

Questionnaire to Governments

The report of the fourteenth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues provides a number of recommendations within its mandated areas, some of which are addressed to Member States.

The Secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues invites Governments to complete the attached short questionnaire on any action taken or planned in response to the Permanent Forum's recommendations and other relevant issues. All the questionnaire responses from Governments will be compiled into one report for the fifteenth session of the Permanent Forum.

Please submit your completed questionnaire by **4 January 2016** to:

Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Division for Social Policy and Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Room: S-2954
United Nations Headquarters
New York, USA 10017
Telephone number 917-367-5100; fax number 917- 367-5102
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The questionnaire can also be downloaded from this site:

<http://undesadspd.org/IndigenousPeoples/UNPFISessions/Fifteenth/Questionnaire.aspx>

Question 1

Briefly state what recommendations from the Fourteenth Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII)¹ or recommendations from previous sessions (not included in your previous reports) that have been addressed by your Government. Where possible, also provide information on the situation of indigenous women.

Australia's previous response to the questionnaire for the 14th Session of the UNPFII, comprehensively outlined policy and programme initiatives for Indigenous Australians, in line with the aspirations of the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, the Outcome Document of the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples and addressing recommendations in the Report on the 13th Session of the UNPFII.

In this response, Australia provides new and updated information relating to specific thematic recommendations from the Report of the 14th Session.

Self-harm and suicide among children and young people – paragraphs 14 and 18

Australia welcomes the Permanent Forum's focus on approaches to addressing self-harm and suicide among indigenous children and youth, recognizing the devastation this causes in indigenous communities.

Internationally, Australia will support work in this area by sharing research, experiences of programme delivery and the development of best practice with relevant United Nations bodies and fora, such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Domestically, Australia is assessing evidence based approaches to address self-harm and suicide in Indigenous communities, including approaches which specific focus on culturally appropriate measures. The Australian Government is supporting research into self-harm and suicide among children and young people, with a view to incorporate findings into broader support services for Indigenous Australians.

Examples of current initiatives include:

- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy which aims to reduce the cause, prevalence and impact of suicide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, their families and communities. The Strategy encompasses the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' holistic view of mental health, physical,

¹ The following paragraphs of the Report on the Fourteenth Session of the Permanent Forum (E/2015/43) contain recommendations addressed to Member States: 6, 8, 10, 13, 18, 22, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 40, 41.

cultural and spiritual health and has an early intervention focus that works to build strong communities through more community-focused and integrated approaches to suicide prevention. The Strategy commits the Australian Government to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop local, culturally appropriate strategies.

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group has been asked to revise the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, including a focus on culturally appropriate approaches to mental illness. The Framework's revision is at an advanced stage.
- As outlined in the response to the Questionnaire for the 2014 Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Australian Government has funded the University of Western Australia to evaluate the effectiveness of existing suicide prevention strategies for Indigenous Australians. This project is ongoing and the findings will be reported to the Australian Government in early 2016.
- Australia's Report of the National Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services, released in April 2015, included strategic directions and recommendations about suicide and suicide prevention, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- In 2015 Australia launched the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan. The Implementation Plan outlines actions, including regarding mental health, improving the patient journey, and making the health system more culturally safe and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to be taken by the Australian Government in collaboration with the Aboriginal community controlled health sector and other key stakeholders.

Food Security – paragraph 28

Australia is working to support food security in remote communities by ensuring that stores in remote areas offer healthy options and implement good retail practices with the broader objective of improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Community Stores Licensing scheme regulates community stores to ensure a reasonable ongoing level of access to a range of healthy food, drink and grocery items that is reasonably priced, safe and sufficient quantity and quality to meet nutritional and related household needs in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities.

Australia is also supporting traditional land management practices, such as northern Australia. Savanna fire management projects demonstrate valuable co-benefits such as improving biodiversity; community health; food and water security; reinvigorating cultural and social traditions; enhancing human capital; and strengthening capacity to adapt to climate change.

Human Rights – paragraph 33

The Australian Government will continue to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to enjoy all the human rights and opportunities available to all Australians.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is an advocate for the rights of Australia's Indigenous peoples and promotes the respect and understanding of these rights among the broader community.

In 2015 a new Human Rights Commissioner was appointed to defend universal, individual human rights. The Commissioner has focused on preserving a legal environment and culture that values free speech, religious freedom, free association and property rights. In addition the Commissioner has specifically focused on removing impediments that stop the ability of Indigenous Australians to use their land for economic development.

