



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



First Nations International Engagement Strategy



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Acknowledgements

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) acknowledges Australia's First Nations people as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises and respects their continuing connections to lands, waters and communities. DFAT pays respect to Elders past and present, to emerging leaders, and to all First Nations people, and recognises the continuation of diverse cultural, spiritual and educational practices. DFAT acknowledges that self-determination is a human right for First Nations people, as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. DFAT thanks all First Nations people who have generously shared their valuable knowledge and expertise to inform the development of this First Nations International Engagement Strategy (the Strategy).

This document uses the terms *Aboriginal*, *Torres Strait Islander* and *First Nations* throughout. We recognise that no single term captures the full diversity of cultural, kinship, and language groups across Australia. These terms are used respectfully to ensure this Strategy can be applied to all DFAT's work.

This publication may contain images or references to First Nations people who are deceased. The Australian Government does not wish to cause distress to any First Nations community members.



Artwork and story by Jay Hobbs



‘Threads of eucalypt’

Threads of eucalypt embodies the spirit of renewal, connection, and cultural strength that underpins the First Nations International Engagement Strategy.

The artwork weaves together themes of collaboration, resilience and shared growth. It shows how relationships between peoples and nations flourish when rooted in respect and reciprocity.

The circular forms reflect unity and collective purpose, while the journey stones trace pathways of exchange across Country and the Blue Pacific. Scattered among them, eucalypt blossoms and seed pods symbolise healing, regeneration and continuity, and echo the enduring resilience of First Nations people and the living landscapes they care for.

Grounded in earthy ochres and ocean blues, the composition mirrors the balance between land and sea, heritage and horizon. Like the eucalyptus, firmly rooted yet reaching outward, the work celebrates how culture, diplomacy, and understanding intertwine to strengthen connections across the world.

‘Saltwater threads’

This complementary motif expands on the themes of *Threads of eucalypt*. It weaves Torres Strait Islander representation into the broader story of connection.

Whereas *Threads of eucalypt* reflects the rooted strength and continuity of Country, this design extends those threads into the saltwater, symbolising unity between land and sea. The turtle embodies navigation, wisdom and life’s enduring rhythm, while the warup (drum) and spear represent culture and protection - the heartbeat and guardianship of Islander identity.

Together, these elements honour the shared journey between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, reflecting the strength of both cultures moving together in balance.



Uncle Duncan Smith during the Courtesy Call by His Majesty King Tupou VI with the Governor General, Her Excellency the Honourable Ms Sam Mostyn AC, accompanied by Queen Nanasipau'u, at Government House, Canberra. Credit: Mel Adams / DFAT



Foreword by the Minister for Foreign Affairs



Australia's security, resilience and future economic growth depend on a peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

As strategic competition intensifies and global uncertainty grows, Australia must use all elements of our national power to strengthen our partnerships in our region of the Pacific and Southeast Asia, deepen economic ties and reinforce regional stability.

For thousands of years, Australia's First Nations peoples have maintained connections across our region including in Indonesia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

This Strategy draws on those connections to advance Australia's interests, recognising that First Nations Australians can make a practical contribution to building relationships, opening doors and supporting Australia's engagement across the Indo-Pacific that has been historically underutilised.

This is a strategic national advantage that other countries do not possess and are unable to emulate.

Strong relationships create opportunities – they support more trade, investment and economic growth. They help Australian businesses access new markets, strengthen regional cooperation and contribute to a more secure and prosperous neighbourhood.

This Strategy supports practical engagement and complements our broader efforts to strengthen Australia's partnerships, expand economic opportunities and enhance our ability to work with countries across the region on the shared challenges we face.

Australia's success in the decades ahead will depend on trusted partnerships and sustained engagement throughout our region. This will help ensure Australia is well placed to build those partnerships, grow our influence and create new opportunities for Australians and our regional neighbours.

By drawing on the full breadth and depth of Australia's experience and capabilities, we can contribute to a region that is peaceful, stable and prosperous, while delivering outcomes for all Australians.

Senator the Hon Penny Wong,
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Foreword by the Ambassador for First Nations People

First Nations international engagement is built on deep history and grounded in mutual respect. First Nations cultures, knowledges and connections deepen Australia's international ties, especially in the Pacific region.

