



Australian
National
University

Marramarra murru

Creating pathways

First Nations Wealth Forum and Economic Development Symposium

Outcomes of events hosted by the Australian National University's First Nations Portfolio from
20-29 June 2022

Report published 17 October 2022.

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CRICOS Provider No. 00120C

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Introduction

This is a report on the outcomes of the Marramarra murru First Nations Economic Development Symposium and side events that were held to advance economic self-determination for the First Nations people of Australia. Coordinated by the First Nations Portfolio at the Australian National University (ANU), the Symposium was driven by First Nations leaders in Australia, with additional contributions from First Nations leaders from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. It was a unique opportunity for First Nations economic development to be examined and analysed by a group of eminent First Nations people who practise it every day.

Cultural Setting

The Symposium was held in the Kambri Cultural precinct at the centre of the ANU campus in Canberra. For thousands of years, Kambri has been a meeting place for the traditional custodians of the land.

Marramarra murru is a local Ngambri, Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri term that describes the creation of pathways. The term has been used to refer to pathways that were created by Biyaami, the creator and protector spirit, often depicted as an eagle, who gifted and shared them with the ancestors. Through knowledge passed from generation to generation, these pathways serve to ensure survival and wellbeing by maintaining and transferring knowledge, lore, custom and cultural authority, as well as facilitating trade. Inspired by these ancient pathways, the Marramarra murru First Nations Economic Development Symposium sought to identify, uncover and create contemporary pathways to economic self-determination for Australia's First Nations peoples.

Institutional Setting

The ANU is a unique institution in both the context of the Australian higher education sector and the realm of Australian federal government policy formulation. Founded immediately after the Second World War in 1946 as the only Australian institute of higher education to be the subject of an Act of the Australian parliament, the ANU was charged with building world-class research capability in Australia, promoting national unity and identity and helping the nation improve its understanding of itself and place in the world, as well as delivering education to the highest standard in fields vital to the nation's future.

Now one of the world's top-ranked universities, the ANU has demonstrably delivered on this objective over the course of the past 75 years.¹

The ANU First Nations Portfolio (FNP) was established in 2020 to enhance the University's nation-building capacity in the context of the relationship between the Australian nation-state and its First Nations peoples. The FNP is a branch of the University's executive, reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor, and is responsible for ensuring that ANU makes a leading contribution to national policy in this regard.

The First Nations Portfolio gives effect to its remit by:

1. Undertaking its own research to inform First Nations affairs, policy formulation, and advocacy;
2. Working in collaboration with the broader ANU academy, including the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), to ensure that concepts of First Nations equity and engagement are embedded in the University's wider research and teaching

¹ Australian National University. (2022). *Our History*. <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/our-history>. Accessed 13 October 2022.

endeavours, and that its research endeavours, in turn, inform the FNP's research and external advocacy activities; and

3. Reaching outside of the University to engage with First Nations communities, leaders, organisations and businesses, mainstream industry, governments, and the not-for-profit sector to advocate for progress in the relationship between First Nations Australians and the wider nation.

Of highest priority to the FNP is enhancing the ability of First Nations Australians to meaningfully engage in economic development on their own terms; in other words, the advancement of Australian First Nations economic self-determination.

The First Nations Portfolio is led by the inaugural ANU Vice-President, First Nations; Professor Peter Yu AM, a Yawuru man from Broome in the Kimberley region in Northwest Australia with over 40 years' experience in Indigenous development and advocacy in the Kimberley and at the state, national and international level.

This report was prepared by the First Nations Portfolio and will be published on its website.²

² ANU First Nations Portfolio. (2022). *Marramarra murru (creating pathways) First Nations Economic Development Symposium*. <https://anufirstnations.com.au/first-nations-economic-development-symposium/>. Accessed 13 October 2022.

Background to the Symposium

Purpose and Background Paper

The Marramarra murru First Nations Economic Development Symposium was conceived as a landmark dialogue for the First Nations Portfolio and for Australia. Most endeavours to improve economic independence for Australian First Nations people to date have focussed on government programs that have aimed to create jobs and businesses in a non-First Nations orientated economy. While this has had some benefit to particular people under certain circumstances, the Symposium's focus was on establishing what is required to build a true, self-determined, First Nations economy that leverages the assets and rights that continue to be reclaimed by Australian First Nations people. Those rights extend to the land, inland waters, sea country, and cultural and intellectual property that First Nations people have and continue to reclaim.