Support for Indigenous women's safety – general information

Australia supports the Permanent Forum's continued focus on indigenous women as a group vulnerable to high levels of disadvantage, including violence. The Australian Government has made addressing and preventing Indigenous domestic and family violence a priority.

The Australian Government recently announced a \$100 million Women's Safety Package. All initiatives funded as part of the Package will support Indigenous women experiencing violence. As for all women, Indigenous women will be supported to be safer in their homes and to be better able to access mainstream legal services. Additional support will be provided for frontline workers, such as medical professionals, police and emergency workers.

The Australian Government is also strongly focused on investing in activities that will prevent violence through changing perpetrator behaviour.

This Package provides \$21 million for activities specifically targeted to Indigenous families, including:

- support for police to better respond to calls for help in remote Indigenous communities,
- extending and expanding support for services that work to change the offending behaviour of perpetrators; and
- developing targeted support measures for at-risk young Indigenous mothers.

This is in addition to the Australian Government's existing commitment through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to reduce Indigenous family violence, which includes funding for:

- family violence prevention legal services;
- alcohol, drug and substance misuse prevention and treatment;
- support to states and territories to improve remote policing; and

- projects that specifically aim to reduce offending and reoffending, including prisoner rehabilitation services.

Question 2

What are some of the obstacles your Government has encountered in implementing the recommendations of the Permanent Forum?

Australia has taken the recommendations of the Permanent Forum under serious consideration, and is committed to achieving the ends of both the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Outcome Document of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples.

The Australian Government recognises the significant challenge that remains and will continue the commitment to a long-term agenda of equality of opportunity for all Australians. The underlying complex nature of Indigenous disadvantage calls for policies and programmes which are supportive of enduring change.

Question 3

What are some of the factors that facilitate your Government's implementation of the recommendations of the Permanent Forum?

The Australian Government seeks to engage and work in partnership with Australia's First Peoples in the facilitation of initiatives echoing the recommendations of the Permanent Forum. Engagement and partnership is a factor in increasing positive outcomes and opportunities.

Question 4

The theme of the Permanent Forum's fifteenth session in 2016 will be "Indigenous peoples: conflict, peace and resolution".

Briefly state how your Government deals with this issue in regards to indigenous peoples?

The Australian Government believes that recognition will acknowledge the long and enduring history of Indigenous peoples, as the original occupants of Australia, and the integral place of the first peoples in the life of this nation.

Australia is progressing towards a referendum to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in our Constitution. A successful referendum would be a unifying moment for the nation.

On 5 March 2015, the Australian Parliament passed an extension to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2013* for a further three years until 2018. The Act of

Recognition demonstrates the Parliament's commitment to acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique and special place in Australia's history.

On 6 July 2015 the Australian political leaders held a bipartisan meeting with 40 Indigenous leaders to discuss next steps to progress constitutional recognition.

On 7 December 2015 the creation of a Referendum Council was announced. The Council will lead national consultations on reconciliation, including a series of Indigenous-designed and led consultations. The Council comprises sixteen Australians, and includes eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and eight non-Indigenous Members. Eight members are women; eight are men. Members have a range of backgrounds and bring diverse experience and expertise.

The Council will advise Australia's Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on progress and next steps towards a successful referendum. On 14 December 2015 the Referendum Council held its first meeting.

The Government has continued to fund the 'Recognise' campaign, led by Reconciliation Australia in 2015-16 to enhance public awareness and support for Indigenous constitutional recognition. Recognition can acknowledge the past, and affirm commitment to a future built on true reconciliation.

Question 5

Please provide information on how your Government currently promotes and/or implements the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Australia has supported the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples since 2009 and regularly reports on overall actions taken to give effect to the Declaration.

Australia's support for the aims of the Declaration is evident from the scope and focus of its Indigenous affairs policies and programmes. Clear priorities have been set to ensure efforts are effectively targeted. These priorities are education, which has a positive impact on the future success of individuals, families and communities; increasing employment, economic development and social participation; and healthy and safe homes and communities, particularly focusing on addressing violence against Indigenous women and children.

Examples of specific initiatives are provided below, including the internationally focused Indigenous Peoples Strategy and action promoting the respect and use of traditional land management practices.

International Support for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Australia's Indigenous Peoples Strategy supports indigenous peoples through foreign affairs, trade policy and development objectives. Through this initiative Australia is putting its support for Indigenous Australians, and the Declaration, into practice at the international level.

In building people-to-people links and economic cooperation between Australia and the world, opportunities that benefit Indigenous Australians will be sought. Australia will work with its partners, such as foreign governments, international and regional organisations, to influence international policy to advance the interests of indigenous peoples in the international community. In the administration of international programs for foreign policy, trade, aid and economic diplomacy, Australia will ensure that wherever relevant programs strive to improve outcomes for indigenous peoples and follow international best-practice.