As Australia's inaugural Ambassador for First Nations People, I have seen first-hand the international interest and appetite to understand, learn from and appreciate Australia's First Nations peoples, cultures and knowledges. Many of our international partners tell me they consider Australia's First Nations people, the oldest continuing living culture in the world, as the knowledge holders, caretakers and grandparents of culture.

This Strategy focuses DFAT's ongoing and greater efforts to listen to and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Strategy has self-determination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at its heart. On the international stage, we can enrich the global community and economy with the diversity and resilience of Australia's First Nations cultures and knowledges.

Through this Strategy, we are shaping Australia's foreign policy journey. It is a journey that requires commitment, trust and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities. We bring a focus on respect and reciprocity; our approach to international engagement is grounded in relationships. DFAT is committed to listening deeply, to working collaboratively and to sharing power.

I would like to personally acknowledge the generous contributions of a broad range of First Nations people in the development of this Strategy. To the Elders and leaders, experts in their fields, businesses and organisations, and community representatives - your knowledge and wisdom, grounded in First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing, enriches Australia's foreign policy. Through this Strategy, First Nations communities will continue to guide, strengthen and lead our international engagement.

Mr Justin Mohamed,
Ambassador for First Nations People

The Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs of Vanuatu invited Aunty Serena Williams and the Yukkumbruk Women's Dreaming dance group to celebrate the reopening of the Chiefs' Nakamal with Chief Paul Robert Ravun and Ambassador Mohamed. Credit: Jeffson Willietien / JZ Photography



Purpose

Recognising the role of Australia’s First Nations people in how we engage with the world reflects who we are – a modern, multicultural nation grounded in the world’s oldest continuous culture. For tens of thousands of years, Australia’s First Nations people have built relationships of trade, culture and kinship across the Indo-Pacific. That legacy of connection, shared history and diplomacy is part of Australia’s story and a powerful asset in Australia’s engagement with our region and the world today.

The inclusion of First Nations’ perspectives in our international engagement benefits all Australians, including First Nations people. It advances key international priorities such as building a peaceful, stable, prosperous and unified Pacific region; promoting equitable trade and investment that

showcases First Nations enterprise and innovation; and supporting a multilateral system that meaningfully recognises First Nations rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples globally.

This First Nations International Engagement Strategy provides a framework through which DFAT will further advance First Nations’ perspectives within Australia’s foreign policy to support Australia’s national interests, working with Australia’s First Nations people and collaboratively across government. Grounded in the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Strategy outlines key focus areas, identified through discussions with First Nations people, to guide DFAT’s international engagement.

1 | Deepening Australia’s partnerships in the Pacific

3 | Elevating First Nations rights, diplomacy and interests globally

2 | Expanding First Nations trade and investment

4 | Strengthening DFAT’s capability to promote First Nations perspectives internationally

Implementation of the Strategy will prioritise trusted and meaningful relationships with First Nations people, organisations and communities. It will also focus on promoting cultural safety and eliminating racism; sharing power and accountability; and supporting healing and the conservation and promotion of First Nations cultures. Implementation will be guided by ongoing collaboration with First Nations organisations. This Strategy aligns with the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, embedding First Nations perspectives in DFAT’s work through genuine partnership and structural reform.

The Strategy builds on Australia’s history in Indigenous diplomacy – including the significant and diverse contributions of DFAT’s First Nations diplomats, in addition to the *Indigenous Diplomacy Agenda* (2021); the Office of the Pacific – *Indigenous Engagement Plan* (2021-2023); the *Indigenous Procurement Policy* (2020) and *International Development Policy* (2023).

