Concept Paper for a National Anti-Racism Framework

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Response to the Australian Human Rights Commission from First Nations Media Australia

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FNMA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

About this submission

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) is the peak body for the First Nations media and communications industry. Our purpose is empowering Australia's First Nations people through our culturally connected media industry. As at January 2022, FNMA's membership includes 62 organisations and 167 individuals who work in or alongside the community-controlled media industry as broadcasters, freelance journalists, photographers, filmmakers and allies.

The sector reaches significant audience share with 91% of people in remote First Nations communities being regular listeners to radio services and watching ICTV at least once per month.[1] In the remote context, First Nations media is the most reliable and ubiquitous radio and media service available to audiences. The communications sector provides enabling services to support opportunities and outcomes in service sectors, such as health and education, and promotes inclusiveness and participation.[2]

The scope of the First Nations media sector includes:

- **Television**: National free-to-air (NITV); satellite delivered narrowcast (ICTV) TV services; local narrowcast TV services (Goolarri TV at Broome, ICTV in Alice Springs and Broome and Larrakia TV at Darwin).
- **Video & film production**: Production of culture and language-based content for broadcast & online distribution.
- **Print** and **Online:** A national newspaper (Koori Mail) alongside a strong web presence of journalistic sites such as IndigenousX. First Nations media organisations have a strong **social media** following and publish content online daily. 26 stations can be streamed via the indigiTUBE website and app. Some stations also have their own application or use the TuneIn or iHeartRadio apps to reach audiences. Many offer on-demand content either through the station's own website, or Soundcloud or podcast sites.
- **Radio**: Over 230 radio broadcast sites coordinated by 35 licensed, community-owned, not-for-profit organisations. Established stations broadcast live shows, plus interviews, radio documentaries, news, emergency information, community events, government and other messaging within community broadcasting guidelines.
- These channels offer a wide range of programming, including news and current affairs reporting from a First Nations perspective, in over 25 Indigenous languages nationally, including the first language of many people in remote communities.

First Nations Media Australia supports and amplifies the First Nations media sector and its objectives. This submission is informed by ongoing consultation with the membership, the broader media sector and FNMA's participation in discussions as a member of the Coalition of Peaks.

FNMA welcomes the Australian Human Rights Commission's invitation to provide input and commentary on its Concept Paper for a National Anti-Racism Framework. This response offers some general themes for the Commission's consideration and some specific feedback on points raised in the concept paper.

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[1] McNair yellowSquares, *Indigenous Communications and Media Survey,* 2016
[2] Department of Communications and the Arts, *The Communications Sector: recent trends and developments,* Bureau of Communications Research, Commonwealth Government, Canberra, October 2016

In this submission

1.   Reducing racism through media representation

First Nations Media Australia is pleased to note the alignment between the proposed National Anti-Racism Framework and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. In particular, Priority Reform 3 within the National Agreement on Closing the Gap focuses on the necessity to significantly reduce systematic racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to close the gap in life outcomes.

There are strong correlations between media portrayal, self-determination and wellbeing. For this reason, some of the key themes identified in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified that "action is needed to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the media, and to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve community attitudes and address ignorance."[3] First Nations Media Australia submits comments on the National Anti-Racism Strategy in the context of decades of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people striving to combat racial stereotyping, inaccurate and imbalanced reporting through media; positively impacting the way First Nations communities perceive themselves and the way they are perceived.

The Australian Reconciliation Barometer 2020 shows that nearly half of Australian society thinks media usually portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a negative way (44% of the general community and 46% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), with only 12% of the general community and 19% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community believing that media portrays Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people positively. All too often reporting on First Nations matters by mainstream media is problematic, taking a deficit approach and reiterating negative stereotypes, despite journalism protocols. This has a significant impact on racism and unconscious bias faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the context of 32% of the

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[3] Deloitte, *Review of the Implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody,* Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet, 2018

general community citing media as their main source of information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.[4] Furthermore, the poor representation in non-Indigenous media directly impacts on the development and implementation of government Indigenous policy.[5] Mainstream reporting often focuses on the "problem of First Nations peoples" rather than addressing the many successes, or in fact the structural inequalities arising from dispossession and racism.

First Nations media exists due to the failure of mainstream media to adequately reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in news and public discourse. First Nations communities were first granted community broadcast licenses in the 1970s and 1980s as a policy response to the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have their voices heard in media outlets. This imbalance in participation in the media still permeates Australia's media landscape today. First Nations broadcasting and media has a vital role in providing balanced and culturally appropriate reporting in order to promote awareness and understanding among non-Indigenous Australians, participate in the truth-telling process, encourage participation in democratic processes and promote reconciliation. The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community media sector (radio, TV, print and online) is a critical component of that diversity within the Australian media landscape.

First Nations media organisations are the primary providers of First Nations news and current affairs to their communities and are the key providers of mainstream news and current affairs to their communities in forms that are appropriate and relevant. The role that First Nations media organisations perform in the delivery of essential information cannot be overestimated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters translate and relay key information in languages that are accessible to communities around the country every day.

