

# TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

## HELEN WILLIAMS ORATION | JODY BROUN

### **Jody Broun (Keynote speaker)**

Chief Executive Officer  
National Indigenous Australians Agency

### **Caroline Hughes (Welcome to Country)**

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

### **Amanda Story (Vote of Thanks)**

Partner, Government Leader  
Canberra MinterEllison

### **Natalie James (Host)**

Secretary  
Department of Employment and Workforce Relations

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Enquiries should be directed to Caroline Walsh on 0413 139 427 or at [caroline.walsh@act.IPAAa.org.au](mailto:caroline.walsh@act.IPAAa.org.au)

CAROLINE HUGHES:

[Indigenous language] IPAA ACT keynote speaker Jody Broun CEO of NIAA, members of MinterEllison, hello, good evening, everyone. I'm really honoured to be here this afternoon or this evening. And look at the brain trust around us, all these amazing women in this room and imagine what can be done with all of these wonderful beings coming together in solidarity. So really, really proud to be here. So [Indigenous language] in the spirit of wellbeing and coming together I'd like to acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here with us this evening, and of course our many non-indigenous friends. You are our allies and we need you. I am one of many Ngunnawal elders that have the privilege and responsibility to provide ceremonial practises on our lands, and that includes welcome to country. And it is my absolute honour to be with you to welcome you to Ngunnawal Country for the Helen Williams oration and to listen to Jody this evening.

This is a topic close to my heart, women in leadership. As a woman and female leader, I've had to overcome great diversity in my time. That includes lateral violence, tall poppy syndrome, which is alive and well here in Australia, imposter syndrome, discrimination as an aboriginal female, and constantly battling every day against the odds just to achieve what some men can expect as a matter of course. An example is when I was a young mother returning to work after the birth of my second child. I had applied for a role that I had great experience acting in prior to my maternity leave. I applied for that role in an ongoing capacity but was not successful. There were many reasons behind that that I felt that I had injustice around that, so I sought other opportunities. So, I thought I could apply for leave without pay for 12 months to undertake an acting management role in another agency to build my skills for next time. I was told by the HR director that like her I had made a choice in life.

Hers was to be a focused career woman, and mine was to be a mother. I couldn't do both. I've proved her wrong. Change is inevitable whether we like it or not. We can try to remain in the same routine, but nature and faith have ways of pushing us to do things differently. We often hear people say, "I do not like change" yet every day we make choices that are foisted on us. A different route to work due to roadblock blockages is an example. A big example lately around the ACT, isn't it? As humans, we can be the driving force though of our destinies, or we can allow it like the roadblocks to be foisted on us, yet it is certain to happen and cannot be prevented or avoided. One creature that I love is butterflies. They are the truest representation of change, transforming from the caterpillar to achieve the beautiful wings of the butterfly. And for Ngunnawal, the butterfly represents change, transformation, comfort, hope, and positivity. And another one that

we don't think about much with the butterfly is bravery.

Change is transpiring and brave, forces are at work to ensure our successes and if we can help others in the element of growth to build and evolve, how amazing that feeling is. One of the things I love in life is seeing others achieve their dreams. Seeing the light in another person's eyes is the most powerful thing that you can achieve. Yeah, our pay packet is important it helps us get by but seeing the love and care that you get from somebody else achieving what they never ever thought they could achieve is incredible. And we all know the words of the great Nelson Mandela and they are always with me no matter what I do in life or where I am, and that is education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Critical words in this time and place for my people and all people. And I of all people understand the critical role as fellow humans we have in providing the salient ingredient for individuals to create their own successes. As leaders, males, and females, we have a responsibility to encourage, support and allow others to grow.

This can only lead to the success of society and as such our nation, and that is what makes us powerful as leaders. And in order to understand that I will tell you a little more of my story, but I need to start before my time. And that is because to get to where I am to today, others have led that way. They provided me with the spiritual, cultural, and physical sustenance to want more and dare to be more. I was born and raised in the sixties and seventies, a time of freedom, free love and civil rights movements, political protests, and a deep emerging profound change to societal norms. Yet as an aboriginal baby, I was automatically when I was born a ward of the state. And throughout my life my aboriginality was perceived by others to be a deterrent to be employed, let alone have success, and my voice was often unheard. This period meant for many and particularly my own family that changes to the old ways of doing, changes to fashion and music that horrified the older generations of that time.

And I fear that I've now become those older generations listening to certain music on the radio. So, I wanted you to know that because as a child growing up, school was a place that I dreaded and where I was horribly bullied, and it left an indelible imprint in my mind that has never ever left me. And a place of haven for me was the library, it was a place where I could hide from the bullies. And at that time reading for me was a terrible chore, but the dreaded librarian had a rule when you were in her library, you must be reading. So, one lunchtime, I again sought refuge in the library. I was hiding behind the stacks, and I could see that librarian coming towards me as I hid behind those stacks, and I grabbed the very first book near my head that I could grab. And do you know what that book was? Narnia. I fell in love. My very first

love and I love today to read. Those books became my safe place and the gateway for my imagination to run freely. I could take them anywhere.

And today I have a Kindle so of course they go everywhere with me, a whole library of books. I finished year 10 with very poor results because apparently reading romantic novels weren't enough to improve my literacy and numeracy levels. My early work years, I stacked timber in a timber wood mill, a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, and I stand here today because of TAFE. The TAFE sector was the pivotal turning point for my life when I was 20, but I went for the wrong reasons. I went to TAFE, so I didn't have to stack those in the timber mill anymore. And I went to get app study so I could still party off a weekend, and did I party at 20? But little did I know that those amazing TAFE teachers could open doors for me that I didn't know existed. They gave me a thirst for knowledge, they gave me confidence and I finally felt that I belonged. I exceed those successes. I completed qualification then I was able to climb the ladder quickly despite that HR manager. I was asked at that time, "Where did I want to be in five years?"