Driven and informed by leaders in First Nations economic development and public policy, the Symposium (which will be supplemented and expanded on during a series of six seminars commencing in 2023) sought to build a coalition for action and an evidence-based platform that will focus public policy toward frameworks that facilitate and support First Nations Australians to build their own economies that are aligned with their cultural, social and wealth priorities. This approach is consistent with world-best-practice and the foundational principles of self-determination.³

Prior to the event, Symposium participants were provided with a comprehensive Background Paper outlining contemporary and historical evidence of the strength and yet-to-be-realised potential of First Nations economies in Australia.⁴ It refers to economic self-determination as a United Nations-sanctioned right of all peoples to generate wealth from their own assets in ways that they deem fit. The Background Paper and the Symposium sessions followed a theme of Budyaan – a south-eastern Australian First Nations term used as the generic term for all avian species, including the key local totems – the Crow (Waagan) and Eagle-hawk (Maliyan).

Event programs

First Nations Wealth Forum

The Symposium was preceded by an introductory event on the evening of Tuesday 21 June 2022; the First Nations Wealth Forum. The Wealth Forum was held at the National Press Club in Canberra and was attended by a capacity audience of 220 people, primarily invited participants of the Economic Development Symposium, who were joined representatives from the National Indigenous Australians Agency, ANU students, staff, and senior executives, and selected supporters of the ANU and First Nations Portfolio.

The Wealth Forum featured a panel discussion moderated by the Hon Julie Bishop, Chancellor of the ANU. The panel comprised Jody Broun, CEO, National Indigenous Australians Agency (Australia), Peter Yu (Australia), Harold Calla (Australia), Eric Henson (USA) and Ta (Sir) Mark Solomon (Aotearoa/New Zealand).

³ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2022). *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>. Accessed 13 October 2022.

⁴ The Background Paper was prepared and published by the First Nations Portfolio. Available for free download at: <https://anufirstnations.com.au/first-nations-economic-development-symposium/>

The Wealth Forum included a three-course dinner designed by chef, James Tylor, incorporating native foods and flavours, and entertainment was provided by musicians and performers, William Barton, Aunty Delmae Barton, and Dobby.

Marramarra murru Symposium

The Symposium was held at the Marie Reay Teaching Centre in the ANU Kambri Precinct. It was attended by approximately 150 invited participants, carefully selected by the First Nations Portfolio for their commitment and contributions to First Nations economic development.

Following a Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country, performed by Ngambri/Ngunnawal custodian, Paul Girrawah House, the Symposium was formally opened by the ANU Chancellor, the Hon Julie Bishop. Seven Symposium sessions were then held over the following two days, examining the issues critical to the objectives of the Symposium. Each session involved the facilitator framing a specific topic, an expert speaker(s) or discussion panel of experts discussing key aspects of the topic, and then break-out participant working groups that were tasked with:

- Validating and refining key issues
- Determining what needs to be achieved
- Determining the challenges and obstacles that need to be overcome
- Discussing possible solutions
- Setting terms of reference that identify issues that need to be investigated more deeply by specific subsequent expert seminars.

In a historic move to enhance the engagement of ANU with First Nations people, the National Native Title Council and the First Nations Portfolio signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Symposium. Its purpose is to establish a long-term relationship of cooperation and collaboration through research and public policy development in mutually agreed areas such as economic self-determination.

International Delegates Tour

The Portfolio sought to introduce the international delegates to a diverse range of Australian First Nations cultural activities and maximise their opportunities for engagement with Australian Indigenous organisations and community members by hosting a tour alongside the Symposium and Wealth Forum. The tour itinerary included activities and meetings in five locations across the ACT, Victoria and Queensland. At each location, the international delegates were formally welcomed to Country by traditional owners from each area according to local protocols.

International Delegates Tour Itinerary

18-24 June 2022: Kambri/Canberra

- Welcome to Country by Ngambri/Ngunnawal Traditional Owners, Dr Aunty Matilda House and Paul House.
- Kambri/Canberra Cultural Tour, including significant Ngambri/Ngunnawal sites, the National Gallery of Australia, Old Parliament House, Parliament House, and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.
- Indigenous Astronomy Stargazing at the ANU Mount Stromlo Observatory.
- Virtual roundtable discussion on Indigenous Economic Independence, Self-Determination, and the Uluru Statement from the Heart, attended by Megan Davis, Janine Gertz, Thomas Mayor, Dean Parkin, Brian Stacey, Eddie Synot, and Peter Yu.
- Presentation of the Canadian First Nations Financial Management Board Roadmap to approximately 50 Indigenous Australian delegates and guests.

- New Zealand High Commission Matariki (Māori New Year) celebration.
- Marramarra Murru First Nations Wealth Forum and Economic Development Symposium

24-27 June 2022: Naarm/Melbourne

- Welcome to Country by Wurundjeri Traditional Owner, Uncle Bill Nicholson.
- Guided walking and cultural tour on Wurundjeri Country around Abbotsford Convent, Dights Falls, and the Merri Creek Aboriginal School site.
- Attendance of an AFL game, hosted by the AFL Inclusion and Social Policy unit.
- Attendance of the launch of the Victorian State Government Yuma Yirramboi (Invest in Tomorrow) Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy
- Meeting with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria.
- Meeting with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations.
- Meeting with Responsible Investment Association Australasia.