First Nations media organisations contribute to reducing racism in their work through:
- Educating audiences and building awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures;
- Providing accessible platforms for the sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives;
- Actively participating in truth-telling processes to support education and healing through journalism and citizen reporting, empowering local voices to share their own experiences, challenges, strengths and truths;
- Highlighting and 'calling out' instances of racism to raise awareness of racist actions and responses;
- Providing a safe space for the expression of culture and discussion of racism;
- Supporting and actively contributing to the maintenance and revitalization of Indigenous languages; and
- Reporting matters relevant to First Nations communities in a balanced way, not exclusively focused on deficit reporting and highlighting positive stories that strengthen pride in both individuals and communities.

First Nations Media Australia encourages the Australian Human Rights Commission to recognise the role of community-controlled media in the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework and

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[4] Ibid.
[5] Kerry McCallum (ed). 2012. The media and Indigenous policy: how news media reporting and mediatized practice impact on Indigenous policy. p4. Available at http://www.canberra.edu.au/about-uc/faculties/arts-design/attachments2/pdf/MIP-Report_Combined_Final.pdf

consider opportunities to support and strengthen the sector's role in addressing racism through the development and implementation of the strategy. The Commission is also encouraged to refer to Article 16 in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples which states, *"Indigenous peoples have the right to establish their own media in their own languages and to have access to all forms of non-indigenous media without discrimination"* in relation to the National Anti-Racism Framework.

2. Principles & outcomes

Indigenous broadcast licenses are issued by the Australian Communications & Media Authority (ACMA) under the community media license type. Community broadcasters are united by six guiding principles, including working to:

- Promote harmony and diversity and contribute to an inclusive, cohesive and culturally-diverse Australian community; and
- Pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, especially for people and issues not adequately represented in other media.[6]

This contribution to social cohesion in Australia is the basis for policy that underpins Government investment in community media, including 'ethnic' and 'Indigenous' media (both Government terms).

In response to the proposed guiding principles set out in the concept paper, FNMA suggests the inclusion of support for sovereign voices as part of principle 1. It may be worth including a principle that outlines a commitment to action from Government and other parties to be actively anti-racist to prevent racism, as opposed to responsive *to* racism. FNMA notes that principles 7 and 8 are currently framed as statements rather than active principles 1-6.

FNMA suggests the addition of a national outcome (9) focused on the celebration and sharing of cultures and languages to create social cohesion.

The key actions and strategies outlined under National Outcome 4 refer to committing 'the media' to counter-racism activities. This is a broad-sweeping statement that will require further definition in the development processes. Conversely, the Commission might consider how pro-active measures to increase diversity in media representation could be added to the key actions and strategies under National Outcome 6.

3. The framework

FNMA notes the example framework provided in the concept paper does not include community-controlled media. It should be adjusted to include communication and media as an area of effort with a priority to shift public narratives and perceptions of multicultural and First Nations communities in Australia. Effectively, this is about changing the hearts and minds of non-Indigenous people living in Australia through education and awareness, resulting in reduced racism.

The diagram on page 21 of the concept paper needs the addition of evaluation and accountability measures as part of the framework.

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[6] Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice, https://www.cbaa.org.au/resource/codes-practice-introduction

4. Social cohesion

FNMA agrees with the need for national support for measures that address systemic and structural barriers to the full participation of cultural groups in public life. Poor representation and/or marginalisation of minorities in mainstream media is understood to contribute to the worsening or fragmentation of social cohesion.[7] The First Nations media sector has a strong role in advancing social harmony through its journalistic functions and meets key human rights obligations agreed by Government. First Nations media services, currently serving around 48% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations due to barriers in licensing and funding allocations, are required in all regions to address the Government's social cohesion objectives, and to reduce racism.

5. Emerging concerns and broader impacts

In addition to the examples listed in the concept paper of demonstrated racism, FNMA would add increasing public debate around January 26 as a trigger for racism and frequently a harmful experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While there is some progress and support for the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives on the date, each year this comes with negative backlash in public narratives and for individuals.

Progress toward social cohesion more broadly has been marred to some extent by the rise of far-right, generally racially driven ideologies around the world. The Australian Human Rights Commission is right in pointing out the national interest in countering racism and achieving racial equality from a national security perspective. Furthermore, we are now witnessing such groups, emboldened by the limited popularity their racist views have drawn, endangering public health through the spread of anti-vaccine and anti-government dogmas. One might expect that taking active steps to not only respond to racism, but to be anti-racist by actively combatting racism at its roots would lessen the impact of hate speech and far-right doctrines emerging across a range of social issues.

FNMA agrees with the comments in the concept paper relating to the economic impact and consequences for Australia from not tackling racism and racial inequality. In addition to the examples noted in the paper, FNMA adds that racism is a significant barrier to the employment and economic success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, directly contributing to Indigenous economic disadvantage. Furthermore, there is a very real (and potentially measurable) economic toll resulting from the mental health impacts of racism within First Nations communities.