And I said, "Five years? Two years I'll be in your job." She said, "Don't take it the wrong way, but you're a bit like a bulldog with a bone you won't let go." I said, "Well, I'm going to take that as a compliment." And I know that it's because of determination that those TAFE teachers gave me, which is really, really important. And I had wonderful leaders around me that despite what that person told me they were able to help me to achieve. And I realised that I could have it all. I could work, I could have a career, I could have a family and raise wonderful children who give back to society in many, many ways as a 29-year-old and 31 year old. They might not be happy with me telling you how old they were though. So, witnessing others and having them support me is amazing. And one last thing in 1920, my great-grandmother, Ngunnawal Elder Bertha Bell wrote to the Aus Chronicle protesting for the right of her child Ferdie Bell my grandfather to have access to school.

An education that was denied by him by the white parents that demanded this aboriginal child not be allowed into that school. But I wonder what she would say today with me standing here before you giving this welcome to country on her behalf because I stand here on the shoulders of great women. I'm here because of them, and I wonder what she would say when she would see her great-granddaughter standing here with a doctorate and giving the welcome to country. So, in the words of her and the many thousands of Ngunnawal ancestors who were the first human voices and the first human footprints in this place across Ngunnawal Country [Indigenous language]. Distinguished guests

today we have all gathered together in Ngunnawal Country. This country is my ancestor's spiritual homeland, and together with you we are keeping the pathways of our ancestors alive by all of us walking together as one. [Indigenous language] With respect, welcome to Ngunnawal Country. [Indigenous language]. Thank you.

NATALIE JAMES:

Thank you so much Caroline for that welcome to country. And let me say there's so much in your story in just the bit that we heard, but I'd like to say I'm really sorry that you were treated the way you were for the choices you made. And I would like to think today that women parents aren't treated or judged in that way for the choices that are made, but we all know that decisions around having a family and the decisions we take around caring for a family are still decisions that people are judged on or there are assumptions made about why, why not or expectations. And so I think it is worth reflecting on the fact that I would hope your story would not be repeated, but we need to remember and really think about what it is like for people who are thinking about starting a family, fertility and are balancing those responsibilities in today's public service and in our workplaces.

I will add my acknowledgement to the Ngunnawal and the Ngambri people, the traditional custodians of the land and I extend those respects to elders past, present, and emerging and all First Nations people here in the room today. So I'd also like to acknowledge many distinguished guests that we have here today, including many senior executives and guests and members of IPAA. Particularly some of our key partners, KPMG, Hayes, Telstra, MinterEllison, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and Microsoft. So, we are here today for the Helen Williams oration, and it's wonderful to be able to get together physically after a period of time where that's been disrupted shall we say. I was super chuffed to be asked to host today's event for three reasons. I'm a huge supportive IPAA, I've been away from the public service for the last four years and it's great to be back and involved. I was actually on the board of IPAA Victoria when I was based in Victoria and so great to be back.

I'm a huge fan of Jody and the way she goes about her challenging and important work. She's been a very impactful person since I've been back, I've only been back four months and someone who stood out to me. And also, Helen Williams, Helen Williams has been on my mind, and you might ask really why? So, in the department, in my department, there is a wall with all of the departmental secretaries ever, the Department of Education and I walk past it every time I go to the kitchen, which is a lot because I'm always eating and drinking. And that wall is kind of like black and white men. Black and white men. Black and white men. Oh, a black and white woman. Black and white men. Black and white

men. Lisa Paul. That's how it looks. And what's kind of striking is that Helen Williams is in the middle of all that. She's not towards the end, she was the first female secretary of the Australian government. Well, in the Australian government in 1985 she was 39 years old.

And all of those black and white pictures I guess show their age. And even in 1985, I guess we had colour, but she stands out although she stands out because she's a woman. And she went on to be secretary of a number of other departments, Tourism, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Communication, Human Services, and she was public service commissioner from 1998 to 2002. And it was in that period that I joined the public service and I actually remember her name from that period. She retired from the APS in 2009, and she was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia in January 2019 for eminent service to public administration. She had a remarkable career and was the trailblazer for all of us really breaking that glass ceiling for many of us to follow. And unfortunately, Helen isn't joining us today, but nonetheless I think we should honour the path that she set and thank her for her service.

So, this oration is in honour of gender equity, and we do hope things have changed since some of the stories we've heard of the past. We now have 52% of women in senior executive roles, but we know it's not just about the numbers. Gender equity is something I'm personally very passionate about and I'm really pleased about the government's focus on gender equity. My own agency employment and workplace relations has a number of priorities that are based around this. And just last week, the Fair Work Commission granted age care workers an interim pay increase of 15% and this was very much because of the undervaluation of the feminise work in that sector. So, let's hand over now to Jody. Jody is someone who is an incredibly impressive speaker. She is from the Pilbara in Western Australia, an Yinjibarndi woman if I got that. I did try and check, not too bad. Chief executive officer of the National Indigenous Australians Agency, which has such an important role not on its own, but with every department across the commonwealth in a number of important missions at the moment.

Including Closing the Gap and including raising the representation of First Nations people in our APS. Jody is passionate about social justice and community led co-design. And she has over the last 30 years held many, many senior positions in government and not for profit coming to the commonwealth reasonably recently. I've got a long list here. Aboriginal Housing office. Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure WA. Equal Opportunity in Public Employment. Directed General of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, New South Wales. So Jody's worked across a couple of

states. Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First People, and director of New South Wales ACT Australian Red Cross. Jody's worked tirelessly to deliver community and statewide policy programmes, reforms and to negotiate commonwealth state agreements in the areas of housing, health, education, justice, land and culture. She was appointed CEO of the NIAA in February 2022, what a time. And I think we're going to hear a little bit more about Jody, about how she feels about that appointment and these times. Please welcome Jody.