26 June 2022: Dja Dja Wurrung Country/Bendigo and surrounds

- Welcome to Country by Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owner and CEO of Djarra (Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation), Rodney Carter.
- Visits to culturally significant regional sites, including Daylesford, Mount Franklin and Franklinford, Vaughan Springs, and central Bendigo.
- Viewings of projects underway or completed by Djarra (Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation).

28 June 2022: Meanjin/Brisbane

- Welcome to Country by Turrbal/Yuggera Traditional Owner, Shannon Ruska.
- First Nations Economic Development Workshop, attended by approximately 30 Brisbane/Queensland-based Indigenous businesspeople and community leaders.

28-29 June 2022: Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island

- Welcome to Country by Quandamooka Traditional Owner, Dr Valerie Cooms.
- Tour of the operations of the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, the Registered Native Title Body Corporate for Minjerribah. Its operations cover campsites and accommodation business ventures, archival storage and cultural preservation facilities, and land management and restoration activities.

Sponsorship and Support

The Symposium and Wealth Forum were hosted, co-ordinated and financially supported for by the Australian National University through its First Nations Portfolio.

Supplementary financial support was also received from the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation, BHP, Wesfarmers and the Department of State of the United States of America. The First Nations Portfolio is grateful for the financial support of the Sponsors, which contributed to the success of the Symposium.

The firm, Wiltshire + Dimas Management, were contracted by the First Nations Portfolio to organise the Symposium and the First Nations Wealth Forum including providing communications and marketing services.

A total of 41 Indigenous suppliers and artists provided goods and services for the Symposium and its side events.

The Symposium was also supported by 20 volunteers from the University's student population who provided a range of services, including ushering, note-taking, and venue management.

Participants

First Nations representation from Australia

Approximately 52 percent of Symposium participants were Indigenous entrepreneurs and executives from non-government organisations from across Australia. Over 35 First Nations organisations (including from the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors) were represented at the event.

First Nations representation from overseas

Of great interest and significance was the participation of seven First Nations international delegates representing five First Nations from Canada, the Chickasaw nation in the United States, and the Ngāi Tahu Iwi in Aotearoa/New Zealand. These delegates were:

- Harold Calla (Squamish), Executive Chair, First Nations Financial Management Board, Canada
- Geordie Hungerford (Gwich'in), Chief Executive Officer, First Nations Financial Management Board, Canada
- Melanie Assiniwe (Algonquin), Director, Capacity Development and Intervention, First Nations Financial Management Board, Canada
- Michael McIntyre (Membertou), Director, First Nations Financial Management Board, Canada
- Shawn Blankinship (Nlaka'pamux), Data & Analytics Manager, First Nations Financial Management Board, Canada
- Eric Henson (Chickasaw), Research Fellow, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development and Executive Vice President, Compass Lexecon, United States
- Tā (Sir) Mark Solomon (Ngai Tahu & Ngati Kuri), distinguished Māori Leader and former Kaiwhakahaere (Chairman) of Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (Tribal Council of Ngāi Tahu), Aotearoa/New Zealand

Gender

Most of the Symposium participants and speakers were men, reflecting the ongoing issue of gender imbalance in mainstream and First Nations economies. Although the participation of First Nations women in First Nations economies is significant and increasing, the imbalance must be addressed so that their communities and the nation can benefit from their talent, perspectives, and leadership.

Financial Assistance for Participants

The Marramarra murru First Nations Economic Development Symposium was an invitation-only event, and participants were not charged attendance fees. Throughout the event, catering and stationery items were supplied, along with printed copies of the Symposium Background Paper. Participants were also granted free admission to the First Nations Wealth Forum. Tickets for non-participants were sold to the public at a cost of \$250 per person.

While most participants self-funded their travel to Canberra and accommodation during the Symposium and Wealth Forum, thanks to the support of its donors and sponsors, the First Nations Portfolio was able to facilitate the attendance of fourteen participants, nine speakers, and eight international delegates by fully or partially covering their travel expenses.

By providing this financial assistance, the First Nations Portfolio ensured that the discussions at the Symposium included voices from a wide range of people and organisations, regardless of their access to financial resources.

Feedback from the Events

Key Messages from the First Nations Wealth Forum

The Wealth Forum panel discussion was recorded by film crews and is available for free public viewing on the [ANU First Nations Portfolio website](#).

Wiradjuri woman and Australian Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Linda Burney MP, made an address to open the Wealth Forum. She emphasised that the hallmark of the way in which the new Albanese Government would go about working with First Nations people would be absolute adherence to the principle of self-determination.