Deepen Pacific partnerships through First Nations engagement

The unique connections between the First Peoples of our lands and waters and the peoples of the Blue Pacific stretch back through time. We share histories, cultures and familial ties. By incorporating First Nations knowledges, worldviews and shared stories, we contribute to building a peaceful, stable, prosperous and unified Pacific, and showcase Indigenous-led perspectives on diplomacy, peacebuilding, sustainability and community resilience. We will continue to seek opportunities to deepen and celebrate these connections, guided by cultural values of family, collectivism, respect, listening, reciprocity, spirituality and stewardship of Country. We share the responsibility for protecting the lives and livelihoods that rely on the Blue Pacific.¹

DFAT will

- **Strengthen First Nations people-to-people connections** within the Pacific family to ensure a more interconnected and resilient region.
- **Support and elevate First Nations leadership** across the Pacific, including through community-led and faith-based initiatives.
- **Enhance partnerships and development cooperation** by integrating First Nations knowledges and academic research to address and learn from shared challenges such as climate change and disaster resilience, gender equality, access to health care, land rights, justice and economic equity. At the same time, promote locally driven and led solutions, drawing on First Nations innovation and traditional ecological knowledges.
- **Support First Nations interests** through government relationships, frameworks and partnership initiatives that help shape the future of our region.
- **Deepen engagement with the Pacific**, particularly with Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, through the development of bilateral action plans that recognise shared heritage and our region's unique histories, to promote further opportunities for cooperation.

As a visiting Prime Minister, the welcome to Country ceremony is a reminder of the deep cultural heritage and connection to land that our peoples share across the Pacific. I pray for blessings and unity among our people.

**- Prime Minister of Fiji,
Sitiveni Rabuka**

¹ Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2024) *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.

Ngunnawal Senior Elder Ms Violet Sheridan with Prime Minister of Fiji, Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka. Credit: Salaseini Moceiwa / Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Fiji

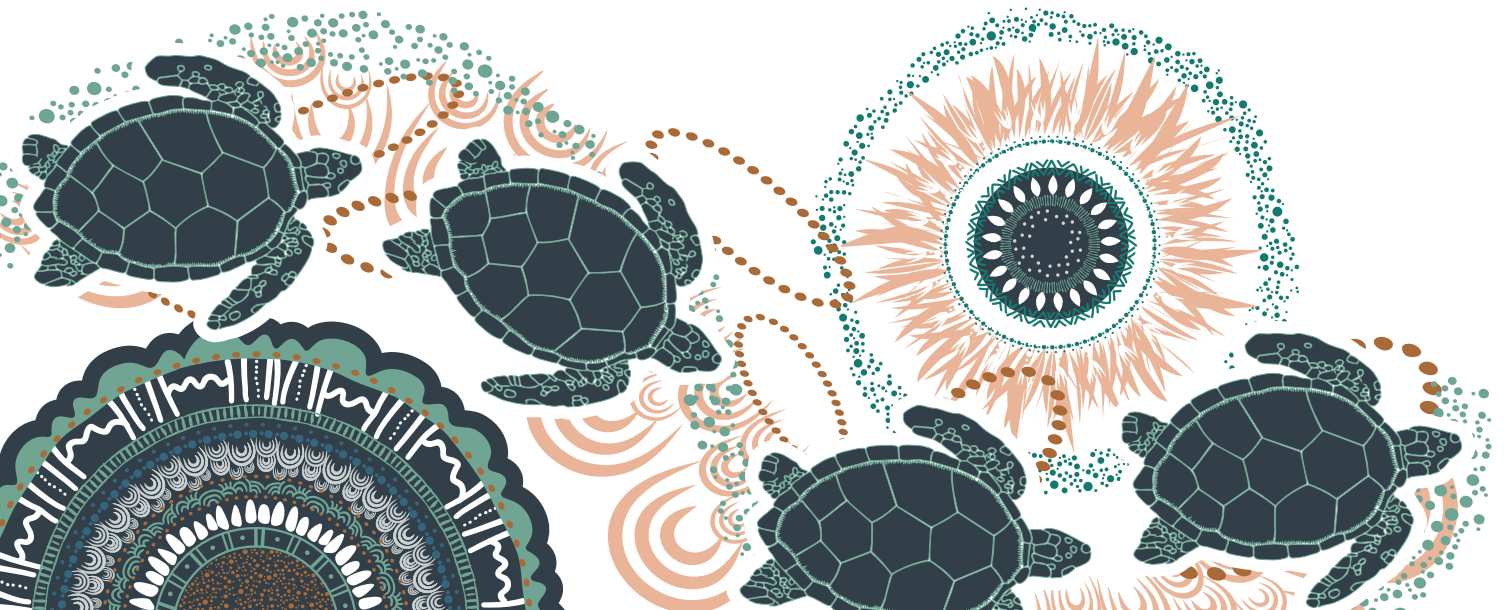




NAATSIHWP, TAFE Queensland and Vanuatu Ministry of Health participants in the Regional Indigenous Partnership: Collaboration for Primary Health Care Workforce Strengthening in Vanuatu. Credit: NAATSIHWP