JODY BROUN:

Thank you Nat. Can I first thank you Dr. Caroline Hughes for that wonderful welcome to country and for sharing some of yourself and your story. And I hope through some of what I'll say tonight we'll actually reflect on that as well, on how we need to make sure those things don't happen. And also, that we need to respect the individual stories of people like yourselves, but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right across this country. I would firstly like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as well. [Indigenous language]. This is Ngunnawal Country and today we are meeting on Ngunnawal Country, and we acknowledge and pay our respects to the elders. And let me also extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today, and to your ancestors and elders. And in my language, [Indigenous language]. I'd like to start off by taking you back to May 21st this year, and I think a lot of public servants you settle in to watch the show, watch it unfold and see who you're going to be working for.

I was at an election party with a few girlfriends and just enjoying that show as well, but also really excited to find out who I was going to be working for the next three years and which of the red book or the blue book I was going to be asked to deliver on. So, a big evening and it was really clear early on, but I suppose there's that anticipation and excitement is also some nervousness. Having only been appointed as the agency head in February, you don't know what the outcome's going to be of an election and you don't know where you might end up the following week. So, it is a little bit nervous and I'd been in that experience in the IHO more recently. I started late 2018, there was an election March 2019 in New South Wales and within that first week we'd been mugged into a whole different department. So, you've got to re-establish yourself, keep your staff as comfortable and settle their nerves I suppose, and their anxieties while you're feeling your own nerves and anxieties about what is this going to look like.

And I had actually come back into the public service after being in Red Cross for about four and a half years, and that had actually taken me quite a big decision to come back into the public service because I'd left not a little bit jaded, but just feeling I really needed to recover. So, I did need a little bit of convincing to come back into the public service, and one of the reasons I came back was to

work for Michael Coutts-Trotter and he was heading up the what was FAACTS at that point, and after the mogging became the Department of Communities and Justice in New South Wales. So, then I was thrust into a whole extra different new department where they put together all of these different parts of government and with a new secretary, I didn't know anything about and that was Jim Bets. Now Jim and I have created a great I think friendship in the couple of years we worked together, and now he's down here as well as the secretary of a very longly named department.

So, in fact, I was watching him today at lunchtime just to see how he was going in senate estimates. So, it was a bit nerve-wracking working out, okay, there's a new government, what is that going to mean for myself? What is that going to mean for the department? When the Prime Minister took to the stage and opened on behalf of the Australian Labour Party, I commit to the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. I knew just how big a term of parliament we were going to have, and you can imagine there was also in the small group of friends I was with watching and having that election party, there was a lot of excitement. So, the NIAA had just been thrust from my perspective into the very top of the priority list for the new government. And that was exciting and also, I suppose a bit nerve-wracking as well, and I immediately felt that weight of expectation knowing that that commitment meant delivering a referendum and that would be the first since 1999.

So, it wasn't clear on election night whether this would be done through a task force in PM&C, delivered by the Attorney General's department or whether we'd be bolstered, but whatever the construct all eyes were going to be on NIAA. And providing the leadership through that process, but also since then I think it takes a certain level of strength and energy to keep people excited about it because I think it does take some time to get used to the idea. I've never seen an agency though as excite. We have three ministers. We have Linda Burney as Minister for Indigenous Affairs and I've worked with Linda previously; I've worked with her in New South Wales. In fact, she recruited me from WA. And we've got an assistant minister in Senator McCarthy and we've got a special envoy in Senator Dodson. So, we actually have three ministers, and while they do try and work as a team, we also do have to work with them singly as well. So, it does provide us with I suppose some new challenges, but also some real opportunities having people who are from communities quite right across Australia.

And even in the Labour Party as a whole, you've got a lot of indigenous people as representatives. So now you have this very strong voice in parliament, not just in the Labour Party, but across the parliament. And that's great to see, but it also, I think for us in



terms of the three ministers and how we need to work with them and what is, I suppose, a very ambitious First Nations agenda that needs to be delivered, it can be a bit daunting at times. And that expectation not just from the political elements, but also from community and what they're expecting over this next few years. Because Minister Burney I've seen her go out to numerous events, give some speeches, go out to communities, and they are expecting a lot. The referendum is one thing, but there's a lot of expectation on all of us. So, we do have a lot to deliver and that sense of expectation of that we don't really have an option to fail on this, we have to succeed in what is that ambitious agenda.

And really when you think about the election cycle, we've got a couple of years to do it before we're back into another cycle, so we've got a lot of work to do. Anyway, when those sort of things happen, you take a bit of a breath and you look for some in inspiration from I suppose amazing women that have come before me and women like Helen Williams who we honour this evening and you get on with it, don't you? You just commit to the task and get on with it. And today I do want to explore how the public service can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, including how we transform our own organisations and departments by bringing in and retaining more indigenous public servants. And that's really about bringing in that voice and having that in your decision making, having that in your workforce and listening to people and making sure that people's voices are heard as part of government decision making processes.

And so given the focus of this oration on women and diversity, I'll take the opportunity to talk about the importance of elevating the voices of First Nations women and girls. And it is a real honour to deliver this year's Helen Williams oration, and I'd like to thank the board and Council of IPAA ACT for inviting me to speak on this occasion and in a small way be associated with that trail blazer. I actually was also vice president of IPAA in New South Wales for several years, so I do have a real passion for IPAA and a commitment to the public sector. Helen Williams has the distinct honour of being the first woman to hold a deputy secretary position and the first woman to be appointed as a secretary for a Commonwealth government department. And as a sign of the pre-gender equality times the mid-eighties, in an interview with the Canberra Times, the minister in charge of the department had to stress that Helen was appointed because of her ability to do the job.