Following this, the Wealth Forum panellists, all First Nations leaders from Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, responded to a series of questions posed by the moderator, the Hon. Julie Bishop, to address the Forum's key thematic question: "How can First Nations people achieve their own wealth?" The panel also took questions from the audience.

Panellists drew on personal insights and experiences in their responses, reflecting on the different circumstances, approaches, and challenges that prevail on the journey to attaining economic self-determination in their respective countries. All panellists considered that the achievements in their jurisdictions with respect to economic self-determination were underpinned by the agency of First Nations peoples themselves. Australia's Jody Broun and Peter Yu both agreed that the recent growth of Indigenous businesses and enterprises should be recognised as a stand-out achievement for Indigenous Australia. Both also noted, however, that significant impediments remain in Australia, particularly in relation to the dominance of governments in the affairs of First Nations peoples.

In contrast, the achievements identified by the First Nations speakers from the other jurisdictions, particularly Tā Mark Solomon from Aotearoa/New Zealand, were linked to treaties, favourable decisions of the courts, and the economic benefits that had flowed because of the opportunities for Indigenous self-government. Even so, impediments to economic self-determination continue in all jurisdictions.

It is apparent that the impediments to economic development faced by First Nations communities in Australia are of a different order than those of their counterparts in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, largely (but perhaps not exclusively) because estimates indicate that the First Nations economies in those countries are proportionally much more substantial and significant relative to their First Nations populations. For example, Canada's Harold Calla discussed lack of access to infrastructure on First Nations territories for economic development but also noted that the Canadian Government had recently agreed to establish a First Nations Infrastructure institution to address this impediment.

In the context of Australia being on the cusp of a new era of institutionalising self-determination because of the Federal Government's commitment to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart, panellists were also asked questions about the benefit of measures such as constitutional recognition and treaties. Those from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada and the United States considered that these types of measures have been important platforms but have not been sufficient on their own to achieve, for example, economic self-determination. Canada recognised First Nations peoples in its Constitution in 1982, but it has taken the Canadian Government until now to recognise the importance of economic development to securing better life outcomes. Increased government investment in education generally works to some degree, but it only achieves true and lasting success where there are corresponding opportunities for economic participation supported by institutions, for example the Indigenous led First Nations Financial Management Board in Canada.

Eric Henson from the Harvard Kennedy School's Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development highlighted that treaties have usually been beneficial for those Native American tribes that have them as they brought with them formal nation-to-nation recognition, along with a degree of enforceability. The treaty-making era in the United States ended some 150 years ago, though, and while they still provide leverage, they are not a prominent factor in current economic development successes. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Tā Mark Solomon advised that though the Waitangi Tribunal had been beneficial for Māori people and communities, including through facilitating truth telling exercises, ultimately it is only an advisory body. Tā Mark argued that gaining access to, and successfully using, capital to build the Māori economy has been more important.

The Australian panellists, on the other hand, reflecting that their jurisdiction has not had the benefit of these institutional arrangements, indicated that a constitutionally enshrined Voice ought to bring a significant shift in the relationship between Indigenous Australians and the Australian nation-state. That did not mean, however, that work on other significant and substantial reforms should cease while the Voice was being pursued, particularly on those that determine how Governments work with First Nations communities across Australia.

Audience member and Nyikina man from the Kimberley, Charles Prouse, asked the panel if they supported the idea of an Indigenous sovereign wealth fund in the context of previous government investments in Indigenous Australia not closing the gaps in life outcomes. Panellists from Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States agreed that the concept of an Indigenous sovereign wealth fund was appealing, but it was insufficient on its own to respond to the huge deficits experienced by First Nations peoples due to colonisation. A sovereign wealth fund is likely just one of several necessary responses to First Nations disadvantage, along with greater access to venture and international capital, for example, to enable First Nations peoples to pursue equity in resource development projects. Eric Henson pointed out that long term vision and successful enterprise development were important ingredients for the success of a sovereign wealth fund. Professor Peter Yu indicated that a sovereign wealth fund will be necessary and will form an important component of achieving economic self-determination. Jody Broun was not unsupportive but noted the risk of such a fund being used to finance initiatives that should be resourced by governments.

Another member of the audience, Birri and Guugu Yimidhirr man, Wayne Denning, asked panel members to discuss successes in economic development, indicating that there was cause for optimism in First Nations Australia (despite persistent economic and social deficits) and that there have been important advances in Australia, e.g., the establishment of Supply Nation.

Harold Calla referred to the Membertou First Nation recently becoming the owners of the largest fishing company on Canada's East Coast after acquiring a 50% stake in a \$1 billion business. This was possible because the community pursued the benefits arising from the Supreme Court's landmark Marshall decision that affirmed First Nations' treaty right to fish, hunt and gather in pursuit of a moderate livelihood. Chickasaw citizen, Eric Henson discussed the success of Colorado's Southern Ute in building a \$6 billion wealth fund after deciding to change their business model from leasing mineral resources to securing equity in the business of accessing and utilising these resources. Tā Mark Solomon noted that there had been huge economic successes among Māori communities, as in Canada, including the massive growth of the Māori economy, estimated by Tā Mark to be around \$38 billion in 2009 (estimated to be over \$50 billion in 2017⁵).