Case study

DFAT is partnering with the National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) on the Regional Indigenous Partnership: Collaboration for Primary Health Care Workforce Strengthening in Vanuatu through the Partnerships for a Healthy Region Initiative. In close collaboration with the Government of Vanuatu Ministry of Health, the project will contribute to the advancement of Vanuatu Village Health Worker roles through Indigenous self-determination and by using co-designed and relational approaches. Another key component of the project is to establish professional networks to strengthen connections, promote reciprocal learning and drive ongoing professional dialogue.



Expand First Nations trade and investment

Australia's First Nations traders are our country's first exporters. Supporting the growth of successful Australian First Nations businesses through international trade and investment is a key priority.² These businesses bring unique strengths that enrich Australia's global trade offerings. DFAT is committed to collaboration with First Nations businesses³ to advance a trade and investment agenda that not only delivers greater opportunities for First Nations people and communities but also amplifies the distinct competitive advantages First Nations enterprises contribute to Australia's economic interests and global reputation.

In partnership with portfolio and other relevant agencies, DFAT will

- **Expand international market access**, including for First Nations women-owned businesses, through: negotiating and implementing Australia's free trade agreements and investment arrangements; trade finance; the visitor economy; and export promotion and support, consistent with the First Nations Economic Partnership.⁴
- **Support economic opportunities, investment and partnerships** with First Nations communities, organisations and businesses in Australia's clean energy transition.⁵
- **Strengthen engagement and knowledge exchange** between First Nations businesses, corporations and key international partners and regions including Canada, New Zealand, the United States, the Pacific, Southeast Asia and Latin America, including exploring Indigenous-to-Indigenous trade and investment.
- **Advance First Nations economic interests** through participation in regional and multilateral arrangements, including the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA).
- **Promote international recognition** and advocate for the protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, including through engagement with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and other forums.
- **Collaborate with state and territory governments** to support First Nations economic development, including through the Ministerial Council on Trade and Investment consistent with the *National Statement on First Nations Trade and Investment*.⁶

The clean-energy transition is a once-in-a-generation chance to shift to long-term partnerships led by First Nations businesses. Expanding First Nations trade and investment opens markets and finance and turns intent into tangible outcomes - equity stakes in projects on Country, new export revenue, and skilled jobs where they're needed most - growing Indigenous-owned exporters, anchoring resilient regions and accelerating a just, nation-building transition.

- Leah Armstrong
Managing Director,
Core Insights Advisory Services
and Australian Indigenous
Co-Lead, Indigenous Peoples
Economic Trade Cooperation
Arrangement

² In line with the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, in particular Target 8 (Economic Participation).

³ Including through the pilot First Nations Trade and Investment Advisory Group and the First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership.

⁴ Australian Government, Coalition of Peaks, First Nations Economic Empowerment Alliance (2025) First Nations Economic Partnership: An Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community - Controlled Peak Organisations and the First Nations Economic Empowerment Alliance 2025-2030.

⁵ In line with the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy.

⁶ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2025) National Statement National Statement on First Nations Trade and Investment: Empowering Australia's prosperity through First Nations international business excellence.




Case study

Australian First Nations businesses are poised to benefit from the enormous potential of the Australia - United Arab Emirates (UAE) Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which is in effect from 1 October 2025. The agreement contains Australia's first Indigenous chapter in a free trade agreement and promotes cooperation as the foundation for First Nations businesses to launch into the UAE and its broader region. The agreement also highlights important First Nations perspectives in environment, sustainable agriculture, intellectual property protection and investment.