And in 1995 on her appointment as secretary to the Department of Tourism, the Canberra Times headlined a story Pioneering Femocrat gets Top Job. So, I'm not sure any of us would like to be called a femocrat, but that was what the headline was. But I think you can celebrate someone's success in that line of all of those

men that Nat described, the couple of women in there, you can imagine what she was up against as well. Her highly successful career and the high regard from those she worked with and worked too has inspired and motivated many women who followed in her footsteps. I joined the public service as the inaugural executive director for Aboriginal Housing in Perth in WA in 1993, and I was the first woman and obviously the first aboriginal person on the executive at that point. It was a very blokey male dominated space. So '93 doesn't sound that long ago, but it is quite a long time ago. And so, we all had our quite large offices and then all of the EAs out the front, all women obviously had their little desk outside of their director's office, but I was the only woman on that whole floor.

And I had a young family, I had a two-year-old and three other children and other stepchildren and a whole life outside of that and they were quite good. And in fact, the CEO or Director General at the time, he was a bit of a mentor for me as well, which really helped me both settle into the role but make sure I made a success of it. And I stayed in that job for about seven years. So, over the years, I mean it was a bit of a novelty I think for them. And I think the blokes on the floor thought they had to change a little bit about the way that they operated, particularly in the executive meetings and sometimes they didn't, but they mostly did. I think they were mostly pretty well behaved, but the novelty of having senior female leaders has waned, and I think that's for all of those trailblazers. So, whether it's Helen Williams or other people like Linda Burney for instance.

My minister when I was appointed and that was the previous minister didn't have to defend my merit, just sort of talk about what my journey had been. And so that I think gives you a sense of what's changed over those years, and it is over an enormous period of time. So, I'm really privileged to be following on the footsteps of strong, intelligent, inspirational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as well. People like Lowitja O'Donoghue, and we honoured her this year. She turned 90 in August, and she was the first ATSIC chair and she broke down a lot of barriers for First Nations peoples and particularly for women, and also showed what a proud determined woman can achieve. And to me, I look up to her a lot and one of the greatest pleasures in this role since I've been in it has been able to work with the Lowitja Institute and her niece to actually formulate a foundation to honour Lowitja. And that will have scholarships for people to go into the public sector and into nursing, which she was as well.

So, she really laid a great pathway for other women, and particularly other First Nations women. And more recent recently you see people like... Well, not recently actually, because Professor Marcia Langton has been around for a long time and to

me, she's larger than life and she reminds us of that tenacity we have to embed in ourselves to make real change, and she perseveres and she's got real resilience. And there's so many other outstanding women leading organisations right across the country, but I won't go through all of those because we would be here all night. But to name a few, there's Donella Mills who's the director of Wuchopperen Health Service and chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. There's Indigenous Business Australia board directors Shirley McPherson and Vanessa Elliot, and Vonda Malone the first female mayor of the Torres Shire Council and now CEO for the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

These are some people who are blazing their own trails and not only I look up to them and I see these women who are doing an amazing job, but you can think what their communities see as well as women who are really taking those steps forward. And they may not get the same level of attention as Williams, O'Donoghue, or Langton, but they are making it more and more commonplace for indigenous women to be seen in those senior roles. And for that, I think they really deserve our admiration. And I suppose I also hope that I leave a mark and that I inspire some younger women particularly, but younger indigenous people right across the board. I went out to Coolgardie, and I met with a group of people who are in the indigenous Chamber of Commerce out there. Now, you can imagine they've got a huge opportunity out there, they can do a fantastic thing out there. They are getting work that people are falling over them to give them work.

And there was a young woman in the small room we were talking in and after the conversation I talked about the voice, I talked about Closing the Gap, I talked about the APS. She came up to me and said, "I want to work with you." And the guy who works for me in WA said, "Here's my card, give us a ring." And we've already got her working for us so you can actually get people working for you, tell the right story, you have the narrative for your agency. And she was just ready to come on board, which was a great story I thought that someone young like that actually wants to be part of not just NIAA, but the APS. So, for me, I'm running now this NIAA, we're not allowed to call it NIAA, but we can call it NIAA and it's such a pleasure because people are there because they love the work, they're so committed. They come to work every day and as I said, when we had the three ministers turn up, I forgot that to finish that story, three ministers turning up, the whole place was booked out.

We could only have like 60 people on the ground floor booked out in minutes and then people were just sort of hanging out so they might get a glimpse of the rock stars coming through the building and it was very exciting for people, I think. And of course, they did

a great job inspiring the agency and talking about themselves and what that agenda is as well, but it's not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the agency. We have many non-indigenous people who are there as well because they are committed to changing things for indigenous people in this country. And they're committed to seeing First Nations people recognised, heard, respected, and empowered. Our purpose is a simple one, it's to work in genuine partnership to enable the self-determination and aspirations of First Nations communities. And to lead and influence change across government to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a say in the decisions that affect them. Recognising that each community is unique, we achieve this through a fairly large national footprint.

So, we've got 70 locations across Australia, and that allows us to work really closely with community. It also helps us to really know them and to be an enabler, and many of our staff actually live in those communities where they're from. So, Yuendumu for instance, I've got a couple of staff there who actually live in the community, they're from the community. I went up to Derby recently and met with the staff there. There's one non-indigenous person in the whole staff in Derby, and all the rest of the people are Derby people born and bred with a real commitment and passion for the work that they're doing in changing the lives of people in that region. They know the issues, the people, the local politics, the mood, and sentiment and what's needed from us on the ground. And we've got that breadth and that coverage across Australia, it really helps us to keep our finger on the pulse and mobilise quickly and support communities when they need it most.

And that's things like supporting the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation to deliver culturally sensitive mental health support to the Yuendumu community following a death in custody. And also working with community representatives and organisations around the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations, driving to people to their vaccinations, helping get the messaging out through the elders and respected leaders. So, working with the community in those places, and those ideas come from the community and our job is actually to facilitate that and enable that to happen. Community ownership of policies and programmes is I think becoming much more a common way for us to work with First Nations peoples, and I would hope through the work we are doing, but also the expectation through Closing the Gap and I'll come back to the that in a minute, that we're all going to do work like that and actually listen to those voices both within our own departments, but also within communities.