⁵ Chapman Tripp. (2017). *Te Ao Māori – Trends and insights*.
<https://chapmantripp.com/media/j1slpr3f/te-ao-maori-2017-english.pdf> Accessed 13 October 2022.

These economic successes at the family and community level have not been achieved in Australia. Nonetheless, Jody Broun noted the success of the Commonwealth's Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP), which since its implementation in 2015, has resulted in \$6.3 billion in some 42,000 Federal Government contracts being awarded to over 2,800 First Nations businesses. For this success to grow, continuing to enhance the capability of First Nations leaders and entrepreneurs is especially important according to Professor Peter Yu. He pointed to the need for First Nations leaders to be willing to challenge the status quo, trust one another and be prepared to "own their own risk".

Key Messages from the Marramarra murru Symposium

In the final session of Symposium, a draft communique on the key messages was read to the Symposium participants. After some discussion, the participants gave their support to the draft. A final version was subsequently distributed to participants and published on the [ANU First Nations Portfolio website](#). An overview of the seven Symposium sessions and their key messages drafted for the communique are reproduced below.

1. *Ngunba-ngidyala budyaan (gaol, closed place, shut place)*

A caged bird: an historical perspective

Speaker: **Professor Peter Yu**, Vice President, First Nations, ANU

This session provided an overview of the impact of British settlement of Australia on the ability of First Nations Australians to participate in the economy over the past 250 years, the evolution of the Australian policy framework as far as it pertains to facilitating a First Nations economy, how that policy framework compares to those in other modern nation-states, and the overall conduciveness of the current policy environment to self-determined Australian First Nations economies.

Colonisation has immeasurably affected the economic well-being of First Nations in the most adverse way. This has yet to be reconciled by the Australian nation, despite the recognition of native title. Most of the land that has been reacquired by First Nation peoples presents significant structural and attitudinal barriers for economic development, while rights to sea and freshwater country remain miniscule.

2. *Dibalany barraan-dirra (wings clipped/cut)*

With wings clipped and feet tied: where are we now?

Speaker: **Oral McGuire**, Chair, Noongar Land Enterprise

This session examined the socio-economic outcomes achieved by the contemporary First Nations affairs policy approach of Australian Governments and sought to explain why substantive progress cannot be made until there is a greater focus on addressing the barriers to economic self-determination of First Nations Australians and facilitating the development of truly self-determined First Nations economies.

A new policy framework for First Nations economic development needs to be built by First Nations peoples with Australian governments. The framework should focus on economic self-determination and form part of the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

This and any new policy framework regarding First Nations economies must be negotiated and agreed between representatives of First Nations communities across Australia and all levels of government. Key ingredients for the new policy framework include a strong focus on building trust, flexibility to respond to the diverse needs and priorities of communities across Australia, recognition and support for collective ownership of assets, and building capability, particularly with respect to governance.

3. *Yibai Maliyan bunbunha (eagle emerge/moving away, escaping)*

A phoenix emerges: entrepreneurship, aspirations & community economic development

Speakers: **Leah Armstrong**, Co-chairperson / Managing Director, First Australians Capital
Darren Godwell, CEO, i2i Global

This session included discussion of the different dimensions of First Nations economic aspirations, participation of First Nations interests in the mainstream and uniquely First Nations economies, relatively recent growth in the Australian First Nations economies, and the factors that continue to constrain that growth.

There is a growing First Nations business sector in Australia which has received a significant boost from Indigenous procurement policies implemented over the past five years, particularly by the Commonwealth and its institutions. Nonetheless, development of the First Nations business sector in Australia has been slow relative to comparable nations. Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States have much larger sectors proportionate to their First Nations populations, with the disparity being in large part accounted for by the innovative and Indigenous-led mechanisms for raising capital from the private sector (i.e., the Canadian First Nations Financial Management Board) implemented by their governments.

‘Caring for Country,’ an initiative of Australian First Nations people, has been hugely successful and is a significant contributor to First Nations Australians economies. It has allowed land, sea, and freshwater country to be better managed and has provided massive employment opportunities. Of most importance is that through establishing ranger projects wherever First Nations people live, in urban, regional, or remote environments, these programs have united First Nations people like no other initiative funded by governments. The programs have also become an important platform for community-based economic development.