Australian First Nations fashion house, Kirrikin, showcased its culturally rich designs at an event in Abu Dhabi, spotlighting the First Nations Chapter of the Australia-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Credit: RedxMedia





Banok Rind and Terri Reid, Wiyi
Yani U Thangani Institute for First
Nations Gender Justice Credit:
Dan Bourchier / NITV

Key focus 3

Elevate First Nations’ rights, diplomacy and interests globally

Australia’s First Nations people have long engaged internationally, bringing deep cultural insights, diplomatic leadership, and lived experience that enriches the global discourse on key issues like the rights of Indigenous Peoples, economic empowerment, World Heritage and climate change. Through DFAT’s cultural diplomacy and values-driven foreign policy – grounded in cultural integrity, deep listening, reciprocity, and respect – Australia fosters genuine partnerships that affirm Indigenous self-determination and strengthen international relationships.

DFAT will

- **Prioritise and facilitate relationship-building and cultural exchange** – elevating the rich heritage of First Nations people to grow Australia’s relationships with international partners, including other Indigenous Peoples, especially across the Indo-Pacific.⁷
- **Expand opportunities for First Nations owned and led corporations,** businesses, researchers, artists and cultural organisations in international activities.⁸
- **Uphold Australia’s commitment to the principles of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** by actively engaging in multilateral and regional forums that promote Indigenous Peoples’ rights and socioeconomic equity.
- **Enhance Australia’s leadership** in supporting and promoting First Nations ways of knowing, being and doing in responding to global challenges.
- **Support return of cultural heritage and repatriation of ancestors** in partnership with Australian Government agencies.
- **Promote regional collaboration and dialogue on First Nations rights** and interests, by enhancing coordination across government agencies, non-government organisations, academic institutions, civil society, human rights bodies, regional organisations and multilateral partners.

We raised our voices on the global stage to champion our right to shape our own future. To solve the social challenges of our time, women must have a seat at the table leading, designing and driving solutions. It’s time to rebuild our nation with intentional investment that uplifts and empowers our communities to lead the way. Our vision is to look beyond today and lay the foundation for generations to come.

– Janine Dureau
CEO, Kimberley Aboriginal
Women’s Council

⁷ Including through our scholarships programs such as Australia Awards and the New Colombo Plan

⁸ Consistent with the First Nations First approach of the National Cultural Policy: *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*

Strengthen DFAT's capability to promote First Nations perspectives internationally

Australia's global influence is enhanced when we reflect both our modern diversity and our rich cultural heritage to the world. The inclusion of First Nations' perspectives in our foreign policy respects and reflects Australia's unique identity. This requires sustained investment in DFAT's capacity and capability, including increased First Nations participation and leadership.

DFAT will

- **Strengthen relationships with First Nations people and organisations** to continue to enrich Australian diplomacy through First Nations knowledges and perspectives.
- **Support First Nations interests** internationally through the role of Ambassador for First Nations People and across our international and thematic diplomatic networks.
- **Support First Nations experts, leaders and early-career practitioners** from within DFAT and externally to engage internationally, recognising the unique contribution of First Nations talent to Australia's diplomatic excellence.
- **Grow and support DFAT's First Nations workforce** through implementing the DFAT People Strategy, DFAT Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan and the Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Strategy – Embracing Diversity for Global Influence.
- **Increase cultural safety and capability** across DFAT by expanding learning and development opportunities and facilitating community exchanges and immersive cultural experiences such as Jawun.
- **Implement systems to track progress on the priorities of this Strategy, support accountability** and deliver continuous improvement.

Amanda Healy, Director of Kirrikin social enterprise and proud Wonnarua woman from the Hunter Valley in NSW, celebrates 80 Years of Friendship between Australia and Chile. Credit: Marcelo Martin / DFAT





To effectively advance a First Nations foreign policy agenda, it is vital we continue to uplift departmental understanding of First Nations issues, and walk alongside First Nations people, whose knowledge, perspectives and leadership enrich Australia's engagement with the world.

- George Mina
DFAT First Nations Champion and Deputy
Secretary Trade and Investment Group

Vina, Daeng Sareng Dakko, Somba Opu area community elder and musician; David Yunupingu, Yolngu dancer; Uncle Lionel Lauch, Living Culture; Guswan Gunawan, Marege Institute and Uncle Shane Charles, Brimbank City Council. Credit: Agit Primaswara / Agit & Co.





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