And to me I don't really see it as a new way of doing business, I see it as us doing the business we should be doing and the way we should be doing it. So, I'm very deeply committed to

community decision making and empowerment through strong community governance and employment. And obviously I've also done a lot in education as well, I've spent a lot of time in education, in fact started out as a teacher, but I'm very passionate about how people transfer and have recognition for their own skills, but also how do they grow themselves. And again, that's a great story that we heard from Caroline before as well. So we've got to give the communities the tools that they need and let them get on with it, and what one thing I've found of working in aboriginal affairs for so many years is you can't do things yourself. You actually have to work with whole teams and every department right across government. It's not something that you can achieve change in by yourselves, and I've always had this very collaborative approach because you're usually the smallest department or the smallest agency in government and you've got a big agenda to deliver.

And there's lots of eyes on you so you actually have to work with those other bigger agencies. So, I think the public service has demonstrated through the COVID experience that agencies can mobilise quickly and work together effectively to deliver in times of crisis. And we need to prove now that we can do that all the time, not just when there's a COVID pandemic, not just when there's a crisis going on, but we need to do it all the time. That we don't operate in silos and that we can be innovative and agile and share information and resources. And one of the things I thought was very telling through the whole of COVID is all of a sudden, we were sharing information across departments that we'd been told all the time we couldn't share and now all of a sudden we could share. And now I don't want to go back to this point where we can't share information that actually does empower communities when we give them regional data that they need to make decisions.

So, I think we also learned a lot about how do we work remotely, separately, but as a team and how do we do that really well. That we don't need to be face to face or be in the same office to be efficient and effective. A lot went on in IHO in New South Wales, we got given through the budget process an extra 300 million to spend in that year on top of our normal budget. And we did it, but this was people working from home in their own places, they couldn't even travel. There was a lockdown on construction for a while so everything was harder, but we still did it and you can do it because it's about delivering to the community. And again, it comes back to the passion people have, but we need to think differently about how we employ people, how do we engage them in their teams, and how do we empower them to get on and do the business at those local areas. People don't need to be meeting in person to test ideas or to coordinate, we have a lot of technology now that enables us to do that.

And I think we've also learned how to work remotely and trust staff more and trust comes, that's probably the most important thing. And you see that in all of the surveys and particularly the APS census, those high trust environments motivate people to deliver and to exceed expectations. So, there's lots of new found ways of flexibility that I think has the potential to boost that participation, workforce participation for women, people with disabilities, and those working away from the capital cities. And when I think about that, I think about the people out in Broken Hill or out in [inaudible] canyon and how can we enable them to work for me. Or that young woman in Coolgardie, how can we enable her to work for me or for any other a government agency? How do we make sure that they've got jobs that they're really proud of and they can deliver on and they get the support that they need? And I think as I said, the lessons over the last couple of years have shown that that can happen.

In fact, I think all of us went back to work at some point and went all these new people I've never met before, but they'd been interviewed and appointed and started without ones coming into the office. So, we do need to understand what some of those barriers are to embracing that participation of those diverse communities in our workplace and overcoming some of those challenges of recruiting and retaining staff. So, for many people, we know that career progression can be hindered by apparent lack of flexible work agreements at that senior level or at any level in fact. People might say, "Well, there's no senior jobs. I've got nowhere to go. If I'm sitting in Dubbo, where's the next career progression for me?" So, I think there's lots of options, but we've got to open that door for people out in those regions. So, we need to challenge those assumptions and communicate those success stories and they are out there. We need to start by offering greater access to flexible work arrangements, built in professional development programmes, enable that career progression, and open up a range of opportunities to attract and retain talent.

I'm sure you've all experienced the very tight labour market we're operating in now, and we are all looking at the same people, particularly for specialised roles and particularly for First Nations people. We're all actually competing against each other for the same people, and we're also competing against a very high paying private sector in some cases. So, we need to make sure we've got a great narrative to tell as departments and as the APS, and that people can actually want to come and work for us. So, speaking at a global government forum earlier this year, Pat Hetherington the APSC assistant commissioner called it the War for Talent. And he encouraged us to adopt a coordinated leadership approach to attract, retain, and develop our people. Each year through the APS census our employees tell us about the realities of working in the APS, including their intentions to stay or to leave and why.

And that's not just a litmus test, it just gives us the sense of who's out there and great opportunity to dig into staff management and question what we are or are not and what we're doing to build workforce capability and to hang onto that workforce. An important outcome from the National Skills Summit was that full employment, productivity, growth, and equal opportunities for women will be central objectives of the government's economic and fiscal policy. And to improving access to jobs, training pathways for women, First Nations people, regional Australians, and culturally and linguistically diverse people. And I think that presents us a real opportunity to work together, to be innovative and to build the workforce the APS needs to deliver that government agenda and to make people's lives better. Of course, being the head of NIAA I take that opportunity to look at First Nations people first and their representation in the APS and we're not doing a great job I have to say. In the last state of the service report, we saw that an indigenous employee's median length of service is around eight years shorter than others.

So, it's a very low 4.3 years, others is 13. So people aren't staying in the public service and we need to ask ourselves that hard question, what is it about the cultural environment or the opportunities for progression that means we don't hang onto them? So, all agencies across the APS signed up to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce strategy and committed to increase representation at the APS four to APS six levels to 5% by the end of 2022. We're not going to meet that, in fact we're miles off it. We'd have to employ another 1,000 people between now and the end of the year to meet that target. Which does go to that competitive, who are we competing for to get people into the public service? And we are also not on track to meet the targets we've set for ourselves for 2024 for ER ones and twos or for SES. And so clearly, we haven't really done enough to focus our efforts on the right place, and that's not really good enough and I think we need to really try harder and do more to get First Nations people into the sector.