The impact of reporting on trauma and other mental health issues has direct economic and personal impacts on the the First Nations media sector. For example, the monitoring of comments on social media is a task that takes a toll on time resources and on mental health. Online platforms provide a level of engagement with content and within communities that is often positive and inclusive. However, it also attracts racist vitriol, bullying and the spread of misinformation which must be managed to ensure social media spaces attributed to First Nations media organisations remain safe spaces for community engagement. If self-care is not reading the comments, then who is taking care of the comment moderators? Media organisations cannot avoid this task and the associated burden it places on individuals working in the First Nations media industry, nor are they adequately resourced to provide mental health support to staff. While this is particularly prevalent around divisive public conversations such as January 26, the Black Lives Matter movement and/or sports

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[7] Jakubowicz, A., 'New groups and social cohesion in Australia', in Higley, J., Nieuwenhuysen, J., & Neerup, S. (eds.), *Nations of Immigrants: Australia and the USA Compared*, 2009.

players singing or not singing the national anthem, it is also a regular occurrence relating to public policy on Closing the Gap, land management and equality actions from Government and its agencies. Beyond the racism found online, First Nations media workers regularly receive phone calls, emails and in-person threats resulting from their participation in media and their chosen place of work. First Nations Media Australia has taken action to support mental health within the sector to help address these concerns, but they remain a significant concern and result in unnecessarily increased staff turnover rates which are costly from both a recruitment and training perspective.

6. The role of Government

First Nations Media Australia notes there are three dot points in the paper articulating the need for a National Anti-Racism Framework (2.1). We suggest an additional reason for requiring a National Anti-Racism Framework is to commit Governments to identifying and addressing instances where Government programs and policies contribute to systemic racism. While this issue is referenced in other parts of the concept paper, the identification of this as one of the key aims of the framework would more closely align the framework with the priority reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

FNMA queries how Governments will commit to the proposed framework in an ongoing way that extends beyond the election cycle. Bi-partisan support will be required to make the framework successful and we encourage the Australian Human Rights Commission to consider mechanisms for ensuring the continued relevance of the framework over a period of time, or framing the strategy as an Agreement that all levels of Government can actively commit to through signing.

FNMA agrees that a different approach is required to achieve the commitments made through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including support for the community-controlled media sector as a primary means of shifting racist attitudes in Australia toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and addressing Indigenous disadvantage.

7. Data

FNMA agrees with the need for nationally consistent, robust data to measure changes in experiences of racism over time and factors impacting any rise or fall in racism reported. The Reconciliation Barometer provides some good baseline data on these issues which could potentially be expanded to a broader sample size with appropriate resourcing. FNMA is currently working with the Lowitja Institute to undertake an environmental data scan and make recommendations to the Closing the Gap Data Development Working Group on potential methods for measuring the impact of representation in media on experiences of racism and to meet the data development actions set out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Correlation between these data development activities and the National Anti-Racism Framework would be prudent.

8. Communications

FNMA encourages the Australian Human Rights Commission to consider mechanisms for public reporting and the communication of progress toward the objectives outlined by the National Anti-Racism Framework at regular intervals as a means of embedding evaluation and accountability processes in the framework.

Further, the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework should include a communications strategy that ensures an awareness of the commitments made by multicultural and First Nations communities. It will be important for communities impacted by the framework to have an understanding of responsibilities and commitments made by all levels of Government in order to work cohesively with Government partners in achieving localised outcomes. This should form part of the key actions and strategies under National Outcome 1 in the concept paper, contributing to the understanding of the nature and prevalence of racism in Australia.

FNMA draws attention to the very successful contribution of First Nations media organisations in promoting consultation opportunities to identify the priorities of First Nations communities in the development of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This resulted in over 4,000 individuals participating in online surveys, public meetings and consultation sessions to have input on the Closing the Gap objectives. FNMA encourages the Australian Human Rights Commission to consider how First Nations media organisations might support consultation and input on the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to ensure that grassroots communities have an opportunity to participate in the development of the framework and provide feedback on drafting processes, alongside the government stakeholders identified in the concept paper.

9. Summary

Through this submission, FNMA has made a number of specific suggestions for inclusion in the draft framework and further considerations for the Australian Human Rights Commission in the continued development of a National Anti-Racism Framework. In broad terms, FNMA is supportive of the need for a National Anti-Racism Framework and for actions that increase the understanding of impacts of racism experienced within First Nations communities and multicultural groups. However, FNMA suggests the need for stronger mechanisms to hold governments accountable for agreed actions in an ongoing manner. The framework requires ongoing action to be successful.

FNMA brings the contribution First Nations media makes to education and awareness to the attention of the Commission and encourages recognition of the impact of media in the development of the proposed framework. Furthermore, the Commission is encouraged to utilise First Nations media in consultation and communications processes relating to the framework to ensure community participation and engagement.