



Australian Government

IP Australia

A decorative graphic consisting of several curved, parallel lines in shades of orange, yellow, and red, positioned to the left of the title.

First Nations Strategy 2025-2030

A new approach to
reconciliation and working
ethically and respectfully
with Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander peoples

A decorative graphic consisting of three parallel, slanted lines in shades of orange and red, located at the bottom right of the page.

Acknowledgement

IP Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their continuing connection to Country. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians on whose lands our agency and staff conduct our business. We pay our respects to culture, tradition, ancestors and Elders. We recognise the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first innovators of these lands and waters and the ongoing contributions being made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their knowledge.

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Terminology Disclaimer

In this document, the terms **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander**, **First Nations**, and **Indigenous** are all used to respectfully refer to the original inhabitants of Australia and their descendants. We acknowledge the diversity and richness of cultures, languages, and traditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The use of these terms is not meant to diminish the unique identities and experiences of different communities but to provide a collective reference in the context of this strategy.

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About the artist

Mick Harding belongs to the *Yowong-Illam-Baluk* and *Nattarak Baluk* clans of the Taungurung people. Mick's company, *Ngarga Warendj* (dancing wombat) is a family business established in 2005 and is known for high-quality products that are produced by hand or through ethical licensing agreements.



Artwork

Liwik bu-ing ganalina Nganga-ngan Marram-nganjin nerdu nerdu

- you guide our vision of the future

The traditional *malgarr* (parrying shield) was used with a *liyangayil* (club) and is a powerful symbol of protection in Aboriginal culture. The *malgarr* represents both physical defence and the preservation of cultural identity and heritage. Similarly, the intellectual property (IP) system in today's world protects ideas, inventions, and creative works. This comparison is a symbolism of the importance of protection in both traditional and modern contexts.

The artwork on the *malgarr* is also in the shape of a shield and represents the themes and pillars of IP Australia's First Nations Strategy.

A range of other traditional Aboriginal artefacts have been crafted to complement the *malgarr*. These artefacts highlight the rich history of innovation in Australia that was present well before colonisation.



From the Director General

As Director General I am committed to reconciliation and creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to protect and benefit from their Indigenous Knowledge through the IP system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been the original innovators of these lands for over 65,000 years.

With humility and acknowledging the work we still have in front of us, I am pleased to be able to launch our First Nations Strategy, which will build on our strong foundations and help to make the IP system more accessible and inclusive for all Australians, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our First Nations Strategy sets out our commitments across capability, development, partnership and transformation. It provides a framework for IP Australia to enhance our engagement and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, support their participation and empowerment in the IP system, and transform our organisational culture and practices to be more respectful, responsive and accountable.

It builds on the achievements and learnings from our Reconciliation Action Plan 2021–2023 and is integral in ensuring we meet our commitments under The National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

I am proud to present this First Nations Strategy as a statement of our commitment and aspiration to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a genuine and respectful way. I look forward to seeing the positive impact that this Strategy will have on our organisation and the IP system, and ultimately, on the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Michael Schwager
Director General
IP Australia



From the Indigenous Knowledge Panel

As members of the Indigenous Knowledge Panel, we wholeheartedly endorse the First Nations Strategy. This initiative represents a significant step forward in recognising and protecting Indigenous Knowledge within the IP system. We believe this Strategy will foster greater respect, inclusivity, and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, enabling them to benefit from their heritage and ideas. We commend IP Australia for its commitment to this essential initiative and look forward to the positive changes this Strategy will bring.



Colin Saltmere is a senior Indjalandji-Dhidhanu Traditional Owner of the Camooweal region in North-West Queensland.

Chrissy Grant (Chair) is an Elder from the Jalunji-Warra clan of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji and the Mualgal from Kubin on Moa Island.

Shay Vigona-Goudge is an Aboriginal woman descending from the Tiwi Islands and the Barkly region of the Northern Territory.

Purpose

The First Nations Strategy is our framework to ensure that our services, policies and practices are respectful, inclusive, and supportive of First Nations peoples.

This will help all staff meet our commitments under the Closing the Gap National Agreement, foster meaningful partnerships and drive equitable outcomes.

How does this fit with IP Australia’s purpose?

IP Australia’s purpose is to ensure Australians benefit from great ideas. We do this through administering Australia’s IP rights system, regulating patent and trade marks attorneys, educating our customers on the role of IP and providing advice to government.

The current IP system does not adequately recognise or protect Indigenous Knowledge and is often inaccessible. IP Australia acknowledges these challenges and limitations and is committed to addressing them in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) is built around 4 Priority Reforms directly informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These reforms are central to changing the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

- Priority Reform 1 – Partnerships and shared decision-making
- Priority Reform 2 – Building the community-controlled sector
- Priority Reform 3 – Transforming government organisations
- Priority Reform 4 – Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

The Productivity Commission, in its 2024 [review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), found that governments have largely not fulfilled their commitments. It gave a clear direction that governments need to do things differently as business-as-usual approaches are not working.

First Nations Strategy 2025–2030

The First Nations Strategy guides the way we deliver our services to better consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their knowledge.

It is underpinned by 4 pillars illustrated in the diagram below:



The First Nations Strategy sits alongside other organisational strategic guidance including our Strategic Corporate Plan, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, People Strategy and Workforce Plan, informing how we do business.

The Strategy in itself, is not an action plan. We will develop action plans to deliver the outcomes under each pillar—with a clear focus on quality rather than quantity. By design, the actions and resources that sit under the Strategy will evolve as the work of IP Australia evolves through learning, capability, engagement, policy and legislation changes. The Strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure we are achieving our objectives, and meaningful outcomes are being delivered.