So, there is a lot of talent out there. I recently advertised a very senior role, and you would be shocked if I told you how many people applied for it and a huge number of indigenous people applied for it as well. And people from outside the sector as well and the talent is out there and they are interested in the agenda, they're interested in coming into the APS. So, there is some hope there if we can do some extra work around bringing in particularly SES. So, you do need to be a bit creative in your thinking and we need to use our networks, we need to use online forums. There's some indigenous specific jobs boards called Indigenous Employment Australia and advertise in The Courier-Mail. And while that seems a bit strange in this day and age, but you can still advertise in a newspaper and people will see it and they'll be really interested in the role and the Courier-Mail still gets read. And

other indigenous community broadcasting as well so there's lots we can do.

There is that diverse untapped talent pool in regional areas, but we've got to be more willing and flexible about people staying in those regional areas and working in those regional areas. And we can't just focus on the entry level positions, I feel really passionately that if we're going to meet any of these targets we have to start at the top as well as keep employing people at those lower levels because they're the people that change the culture of the organisation. They're the people that lead from the top. They'll be part of those leadership conversations in the same way as you've got a lot of First Nations people in the Australian Labour Party has changed that conversation. You've got to have senior people in your agencies and departments as well to change the conversations. So, we've got to start employing people at that SES level and I think we can do it. I've got a few ideas and I'm working both with the secretary's board as well as we've got an indigenous champions network that we work with across the APS as well.

And we've got to be creative as I said, but I think the most important thing is that flexibility. Being able to let people stay in their place, in their country, in their community, but work for us as well. And we've also got to have a really strong narrative about what we're there for, what we stand for, what's our culture as an organisation, both as APS but also as our various departments. I'm not sure how much longer I've got, but I feel like I'm going over time. One minute and 10 pages still. They said to me they timed this, but they didn't time it for me at leaving half the information. Look, we've got a couple of fantastic opportunities here. One is around Closing the Gap, and we know that there is a huge reform agenda in the public service. We are becoming more increasingly citizen centric, and I think that's really important. We've got technology, we've got societal expectations to live up to, and people do expect to have more of a say in what government are doing more than just voting once every three years.

So, we've embraced that in the Closing the Gap national agreement, and that's been formalised and signed off with the Coalition of Peaks and all of the states and territories. And it brings us all to the table to deliver on the Closing the Gap targets and outcomes, but more importantly, it centres around four priority reforms. And they go to genuine partnership and decision making, building the aboriginal community-controlled sector, transforming government services and departments, and building better data and sharing that data. So, we have a lot to do over the next few years to meet that. It's a 10-year agreement and we've already lost the first two and a half years, so we've really got to work together as an APS, but also work with communities and enable



them and empower them if we're going to meet the Closing the Gap agreements. So, we are asked to share decision making and build those formal partnerships. That's really CRI critical to our success, and I think also aligns with APS reform agenda about creating a more citizen centric government. The communities know what they need, and they will tell us how to deliver for that.

It doesn't mean everything's there, it just means we have to do our job differently, but we also have to invest more in the community-controlled sector and let them do the work, but also make sure they have the capability and capacity and invest in them. So, we do have a lot of work to do in delivering those, and if you're not aware of the Closing the Gap agreement and the outcomes and targets that are set there, what all governments have signed up to, then you should take some time to actually look at Closing the Gap. Because whether you work with people with a disability, or in health policy, or education, part of the justice system or initiatives around housing employment we've all got to do our bit. Those targets cut across everything. And we've got to demonstrate an understanding of the importance of a person's dignity and to respect their culture and that's basic. So, the measurement for priority reform three, which is about transforming the sector or the target I should say, is reduce the amount of discrimination and racism in the sector.

That's the going to be the measure, and unfortunately, I think there's still a lot of First Nations people that experience racism not just in the workplace, but also in the service delivery. And we've got to look at this really closely and have our eyes open. And I know for many of us, we were enormously shocked and saddened by some of the events recently that have been in the media and young boys being bashed on the street just because they are indigenous people. And then I think you look at the response to that and if that was a non-Aboriginal person that got bashed, a young kid on his way home from school, what would that response have been? I think we have to look at these things a lot more I suppose critically and say, what is wrong with our society and why aren't we stopping this stuff? So, there's a lot to be done. I won't talk about all of the other three pages that I've got here, and I'll go onto some of the work that we're doing under the referendum and the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which includes the referendum, the voice, truth telling and treaty.

As I said, the government's made clear its commitment to implement Statement from the Heart in Full Voice Treaty and Truth. And the Prime Minister said it on election night and then at Garma, and more recently the treasurer also led his budget night speech with this commitment again. Enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in the Constitution, a referendum which will be held for that in this term of parliament is really front

of mind. And as I said, it is something that is obviously front of mind for NIAA, but also, we're working in partnership with the Attorney General's department on what is quite a long process. Obviously very legalistic process, but we've got to bring the community with us for a successful referendum. So, we're playing a really critical role in facilitating strong engagement with First Nations peoples as we deliver on that commitment. An enshrined voice will be a permanent means to advise parliament and the government on the views of First Nations people on matters that affect them.

And it will drive targeted solutions and practical actions to improve outcomes in communities. A lot of the media commentary has focused on interactions with the parliament as well it should, but I'd like to touch what it means for the public service as well. An enshrined voice will give strength and status to the principles of respect and consultation. It will help us to realise priority one of Closing the Gap, to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision making, but it'll also complement the rest of the work we do. And I think it goes to building the whole sector, it's strengthening our role as a sector as well. So, we have started this work, the First Nation's referendum working group has drawn on the significant work already done. And in fact, if you look back on this stuff it didn't just happen, this goes back decades. The calls for a referendum, the calls for recognition in the constitution goes back decades.