4. *Bawalganha (Hatching)*

Hatching unique competitive advantage: Indigenous knowledge and innovation

Speakers: **Dr Miri Raven**, Senior Scientia Lecturer, UNSW and **Associate Professor Colin Saltmere**, Managing Director, Myuma Group

Building on the discussions in the first session, this session identified several challenges associated with protecting and appropriating value from First Nations intellectual property in the interests of First Nations Australians, which has been a significant constraint on the development of a self-determined First Nations economy.

The Symposium participants agreed that the intellectual property of First Nations peoples is critically important to their potential to develop and determine the nature of their own economies. Its formal, legal protection will provide a competitive economic advantage for First Nations peoples, which is their right.

Current legislation in Australia to protect intellectual property is inadequate, confusing, and not widely understood by First Nations communities. This puts them at significant risk of losing legal control of their traditional knowledges and their ability to gain benefits from it.

A new system needs to be negotiated, underpinned by international best practice, starting with Australia ratifying the Nagoya Protocol.⁶ The system should include supporting the development and recognition of Indigenous protocols (as recognised by the Nagoya Protocol) and new legislation that authenticates Indigenous products and knowledge, protects Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP), is adaptable to local and regional contexts, and is relevant to the nuances of Indigenous knowledge as a form of intellectual property.

⁶ Convention on Biological Diversity. (2019). Text of the Nagoya Protocol: <https://www.cbd.int/abs/text/>. Accessed 10 August 2022.

5. *Walanbang dibalany (strong wings)*

You need strong wings to soar: jobs, skills and commercial capability.

Panellists: **Kerry Colbung**, CEO, Aboriginal Lands Trust South Australia, **Charles Prouse**, Managing Director, NyikBar, and **Peter Renehan**, CEO, Centre for Appropriate Technology

Moderator: **Bruce Gorrington**, Director, First Nations Portfolio National Indigenous Business Development Hub

This session examined the specific skills and expertise that are required to optimally activate an economically sustainable self-determined Australian First Nations economy, assessed the current framework of programs that are designed to support First Nations business and identified gaps in that framework.

A First Nations workforce needs to be trained with twenty-first century skills, including those necessary to engage in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. A forward-looking, people-centred approach is essential. It is also vital that there is support for a workforce to remain on Country, connected to culture and community. Current infrastructure and service gaps must be repaired for this to be successful.

New initiatives also need to be undertaken to improve the capabilities of the mainstream economy, particularly businesses, to engage effectively with First Nations people, communities and organisations. Another priority is building collaborations across First Nations businesses nationally to support one another, including through the sharing of knowledges, successes, and capabilities.

The lack of data currently collected by governments on First Nations businesses and economic activities has inhibited the development of fit-for-purpose policies. The limited data that does exist cannot be accessed readily by First Nations people or organisations, or other organisations that might collaborate with them, such as universities and research institutes.

Data is also critical for securing private sector investment in First Nations economies, and the Commonwealth will need to lead the efforts to address current issues relating to First Nations data collection, access, utilisation, and sovereignty.

6. *Wawinha (fly, move with wings)*

From fledgling to flight: access to product, factor and financial markets

Speakers: **Harold Calla**, Executive Chair, First Nations Financial Management Board and **Dr Jonathan Kearns**, Head of Financial Stability, Reserve Bank of Australia

This session assessed some of the challenges that First Nations businesses face in relation to accessing the basic inputs to commerce – product, factor and financial markets – and identified potential solutions pathways.

Market failures continue to hinder the success of First Nations businesses. Access to financial markets and capital investment, for example, remains a major challenge across much of the First Nations economy.

Government programs are having mixed success in addressing these market failures. They would have higher rates of success if they were co-designed and implemented in partnership with representatives of the First Nations economies.

Despite the difficulties and challenges to overcome, opportunities for improvement exist; notably through the principle of requiring businesses and governments to seek Free, Prior and Informed Consent before proceeding with developments on the lands of Traditional Owners. If implemented in Australia, this principle could significantly improve the negotiating position of Traditional Owners.

Further opportunities exist in the adoption of Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) principles, which would, in theory, incentivise Australia's private sector to support economic self-determination for First Nations Australians.

7. Maliyan miil (eagle-eyed)

Eagle-eyed: future perspectives

Speaker: **Ben Wyatt**, Director Woodside Energy, Director Rio Tinto, former Western Australian Treasurer

This session highlighted global megatrends and their implications for a future self-determined Australian First Nations

The Symposium discussed that global megatrends are presenting both opportunities and challenges for the First Nations business sector and for Australia as a whole. There is no doubt that self-determined First Nations economies, once firmly established as part of the broader Australian economy, will be operating in very different economic and social circumstances when compared to today.

Australia's First Nations peoples are emerging from their recent history of suppression to be better prepared for these megatrends than they were in the past. The increasing asset base of First Nations, including cultural and intellectual property, reclaimed land, and their growing business sector, presents significant opportunities.

