food sources. In times of global instability or disruption in particular, these enterprises provide the foundation that protects Australia's supply chains and communities, demonstrating that their national significance far outstrips their total job numbers.

First Nations voices to drive the statement

It is important that First Nations voices drive the development of the statement. This requires genuine leadership roles in determining policy direction, beyond consultation. Industry leadership expectations must include First Nations approaches and knowledge systems, with incentives designed to develop and recognise this expertise as fundamental to closing employment and economic gaps. First Nations approaches and systems will also assist to develop innovative, sustainable and appropriate actions, delivering better outcomes.

The First Nations Economic Empowerment Alliance, working with the Coalition of Peaks, should be central to the National Statement, and can bring important guidance on the underlying principles of economic leadership and partnership that will need to be included in an effective National Statement. The Discussion Paper highlights the role of the Coalition of Peaks.

Skills Insight works with a range of First Nations people, enterprises, organisation and communities that should be engaged in developing the National Statement, including:

- First Nations Workers Alliance,
- Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation,
- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)
- The Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group
- North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)
- Indigenous Desert Alliance
- The Land Councils
- Rangers groups and Peaks
- Aboriginal Sea Company
- The Aboriginal owned and controlled RTOs and other bodies working in these areas

Other observations

The Discussion Paper has identified the key issues associated with the development of a National Statement, in particular the need for change and clarity relating to land and water rights, First Nations Intellectual Property and knowledge-sharing, and access to investment.

A National Statement should include a focus on the removal of barriers, especially those which impede productivity and innovation. A National Statement should also include statements committing to the inclusion of Murru Waaruu Principles¹, summarised as:

“The Murru waaruu process calls for a paradigm shift in First Nations economic policy. Governments must move away from a legacy of social policies directed at First Nations welfare and simple mainstream industry participation, to a strategic commitment to policy underpinning sustainable First Nations wealth creation. First Nations peoples must be seen as capable and competent economic partners with unique knowledge and assets, not as passive recipients.” (excerpt from the Executive Summary)

In 2025, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations completed a project working with Ninti One to develop cultural safety products for the clean energy industry.² While some of these are specific to that industry, the products are excellent guides which can already be used by other industries, or which could be adapted for use in agriculture, fisheries and forestry. They include guidance for employers and training delivery organisations.

A potential solution could be built around a different form of investment that provides rapid access. This may take the form of investment into organisational vehicles similar to shareholdings, that provide dividends and returns, but where shareholders have no access to influence governance or operational decisions. This may allow competition against major entities.

We are happy to provide any additional information that might be of assistance. Please contact Geoff Barbaro, Executive Manager, Industry Skills Policy via email geoff@skillsinsight.com.au or phone 0433 10 10 45.

Yours sincerely,



Dugald Murray

CEO, Skills Insight Jobs and Skills Council

¹ ANU, 2024, available at <https://firstnationsalliance.org.au/resources/>

² Available at <https://www.nintione.com.au/first-nations-engagement-in-the-transition-to-net-zero/>