And we've come up or they have come up with an agreed set of common principles for the voice, identifying it as a body that provides independent advice to parliament and government. Is chosen by First Nations people based on the wishes of local communities. Is representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders communities. Is empowering community led, inclusive, respectful, culturally informed and gender balanced, and includes youth. Is accountable and transparent, works alongside existing organisations and traditional structures, and will not have a programme delivery function or veto power. So that's those guiding principles that have come through a whole process, including our co-design report that was done last year and led by Marcia Langton and Tom Kelmer. And that was a lot of work right across Australia for them to come up with that, and it was something that came from the community. So, the referendum working group is built on that and agreed those principles, and we look forward to continue to work with all of those people and then broadly engage with First Nations people to get that consensus around both the design question, but also the design of the model itself.

So probably we've got a lot of work to do as you can imagine. And we're starting at a point where I think at the moment it's about the

60% mark of Australians that know about the voice or support the voice. But what we've found is that people when they know more, they support it more so there are people out there. And whether you get what you need in a referendum, which is a double majority is another point, but that's what we're aiming for. And so, there's a lot of community campaigning to be done, the PM has said he won't fund a yes campaign or a no campaign, but there's a lot of people out there who are willing to fund both of those things actually. And some of the campaigning has actually already started and it's been funded by philanthropy. So, you won't necessarily get a 100% agreement on what a voice looks like and how it's going to operate, but if we can get a broad consensus both within the First Nations people, but also across government, then I think we're off to a good start.

And our role is to assist and work with the Attorney General's department to assist the government to get to that point where the question can be put, and people can make that informed choice about the proposal. So being informed is probably the best thing any citizen and any public servant can do to help with everything that I'm talking about today. So how do we embed it in our own cultures of our own organisations? How do we actually embrace that? How do we build our narrative to attract First Nations people? How do we make sure that we are delivering on Closing the Gap, not just on the targets, but also on the full priority reform areas? Because that means all of us, it's not me over in one side trying to work from NIAA, it's every single person in this room and across the public service. To understand you need to understand your role and the role that your department plays in Closing the Gap, what it means to your day-to-day work. You need to make sure First Nations people are involved in your work and are consulted properly.

You need to embed those Closing the Gap priority reforms as I said. You need to read Statement from the Heart if you haven't already and read the Indigenous Voice final report, which you can find on our website or even the indigenous summary. And make sure that you can contribute to those debates that will inevitably be held around you, and you need to take responsibility for your cultural awareness training, your own learning and growing in that understanding. And so, as I said, we're all accountable for Closing the Gap, but as the secretaries will know, some are more accountable than others, but we have all got a role to play and it will focus how the public service can work in partnership with First Nations peoples. And there's a great conference coming up next year, it's an ANZSOG Indigenous specific conference and it will be talking about how do we work as a public service to work in partnership with First Nations people.

So to me, as I said before we can't do it alone. Indigenous affairs,

First Nations outcomes are everyone's business and we've got a long way to go, but I think we are really on a great track. And I really appreciate the level of support that we get right across the sector, and particularly from the secretaries. But we work really closely with a lot of departments and agencies, and I really think we've got a great opportunity here that doesn't happen that often. I have this pretty boring thing I say these days is, I think it was on April 25th, there was four planets and the moon aligned. You might have got out of bed to go and see it very early one morning as I did. It's not very often the planets align, and I think at the moment the planets are aligned to get this work done. Thank you.

NATALIE JAMES: Thank you so much Jody, and I think we have gone over time.

JODY BROUN: Sorry.

NATALIE JAMES: Well, no, I was just talking. So, I'm going to go very quickly to questions, but just reflecting on what you said. You kept saying, got a lot of work to do, got a lot of work to do, but you've also really given us a sense of what we might do differently. What our part might be when it comes to Closing the Gap, when it comes to raising the number of First Nations people and indeed are other people who are not like most of us in this room in the APS. And what we can do to support and bring about the voice and to understand what that means at every level, including in our day-to-day work.

And particularly, I like that language of what can we do to open the door to people in the regions? Open the door to people not in the APS? Open the door to different ways of thinking? And so you've certainly given us a lot to think about so I am going to throw straight to questions. And I've got no idea how much time we have left, but someone will stop me at a certain point. But Jody's given us so much to think about and I will be very disappointed if no one's got anything to say or ask about what she's just said.

MELISSA COADE: Hi Jody. Thanks to your talk Melissa Coade from the Mandarin. You mentioned a few key targets which were behind, what do you have in mind to agitate for that to change?

JODY BROUN: So, I think we need to review the workforce strategy from actually getting this done. And I have started conversations with the secretaries firstly on what those targets are, reminding them they all signed up to it. Although some of them weren't around then, but they have signed up to it. And they're ambitious, but what are the things that they could do differently? And I think about things like that bulk recruitment, sharing the merit list or talent lists right across the sector. I think about locations kind of narrow or something like that, how do we support a whole team there of APS rather than it be I've got one person, someone else has got

one person, usually Services Australia's got a few people, but how do we support them as a team? And that helps community to see one face rather than multiple agencies, but it also helps support the team.

So, I think we've got to be a bit more creative and we could actually advertise collectively as well. And I think because we have this such a tight market at the moment, we do poach off each other a lot, which is not a bad thing. I mean, I've always supported that concept that people are working for NIAA and they might be grown and nurtured as part of that place, but then giving them enough confidence to go and work in mainstream departments as well. The numbers are quite staggering, but if you spread that across all of the departments and agencies, they're actually quite achievable. And we can't use COVID as an excuse forever, we've actually got to get out there and do the work. And as I said, mean we could do things like... And I'm sure we do a lot of these things.

We have those apprenticeships, we have the graduate programme, we have a lot of different strategies in place. But as I said, you could go and talk to a group of people in Coolgardie and inspire one young person to come and work and that's just for me. So, if a few of us went and did that somewhere, we might actually already encourage and inspire a whole lot of First Nations people to come and work in the APS. And I don't know how many of you went to the... There was a whole group of I think the years 10, 11, 12 came to Canberra a week before last I think it was. And they had a whole week of exposure because they're actually interested in working in the public sector. And there was actually a couple of people from Coolgardie, but people we've got to actually embrace that and work a bit harder about how we bring people in.