Evidence for a new approach to Indigenous Economic Development Policy

Symposium Background Paper

Considerable evidence that supports a major shift in Australia's Indigenous Economic Development policies, beyond government programs to economic self-determination, was presented in the Symposium Background Paper⁷ including:

- Confirmation of the dire socio-economic circumstances that are endured by significant sections of the First Nations community in Australia, such as persistently lower levels of employment and wealth.
 - The employment rate for First Nations people is about 49 percent (compared to 75 percent for all Australians) and median income is 40 percent less than other Australians, with 45 percent of First Nations people between 18- and 64-years dependent on social security as their main source of income.
- In seeking to address the dire economic situation facing First Nations communities, First Nations economic development policy across Australia focuses on fostering education, training and employment pathways for First Nations people and (much later than other comparable jurisdictions) preferred procurement programs for First Nations businesses in the mainstream economy.
 - While these programs could be valuable, they fall significantly short of that which is required to build sustained, substantial and meaningful wealth for First Nations people that delivers economic equality. Moreover, insufficient evidence has been collected and analysed to determine the relative success and suitability or otherwise of these programs.
- While a First Nations economy is emerging in Australia, relative to comparable jurisdictions, the Australian First Nations economy remains small. For example, Aotearoa/New Zealand, a nation approximately five times smaller than Australia with fewer resources, has almost twice as many First Nations businesses, and Canada, a more structurally comparable nation has five times as many.
- In only a few instances have First Nations interests in their sizeable land and water estate been developed into economic projects for the benefit of First Nations people. Regulatory constraints that have been known for decades constrain the ability of First Nations people and communities to undertake economic development on their estate.
- In some instances, First Nations interests have been able to negotiate financial returns from third party developers that are active on that estate, but most of that income is ultimately 'locked-up' under trust deeds and public policy has not sought to address this in any meaningful way.
- Public policy for Indigenous economic development has not addressed the complex challenge of Australian First Nations interests being able to protect and leverage economic benefit from the competitive advantage that is encapsulated in their unique cultural and intellectual property.
- Public policy has facilitated investments in training for rudimentary vocational, professional and business skills while not attending to the need for capability in industry and nation building at a world-class level.

⁷ ANU First Nations Portfolio. (2022). *Marramarra murru (creating pathways) First Nations Economic Development Symposium*. <https://anufirstnations.com.au/first-nations-economic-development-symposium/>. Accessed 13 October 2022.

- Insufficient attention in public policy has been paid to improving access to markets for the products of First Nations businesses and to the financial markets that the Symposium demonstrated are fundamental to building a First Nations economy.

First Nations Wealth Forum

Evidence for the need to shift public policy in Australia to economic self-determination was also provided in the First Nations Wealth Forum. Eric Henson from the Harvard Project on American Indian Development indicated that their research had repeatedly found that success is predicated on First Nations making their own decisions about what development approaches to take, that this must be backed up by capable institutions that are culturally grounded and developing nation building leaders.

The Harvard Project's research has regard to Indigenous economic development across the world and there is no reason to think it should not apply in Australia, noting that treaties and self-governance have not been a feature of its history. While the Harvard research is not new to Australia and the ANU has hosted presentations by researchers from the Harvard Project in the past, there is no indication that Australia's policy settings have changed in response. Communities can apply for grants for individual employment and business projects under the Commonwealth's Indigenous Advancement Strategy, for example, but there is not a policy framework that supports the long-term development of capable First Nations community institutions that facilitate sustainable economic self-determination.

Nor has Australian public policy, as the contributions of Tā Mark Solomon indicated, produced anything like the economic outcomes that have been achieved for Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A key reason is that First Nations peoples of Australia have not had received the economic benefits of the Waitangi Treaty and Tribunal including substantial financial redress. There have been some Indigenous Land Use Agreements negotiated between native title holders and miners in Australia that include significant financial gains, but there is little sign that these have led to any change in the lives of First Nations people or that the income has been used to generate economic development. Institutions like Canada's First Nations Financial Management Board (FMB) that support First Nations to build their own economies (including meeting their financial management requirements) are also not included in Australia's policy framework.

Marramarra murru Symposium

First Nations participants at the Symposium indicated staunch support for a change in approach to Indigenous economic development policy and this constitutes powerful evidence.

The communique agreed to by participants states that:

Practitioners agreed that the policy framework led by the Commonwealth for First Nations economic development was in urgent need of reform and that it is a critical component of implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. That policy framework and the institutions supporting it in the Commonwealth were developed in the 20th century and are based on terra nullius thinking including that First Nations cannot be trusted to control and make decisions about their assets for themselves. It needs to be replaced by a policy framework for the 21st century that has a razor like focus on self-determination.

