



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Public
Accounts and Administration

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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Active Democracy Bean

Submission to the Public Accounts and
Administration Committee on the Closing
the Gap Bill

Catherine Blunt, Jane Clifton Bassett



Summary

Active Democracy Bean strongly supports the Closing the Gap(CTG) Bill. Using the powerful mechanisms of transparency and accountability, the Bill promotes good governance, builds public trust, and will make government more responsible to the people it serves. The Bill provides a way of embedding the systemic change needed to turn our woeful CTG statistics around.

Who are we?

Active Democracy Bean is a community group associated with the Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy and Active Democracy Australia. We started in 2020.

Our aim is to strengthen democracy in the Federal electorate of Bean. We do this by educating ourselves and our community on issues of concern to us, communicating these to our elected representatives and prompting accountability on promises made. We are nonpartisan, inclusive and welcoming.

What is our involvement in indigenous issues in the ACT?

Active Democracy Bean and our Federal member's office co-organised the YES23 Referendum campaign in South Canberra. Together we managed 500 volunteers who campaigned weekly at shopping centres, doorknocked and made phone calls. We are proud of the result: 56% of the Bean electorate voted Yes .

At the request of members who joined us post Referendum, in 2024 we initiated “Beyond the Talk - Indigenous-led solutions NOW”, a joint campaign by Active Democracy Bean and ANTaR ACT. (ANTaR is Australia's main non-Indigenous advocacy group for justice and reconciliation). The aim of our campaign was to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's self-determination as an urgent, high-priority issue in the 2024 ACT election.

To this end, we visited our local members in the Brindabella and Murrumbidgee electorate, held monthly “local politics in the pub ” events on our campaign theme and visited the sites identified by the Elected Body as a priority for community control (Boomanulla Oval and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm). As a result, we increased our own and the community's understanding of the National Agreement and the ACT's progress on Closing the Gap (CTG).

In addition, with ANTaR ACT and ANTaR national, we compiled a scorecard on parties' responses to key CTG issues, and had questions asked in the Assembly and in the media. We followed up these same issues with the new Assembly in 2025 and are keeping a watching brief with our elected representatives on progress made implementing promises made on our Scorecard.

Why do we support Thomas Emerson's Closing the Gap Bill?

As we explored the issues, we were not surprised to find that the ACT Government had made repeated commitments to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination and wellbeing. However, we were horrified that little progress has been made in CTG, with the ACT now having the worst incarceration rate, homelessness and experience of racial discrimination in Australia. This is a shameful outcome in a progressive, wealthy jurisdiction such as the ACT.

Accountability of senior public servants

We support the amendment to the Bill that makes the principles of the National Agreement on CTG the responsibility of senior public servants. Practically, this could be part of the reportable outcomes of senior public servants and included in their performance appraisal. Managers could be assessed for undertaking cultural capability and anti-racism training personally and for promoting within their line of management.

Feedback on cultural safety could be obtained from Indigenous stakeholders dealing with Directorates, compiled confidentially and taken seriously in performance reviews. This is good practice in the humanitarian sector, where senior staff are held accountable for their attitudes to implementing partners as rated by those partners. It is a way of rebalancing inequitable power relationships.

It is vital that the National Agreement on CTG is embedded in this way, or we will continue to have all talk and no action. This is no longer acceptable. We want action now.

Public reporting on CTG commitments

Public reporting is a basic accountability tool that ensures transparent access to information by the community on CTG outcomes achieved by government agencies and Directorates. It motivates achievement of goals by senior staff and provision of appropriate support to teams.

Using a format agreed to by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) ensures that the Directorates and government agencies prioritise what the indigenous community identifies as most important to them. This is a key element of self-determination.

The definition of cultural safety in the National Agreement – that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recipients of a service are the only ones who can determine whether it is culturally safe - should be adhered to as it reflects a basic tenet of client focussed service which is a key component of quality management systems. If customers consistently say they are treated rudely, ignored or not respected, who does management listen to? The client or the staff? The answer is obvious. The National Agreement definition of cultural safety must be adhered to in the Bill.

Conclusion

We strongly recommend that the Assembly support Thomas Emerson's Closing the Gap Bill. We need to do so much better meeting our obligations to our First Nations people. The Bean community supported a Yes vote in the Referendum. They would support a Yes vote for this Bill.