But people won't come and work in the sector if they feel A, they're not appreciated for their own skills and abilities and knowledge and their own culture. And so, the values have to be really strong. And our culture within the sector actually has to embrace people, not push them away. And if I read a line that says that the average career of First Nations people in the sector is only four years compared to 13, it tells you something's not right. People aren't staying, why aren't they staying? Okay, I think there's some real questions in that for us.

NATALIE JAMES:

And I'm struck by do we know why they're not staying? So, are we asking people on the way out the door why it is that they might not be remaining with us?

JODY BROUN:

Yeah, I think a lot of it is there's a degree of competition. There's also that degree of people wanting to stay in their own communities, and I think they might not want that next career step

to leave home and go somewhere else. So they're actually choosing to stay in their communities or things like that. I mean, I think we could do a lot more analysis of that though.

NATALIE JAMES: To really understand?

JODY BROUN: Yeah. I'd also point out that in the APS census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people experience discrimination and harassment and racism more than others. So, there's that element as well, and people won't stay if they feel they're culturally unsafe in a department either. Sorry.

SPEAKER 5: Oh, thank you for your talk, Jody. When you reflect, say over your career, do you think there has been any progress on listening to Aboriginal people about service delivery? I know there's a long way to go, but have we made any progress?

JODY BROUN: Look, I think the strengthening voice particularly at the Peaks is a big change and that they are being listened to and not just as a collective of a Coalition of Peaks, but NACCHO for instance working with Department of Health and that we do tend to I think try a lot harder. We don't always get it right, but I think we try a lot harder to have that voice in an advisory body or in some sort of format so that we can hear from community directly. And it might be on a particular topic, it might be on water policy for instance so you might get some people around the table, but I think we've got to do that more consistently. And also, I think having that voice within your own department is part of that as I was saying before, it's one thing to have it outside and go and talk to people, but it's actually about changing that inside as well. But I do think it's changing.

I think the expectation is there. When I look at the list of various bodies and advisory groups that we work with and that the rest of the sector works with so it's pretty comprehensive, but we've also got to make sure we listen. There's no point going to community and say, here's something we've just done. We just want you to have a little few tweaks, but don't change it all together. You've actually got to do it I think in a much more code design type approach. I mean when I was in IHO in New South Wales they got funded to do... What did they call it? Demonstration projects of housing and one other sort of issue in that community. And they said, "Oh, we think we're going to pick this community and that community." I said, "Hang a minute, what are you picking for? Why don't you just do..." I think I said what we're going to do is expressions of interest and ask communities to give us a proposal about how they would do this, what their issues are and why they need to be in that mix.

And we got 17 applications from across New South Wales and we

had an assessment criteria, obviously aboriginal people on the panel and things like that. And we selected from those 17, a couple of strong contenders that wanted to work with us on housing and transition housing, supporting young people leaving out of home care, and another one was on housing and people experiencing domestic violence. So, they're bringing something together and coming up with those solutions themselves. And then we funded them to do a business case, to do their co-design, to do the whole lot themselves, not step in and do it for them. Actually let them have the control, let them have, and it is scary. It was scary for... I said, they've got the power and they can get on with it.

NATALIE JAMES:

There was a big red sign saying end, but as you are describing that process Jody... Yeah, see, noted it's chaos. But here's the thing Jody, as you described that I'm just wondering how prepared is the commonwealth to give over control? Because I've only been back a short while, but it's all very ERC, cabinet, here is the thing and now we have to do it very fast, and we've already announced it. And then somewhere in amongst all that we talked to some people. How... I'm just thinking sort of pop quiz of the bureaucrats in the room, how many people are getting a little bit stressed about the idea of just giving it over like that? What do you think? Do you think that the Commonwealth have we got the DNA to do that?

JODY BROUN:

So, the short answer, no. The long answer is-

NATALIE JAMES:

So, wait, that's why we need different people?

JODY BROUN:

Exactly. The long answer is we have a Closing the Gap priority reform that you're going to get measured on about how well you do partnership and shared decision making. How well you transform your organisations. How well you build the capability of aboriginal community-controlled organisations. How well you share data. So that's what we've signed up to, and so we actually do need to think really clearly about how we do this better. And it's no point waiting until something happens and then as there's the ERC we've only got three weeks, you actually should be having that relationship all the time so that when something like that happens you can very quickly mobilise and respond.

And sometimes the timeframes can be a real challenge and they will challenge community, but it's actually about giving them some of that voice as well in that process. And Coalition Peaks have asked us about how do they get more involved in that work right from the beginning? And in the budget process right from the beginning, not waiting until after. When we announce something, we say, Oh, we're going to do this. We want 500 health workers, and we need it by next week, but we should be having that

conversation well before.

NATALIE JAMES: And I think that's a challenge, but I think it's a challenge that we all have to be up for, right?

JODY BROUN: Yeah.

NATALIE JAMES: And how good would it feel to be coming at the other end of a process having worked on something that's been designed in that way when it's going to work and have the buy-in from the very beginning. So, I am now going to take the end sign seriously and finish up. Thank you very much Jody. And now I'm going to invite Amanda Story from MinterEllison up to the stage very quickly to deliver a vote of thanks that we will then follow with applause no doubt.

AMANDA STORY: Thank you. I am the last step between you and the drinks and food bar so I will be quick to say this is a very special event. It's been my great pleasure to support it for a number of years now, and tonight really is no exception. Thank you Dr. Caroline Hughes for sharing your story. It was very vulnerable and my heartfelt thanks to you it really did speak to me. And thank you Jody Broun for sharing as well your story and a bit about NIAA and where you are planning on taking that agency at this really exciting time. So, thank you.