Some of the feedback from participants is also compelling. Leah Armstrong, a Torres Strait Islander, Managing Director of First Australians Capital Ltd and with over 25 years' business and not-for-profit experience (including as Chair of Supply Nation and a Director of Indigenous Business Australia) communicated to Peter Yu:

Congratulations on a successful Symposium and thank you for the opportunity to speak and contribute. It was a privilege to be amongst Indigenous leaders who are driving economic self-determination and the level of engagement and discussion has set a strong foundation for the future seminars and policy framework. I would be happy to be included in the "coalition of the willing" and engaged in future seminars or activities where my experience in access to finance, capacity building, Indigenous women's business participation and entrepreneurship can provide valuable insights.

Dr Miri (Margaret) Raven, a Yamatji-Noongar and non-Indigenous woman and Senior Scientia Lecturer at UNSW, advised the First Nations Portfolio that the value of the Symposium in part came from the significant involvement of First Nations entrepreneurs and that there was support for a shift of public policy towards self-determination. Dr Raven considers it essential that new policies are developed by First Nations practitioners rather than public servants if they are to be built on self-determination.

Many Land Councils across Australia are working with their constituents on a day-to-day basis to facilitate economic development and they were well represented at the Symposium. Brendan Moyle, Gamilaraay man, CEO of the Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council and a former senior Commonwealth public servant, also affirmed the need for a new policy agenda built around self-determination as articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. He considered that to achieve self-determination will require a strong and sustained conversation between First Nations leaders and the Commonwealth, which needs to lead the policy reform.

Jonathan McLeod, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, General Manager of Regional Development in the Northern Land Council, and a Director of Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture Ltd supported a shift to economic self-determination in public policy but noted that a significant investment in innovative capability development for First Nations communities in the Northern Territory will need to be a critical component.

Eric Henson from the Harvard Kennedy School's Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development provided the following comments reflecting on his experiences during the Wealth Forum, Symposium, and International Delegates Tour:

As the only national university in Australia, the ANU is uniquely situated to amplify the economic development efforts of First Nations people. When Native people are empowered and have the resources to make their own decisions about what governmental and development approaches to take, they consistently outperform external decision makers. The First Nations Portfolio is to be commended for its efforts to facilitate important conversations and partner with First Nations people in their continuing efforts to create pathways for sustainable economic development.

Recommendations for next steps

Australia is well behind Canada, Aotearoa/New Zealand and the United States in establishing institutions to recognise and promote self-determination for First Nations citizens. The declaration of terra nullius by the colonisers of Australia and the legacy of that declaration is in large part responsible for the discrepancy, although a multitude of political, geographic, cultural, and economic factors have also been at play over time.

As a nation, Australia now needs to focus much more on economic development, for individuals, communities and regions, Australia-wide, not limited to remote areas. The Marramarra murru First Nations Economic Development Symposium highlighted that economic development, when driven by Indigenous people with appropriate support from institutional and policy frameworks, is the most promising and most preferred methodology for achieving self-determination among the Australian First Nations population.

Based on solicited and unsolicited feedback from participants during and after the Symposium, the First Nations Portfolio can confidently declare that the Symposium and related events will be considered a landmark in the pathway towards First Nations economic self-determination in Australia.

It is strongly recommended by the First Nations Portfolio that the Commonwealth, which is responsible for overall First Nations economic development public policy, commence a process of jointly reviewing, developing, negotiating and reaching agreement with First Nations interests on a new policy framework based on economic self-determination. This process ought not be rushed and needs to be transparent and include First Nations leaders involved in economic development in making decisions from the outset. It should include engagement by the Commonwealth in the upcoming Murru waaruu Seminar Series being planned by the First Nations Portfolio, which will expand on the key findings from the Symposium.

The First Nations Portfolio emphasises that the above recommendation should not fall to the sole responsibility of the National Indigenous Australians Agency to advance. The Treasury, as it has in the past and as its counterparts in other former English colonies have done, needs to step up to take responsibility for First Nations economic development policy in recognition of its importance to the nation's broader economic interests.

Early consideration also needs to be given to establishing a national First Nations Economic Development Body. Given the emerging nature of the First Nations economy, sustained efforts will be required to improve policy frameworks and delivery, build capability and link Indigenous Australians to capable partners to activate training, employment, and business opportunities. A First Nations Economic Development Body would act, among other things, as a peak organisation to provide a national voice for First Nations fiscal development and Traditional Owners engaged in commercial activities. It is urgently needed, and we recommend looking to Canada to provide models and precedents for potential organisational structures.

Prompt attention also needs to be given to improving the First Nations economic data. Beyond the ABS census, there is little public and reliable data about the size and nature of the First Nations economy of Australia. Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, and the United States have all invested in this area and that has enabled these nations to improve their relevant policies. Until Australia makes its own investments in data development in this space, research and evidence-based policy development will remain exceedingly difficult.