



Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024–2025

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

In relation to: National Agreement on Closing the Gap and Transformation Strategy and Phase 3 engagement

Hearing: 12 November 2025

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 62-63

Transcript provided: 18 November 2025

Answer Due: 25 November 2025

THE CHAIR: So I am just, because I am asking about the spreadsheets you mentioned, but then in the responses I am getting the language used as have participated. I accept that the mode of participation may have changed since the request for information was provided. But I am curious to know which parts of government did not respond to those spreadsheets because this is key to the work of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' ability to coordinate across government. And I think it would be appropriate— I mean, I am going to lodge it on notice, if it is not taken on notice anyway—

Ms Orr: I think Ms Sabellico can probably run through that. I mean, I must say, I do not— I will leave the spreadsheet coordination to the directorate. So I cannot give you too much update on that. But Ms Sabellico, or Ms Arthy, might be able to— I think the spreadsheet is the coordination point for the directorate in your working tool.

Ms Sabellico: I think that is right. And I think—

THE CHAIR: I am imagining a template or something like that sent out professional development plans for the team, "Here is the template. Fill it in. Come back to me". And then no one days, I and I go, what the? And then I take responsibility.

Ms Arthy: Mr Emerson, if I may? And without knowing the details as particularly been just more generally, we use— in government we use spreadsheets, all sorts of measures to get information through. So it may not— we might have got the information we need, maybe not necessarily through a spreadsheet or otherwise. I guess, I focus on the outcomes. What we will— the advice that we have got is that all directorates have been involved, participated. What we can do is have a look at what we have got in terms of what gaps we might have. If we may, rather focusing necessarily on spreadsheets, because they change. Like, we get different spreadsheets week after week, that do different things. But would it be helpful if we looked at what gaps we still have? Would that be helpful?

THE CHAIR: Well perhaps somewhere a different mode of engagement has been undertaken, how each area of government has engaged. Like, we are here to assess the effectiveness of this office in coordinating across government in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. So I think it is a pretty fair question. I understand you are answering it in a way, but I think it would be helpful for us, also in asking questions of other areas of government, where the resistance may have been and at what point in the process different areas of government have responded to requests for information in relation to the Transformation Strategy and Phase 3 of the Agreement. And the reason I am labouring this point is they were both due to commence already and have not. And both of which have been— I have been chasing in these hearings, and they have been delayed multiple times. So I am trying to understand what is behind the delays. Hopefully you can appreciate.

Ms Arthy: Now that I understand the context, we can takeaway and look at what is the most useful information to provide you about— so the committee can give an assessment about the level of engagement from other directorates if that helps?

THE CHAIR: And timing?

Ms Arthy: And timing.

THE CHAIR: Level and timing, whether we received responses and what was the manner of the responses received to these requests for both the Phase 3?

Ms Arthy: And we will put your question specifically around the spreadsheet, to see whether that is helpful. But I suspect it would be— it is only part of the story. And we can provide a better set of information. We will take that offline and come back to you with information.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms Arthy: And happy to iterate the information with you if it does not meet your needs.

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OATSIA) had briefed the ACT Public Service Strategic Board in April 2025 on the alignment of Phase Three of the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement*, in alignment with Essential Action 1.5 of the Productivity Commission Review into the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, following the release of the Productivity Commission Review.

OATSIA negotiated the delay of the development and negotiation of Phase Three to 1 July 2025 to accommodate the Elected Body elections (July 2024) and the ACT General Election (October 2024) to allow for appointments to be finalised prior to the development and agreement of Phase Three.

Following the Strategic Board agreement in April 2025, the Deputy Director General of the then Community Services Directorate was informed in May 2025 of the work required and timeframes.

An email was distributed to directorates on 29 May 2025 providing templates and the request for completion of the development work by 11 July 2025. The request included guidance from OATSIA to ensure these were being developed in partnership with the Elected Body and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through established forums.

OATSIA supported this request by:

- issuing reminders on 11 July 2025;
- follow-up contact and status checks with directorates (approximately once per week); and
- regular follow up-requests by the Deputy Director General (Operations) across the Deputy Directors General from other directorates.

On 17 June 2025, the Head of Service distributed further correspondence from the Elected Body across all directorates identifying specific priority areas the Elected Body hoped to see.

Some directorates maintained regular contact with OATSIA regarding their late or outstanding input, others provided material to or engaged directly with the office of the Deputy Director-General. Consequently, most directorates responded quickly, with two-thirds submitting within two weeks after the due date.

Directorates provided information through the template provided, by email, or through meetings and discussions with OATSIA. These modes varied depending on directorate processes.

On 21 August 2025, the Elected Body called for an urgent workshop with all directorates to go through the actions, which took place on 16 September 2025.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several sweeping, connected strokes.

Signature:

Date: 09/12/25

By the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Ms Suzanne Orr MLA