

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH
5 April 2022
Response to Ministerial Statement:
ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement

The ACT Government is a proud partner in both the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 (ACT Agreement).

Minister Stephen-Smith is tabling the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement Impact Statement 2021. This is the first impact statement which measures the ACT's performance against both Agreements.

I thank Minister Stephen-Smith for tabling the first Annual Impact Statement for the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028.

The ACT Agreement and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap are an important demonstration of partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There is strong alignment between the priorities identified in the new Closing the Gap Agreement and the focus areas of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028.

This represents important work that must be done across Government agencies, across jurisdictions, and across our entire community to address the ongoing harms caused by colonisation and institutional racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The ACT Government has established the \$20 million Healing and Reconciliation Fund to be administered in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to deliver on the priorities identified through the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement.

The Healing and Reconciliation Fund was a Labor election commitment at the 2020 Election, and I am so pleased that we are delivering this commitment in Government.

As the Agreements represent genuine partnership in identifying problems and solutions, the Healing and Reconciliation Fund will represent genuine partnership with the community in driving this work forward.

The Healing and Reconciliation Fund will be administered in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and address priorities identified by the community.

Treaty has been identified as one of the priorities for the Fund. I was pleased to see the Chief Minister, Minister Stephen-Smith and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council announce the appointment of Professor Kerry Arabena as a facilitator for early treaty conversations.

A treaty process represents an enormous opportunity for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and I am pleased to see the community taking these first important steps in this long process.

Treaty supports many of the focus areas of the ACT Agreement, including the core areas of Cultural Integrity and Inclusive Community, as well as having potential for broad benefits across the areas of Economic Participation, Health and Wellbeing, Housing, Justice.

Successful partnerships are built on trust. Governments and institutions in Australia cannot take the trust of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for granted, it must be earned and when won it must be respected.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was a momentous expression of reconciliation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I am pleased that Labor is committed to the Uluru Statement. In the ACT, we have a democratically elected voice to Government enshrined in legislation - the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elected body. And the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement is a tangible demonstration of the value this brings.

As the Annual Impact Statement demonstrates, while we are seeing progress in some areas, there is more to be done to close the gap and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their process of healing.

With the early stages of Treaty discussions getting underway, the development of a Healing and Reconciliation Fund, and a real commitment to doing things differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, I am hopeful of real progress over coming years.