

NSW involvement in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings 2007 and 2008

Introduction

In May 2007, Aboriginal women delegates from around Australia met in Adelaide for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering.

The Gathering is held each year to consider issues of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Recommendations made at the Gathering are then presented to the Australian and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women, which is held annually to discuss issues affecting the status of women.

At the Ministers' most recent meeting in August 2007, in Hobart, delegates from the Gathering presented recommendations concerning the economic status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and particularly ways of increasing business opportunities for Aboriginal women.

Ministers' Resolutions

After a discussion at the meeting about the recommendations, the Ministers agreed to give priority within their own portfolios, in 2008, to the development of a national resource kit for Aboriginal women. This is to include information on existing programs to support Aboriginal women's businesses, and programs that facilitate economic independence and enhance employment and training opportunities.

The Ministers also agreed to send the Gathering's recommendations to the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, so they can be considered during that Council's development of a national Policy Framework for Indigenous Economic Development.

The Ministers expressed their gratitude to the delegates for their recommendations, and their appreciation for the vital leadership roles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women play in their communities.

A full summary of the Gathering's recommendations and the response of the NSW Minister for Women can be found over the page.

In 2007, NSW representatives were Neita Scott from Narromine, Bronwyn Penrith from Sydney, Leah Armstrong from Newcastle, and Cheryl Orr from Sydney.

2008 Gathering

In early 2008, the NSW Office for Women will be calling for expressions of interest/nominations from the community to attend the 2008 Gathering, which will be held in Hobart. Each year, four women from each State Government and Territory, and

four chosen by the Commonwealth Government attend the Gathering. NSW invites the Aboriginal women who are on the NSW Premier's Council for Women, and interested women from the community.

Topics from Gatherings in recent years have been:

- Aboriginal women and leadership;
- Domestic and family violence;
- Community-led solutions to family and domestic violence; and
- The economic status of Aboriginal women, especially business opportunities.

In 2008 the topics for the Gathering are safety and wellbeing, and housing and homelessness.

If you think you might be interested in being a delegate to the 2008 Gathering, please contact the Office for Women for further information.

2007 Gathering Recommendations

The 2007 Gathering recommended to Ministers that the Offices for Women:

- Develop a resource kit, identifying public and private programs to help Aboriginal women with business development
- Establish an Aboriginal women's business network, including a register of women's businesses to be used for government tenders, and identify organisations to act as brokers
- Ensure affordable, culturally appropriate training courses are available including those for small businesses
- Develop affordable low-interest business loans for Aboriginal women
- Get access to mentors for Aboriginal women in business
- Identify Aboriginal women with business experience who can help develop policy on economic independence
- Develop a package to build the capacity of Aboriginal women in the areas of employment, assets and wealth management, include awareness programs to promote economic independence, and provide a list of funded programs which assist economic independence
- Research the impact of industrial relations laws on Aboriginal women
- Provide information on the new Commonwealth Structured Training and Employment projects
- Increase support for Aboriginal women in senior and leadership positions in the private and public sectors
- Recognise the contribution of Aboriginal women pursuing further education and employment and investigate opportunities for bridging courses to assist Aboriginal women to gain employment and qualifications
- Encourage agencies to include targets for Aboriginal women in tenders and contracts
- Encourage Aboriginal women through mentoring, traineeships and more on-the job training programs
- Develop programs about goal setting and self-esteem for girls and young women.

NSW response

The NSW Minister for Women, the Hon Verity Firth MP, strongly supported the joint Ministers' response. She committed the NSW Office for Women to working with the other jurisdictions to develop the national resource kit. She noted that there are a number of excellent programs already within NSW that have the potential to contribute to improved economic outcomes for Aboriginal women, and that the development of a national resource kit will provide a great way to make information about these programs more accessible.

For example:

- NSW already has a Directory of Aboriginal Business and Employment Programs. That, plus information on programs/services listed below, will be provided for the national resource kit:
 - Department of State and Regional Development programs for Women in Business, Aboriginal Business, and Aboriginal Youth Business, which include group training sessions, mentoring, network sessions, and expert assistance for specific industries.
 - Office for Women programs for girls, including *SistaSpeak*, which is specifically for Aboriginal girls.
 - information on industrial relations issues, developed by the NSW Office for Industrial Relations, which is available at www.oir.nsw.gov.au.
 - fact sheets and other resources, funded by Office for Women and developed by the Inner City Legal Service, to help disadvantaged women understand their employment rights.
 - vocational education and training for Aboriginal offenders in correctional centres across NSW, provided through a memorandum of understanding between TAFE NSW and the Department of Corrective Services.
- NSW also has a series of policies and strategies designed to improve economic outcomes for Aboriginal people including women such as:
 - The NSW Government's *Making It Our Business*, an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, which aims to increase Aboriginal employment, professional training, and career development opportunities within the NSW public sector.
 - The *New Partners-New Learning NSW* training strategy, which aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in apprenticeships and traineeships.
 - The *Aboriginal Participation in Construction: Implementation Guidelines*, which encourage the participation of Aboriginal people and business in NSW Government contracting arrangements. The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs is working with the Department of Education and Training and NSW Health to broaden the use of the guidelines to include school cleaning, catering contracts, and maintenance.
- The NSW Government celebrates achievements in the areas of Aboriginal employment, business development and education via initiatives such as:
 - the Aboriginal Employment and Business Awards, which are held every two years.
 - the annual TAFE NSW Aboriginal Awards, which recognise the outstanding achievements of Aboriginals students, staff and programs.

- Incentive Scholarships for Aboriginal students in secondary school, provided by the NSW Aboriginal Education Council.
- NSW Office for Women's *Aboriginal Women in Leadership* lunch, held in 2006, to promote the achievements of Aboriginal women in leadership, and to support their further development.
- Other initiatives which will promote opportunities for the further development of Aboriginal women in leadership positions include:
 - The representation of Aboriginal women on the NSW Premier's Council for Women. The Office for Women has recently called for expressions of interest from women, particularly Aboriginal women, to be members of this influential policy development body in NSW.
 - An Aboriginal women's leadership workshop for women aged 18-35 years, to be piloted during 2008. The Office for Women is currently developing a proposal for this workshop.
 - Specific business training/development programs for Aboriginal women. The Department of State and Regional Development has agreed to work with the Office for Women, in 2008, to identify such programs.

Tell us what you think!

If you would like to find out more about:

- the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering;
- the recommendations made at the 2007 Gathering;
- how to become a delegate to the 2008 Gathering; or
- the NSW Premier's Council for Women,

contact Shelley Booth at the Office for Women on 9228 3141 or ofw@dpc.nsw.gov.au.