A number of Australian Government programmes are dedicated to supporting the development of networks and relationships that facilitate knowledge exchange, understanding and cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and between Indigenous Australians and their counterparts in the international community.

The Australian Government will assess and disseminate lessons from its work to contribute towards evidence and debate about issues affecting indigenous peoples, both in Australia and overseas.

Support for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices for sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment

‘Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment’

Annex - UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Australia supports initiatives that build on Indigenous traditional knowledge and practices in managing land and sea country and is sharing this knowledge internationally to assist other Indigenous peoples in their management of their environments.

Through the World Network of Indigenous and Local Community Land and Sea Managers (WIN), Indigenous people are sharing their knowledge and practices in managing ecosystems, protecting the environment and supporting sustainable livelihoods. Traditional Owners in the north Kimberley region of Australia are hosting forum discussions and providing a video resource through the WIN’s online platform to demonstrate how they are using Australia’s Savannah Fire Management methodology to develop carbon businesses.

Indigenous peoples have historically employed customary burning practice to manage the savanna regions of tropical northern Australia. Experiences in northern Australia show that these practices can limit the scale and intensity of late dry season fires and reduce emissions of the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change.

Preliminary studies have shown that the conditions necessary to establish savanna fire management projects are available in regions with similar savanna landscapes and traditional management practices, including sub-Saharan Africa and South America. There is potential for

Australia's Savannah Fire Management methodology and project experience to be applied by interested developing countries.

In addition, under Australia's Carbon Farming Initiative, the high rainfall Savanna Fire Management is an approved methodology which allows Indigenous communities and farmers to generate carbon credits. The credits can then be sold to Australian companies to offset their emissions. Indigenous communities are reducing emissions and generating sustainable incomes through the Australian carbon market by applying the methodology.

Question 6

Does your national statistics agency or a similar public entity collect disaggregated statistical data about indigenous peoples? If so, please provide practical information on how to access this information (i.e. website address, publications or other sources of information).

Australia's national statistics agency, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), conducts national surveys including of Indigenous Australians. These surveys include the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS).

The ABS also collects a range of other data on social and economic indicators, including through the national Census of Population and Housing, and publishes information disaggregated by Indigenous status when the data is of sufficient quality to publish. The data from these collections can be accessed via the ABS website (www.abs.gov.au).

The Australian Institute of Health Welfare (AIHW) is a national agency that provides information and statistics on Australia's health and welfare, including a range of data sources and reports disaggregated by Indigenous status. The information the AIHW collects, analyses and reports is drawn chiefly from hospitals, health services, community services and housing assistance services. This information can be found on the AIHW website (www.aihw.gov.au).

The Australian Government supports a range of national reporting mechanisms that include data and analysis disaggregated by Indigenous status, drawing on these data sources from the ABS and AIHW and other sources. One such example is the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework* (HPF) biennial report series (since 2006) which has been developed to inform policy and planning in Indigenous health. The HPF report presents a high level summary of data, research and policy analysis for 68 performance measures across three tiers:

- health status and outcomes;
- determinants of health including socioeconomic and behavioural factors; and
- health system performance.

The HPF draws on over 60 existing national datasets including Census, surveys, and administrative datasets including hospital and mortality data. The HPF also synthesises the research literature from over 400 articles and reports. The policy implications of this evidence is then analysed and summarised. THE HPF 2014 report can be accessed here:

<http://www.dpmc.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/publication/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-performance-framework-2014-report>

The Australian Government's Productivity Commission also produces a number of regular reports that collate information relating to Indigenous Australians. These reports include the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report, the Indigenous Expenditure report and the Report on Government Services. These and other reports relating to Indigenous Australians can be found on the Productivity Commission website (www.pc.gov.au)

Question 7

The outcome document of the 2014 World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (A/RES/69/2) invites the UN system to "...to support the implementation, upon request, of national action plans, strategies or other measures to achieve the ends of the..." UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (paragraph 32).

Please provide information on how the UN system (at all levels) could best support your Government's efforts to achieve the ends of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As per paragraph 42 of the Report of the 14th session of the UNPFII, Australia supports the reform of the UNPFII in order to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency, including through a reduction in the number and specific targeting of recommendations.

In general, Australia supports further clarity, and less duplication, in the work and recommendations of the UNPFII and other fora such as the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Australia welcomes discussion of the matter at future sessions.

Reducing duplication between United Nations indigenous issues fora would enable clearer and more specific reporting on progress.