Pillar 1: Capability

We commit to uplifting the cultural capability of IP Australia, our people and the services we provide. We will do this through creating a workforce that has the skills, knowledge, behaviours and tools that respectfully acknowledge and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and knowledge.

Cultural capability is the continuous learning of skills, knowledge, behaviours, and actions to support and improve our services to be reflective of the people we serve in a culturally informed way.

Commonwealth public sector employees significantly influence the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their policies, programs, and interactions. Their decisions can shape the accessibility and quality of essential services. By committing to enhancing cultural capability and ensuring services are culturally appropriate and inclusive, public-sector employees can contribute to improving the socio-economic status and overall wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

The success of this pillar is essential to the success and impact of the other 3 pillars of the Strategy, ensuring we have an inclusive and respectful workplace, free of racism, that values and celebrates the unique cultures and histories of First Nations peoples.

Intended outcomes

- An increase in cultural competence among staff, leading to more respectful and effective engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver services that better suit their needs.
- A more inclusive and culturally safe workplace environment, where diverse cultures and histories are valued and celebrated.



Capability in action

IP Australia actively participates in Jawun secondments, where organisations come together with Indigenous communities to work on Indigenous-related issues. In return, our secondees increase their awareness of the cultural diversity of Indigenous Australia while developing new skills, confidence and resilience.

Development in action

IP Australia collaborated with Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) on its Northern Territory Indigenous Business Accelerator program. We delivered an ‘Introduction to Intellectual Property’ module to Indigenous tourism business operators.

Pillar 2: Development

We commit to ensuring the work of IP Australia can foster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development. We will do this by increasing awareness of the IP system with Indigenous businesses and organisations.

Indigenous Business Development is pivotal in fostering economic empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It strengthens individual and community self-sufficiency and also contributes to the broader economic landscape of Australia.

The IP system can play a significant role in supporting Indigenous business development by driving innovation and economic growth. By protecting inventions, designs, and creative works, it promotes investment in new ideas and can enhance a business’s competitive edge.

Education is key to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways to success. By nurturing Indigenous entrepreneurship through increased awareness and use of the IP system, we can build a more equitable and prosperous society where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities thrive.

Intended outcomes

- Increased number of Indigenous businesses leveraging the IP system for protecting and commercialising their innovations, resulting in stronger economic empowerment and self-determination for all Indigenous people and communities.
- Indigenous Business Development programs and officers are supported to provide education and awareness on the IP system.

Pillar 3: Partnership

We commit to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to inform, influence and share decision-making on issues that affect them. We will do this by creating mechanisms for partnerships on policies and practices relating to the IP system.

Priority Reform 1 of the Closing the Gap National Agreement requires government to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Recognising that their aspirations can only be achieved through shared decision-making, simple advisory or consultation methods are deemed inadequate.

Unlike engagement or consultation, partnerships involve an ongoing relationship where decision-making is shared to achieve common goals. These partnerships should focus on future outcomes and respond to the aspirations of both parties, helping to rebalance some of the power and resource imbalances between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the government.

The 3rd pillar of the First Nations Strategy aims to establish mechanisms for informed and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, ensuring policies and practices are well-considered and supported by them.

Intended outcomes

- Increased representation and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in policy development and decision-making processes relating to the IP system.
- Enhanced engagement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the IP system leading towards greater self-determination.

Partnership in action

IP Australia has established a pilot *Indigenous Knowledge Panel* to ensure that our decisions, policies and practices can be directly informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expertise.

Transformation in action

Preparing for the new WIPO³ GRATK⁴ treaty involved considering new ways for First Nations perspectives to guide the approach. A series of roundtables with First Nations experts familiar with WIPO work were held so their expertise could directly shape Australia's position.

Pillar 4: Transformation

We commit to the systemic and structural transformation of IP Australia's policies and practices to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We will do this through new approaches to the way we work that are responsive to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Under Priority Reform 3 of the Closing the Gap National Agreement, all parties have committed to transforming traditional government processes and ways of working to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This is direct recognition that a new approach is required to policy making where it impacts the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Traditional approaches have generally not worked, and governments need to listen to and change the way they work in response to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Legislation, policies and practices need to be fit-for-purpose, culturally appropriate and effective in supporting educational attainment, economic participation and economic development.

This pillar of the First Nations Strategy is intrinsically interconnected with, and reliant on, the other pillars for its success.

Intended outcomes

- Increased accountability and systemic transformation of IP Australia's policies and practices, resulting in an IP system that better reflects the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- Enhance recruitment, retention, and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff throughout all areas of IP Australia.

³ World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

⁴ Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge (GRATK treaty).

Implementation and governance

Metrics and reporting

To bring these pillars to life, we will establish clear and measurable metrics for each strategic objective. These metrics will be closely monitored through a combination of regular reviews and an annual report. This approach ensures transparency and accountability, allowing us to track progress and make data-driven decisions.

We will develop specific key performance indicators (KPIs) for each of our strategic pillars—with a clear focus on the impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. These KPIs will be reviewed regularly, providing insights into our progress. An annual report will offer a more detailed analysis, highlighting successes and identifying areas for improvement.

The Executive Board of IP Australia will be the responsible and accountable governing body for the First Nations Strategy.

Employee engagement

We encourage all employees to actively participate in the implementation process by submitting ideas and initiatives within their Groups or the broader Agency. Submissions will be evaluated for their alignment with the strategic objectives of the Framework.

Partnership and collaboration

We will work in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including our Indigenous Knowledge Panel and Indigenous Employee Network. This collaboration will be vital for ensuring that our initiatives are culturally appropriate and effective.

By adhering to these broad governance principles, we aim to create an inclusive, equitable, and culturally safe environment within IP Australia, and to enhance our service delivery to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

