



Post-Conference Summary Report

2025

First Nations

Public Administration Conference

Leave a Legacy
– Be a Transformer

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre,
Meanjin Brisbane

26-28 November 2025

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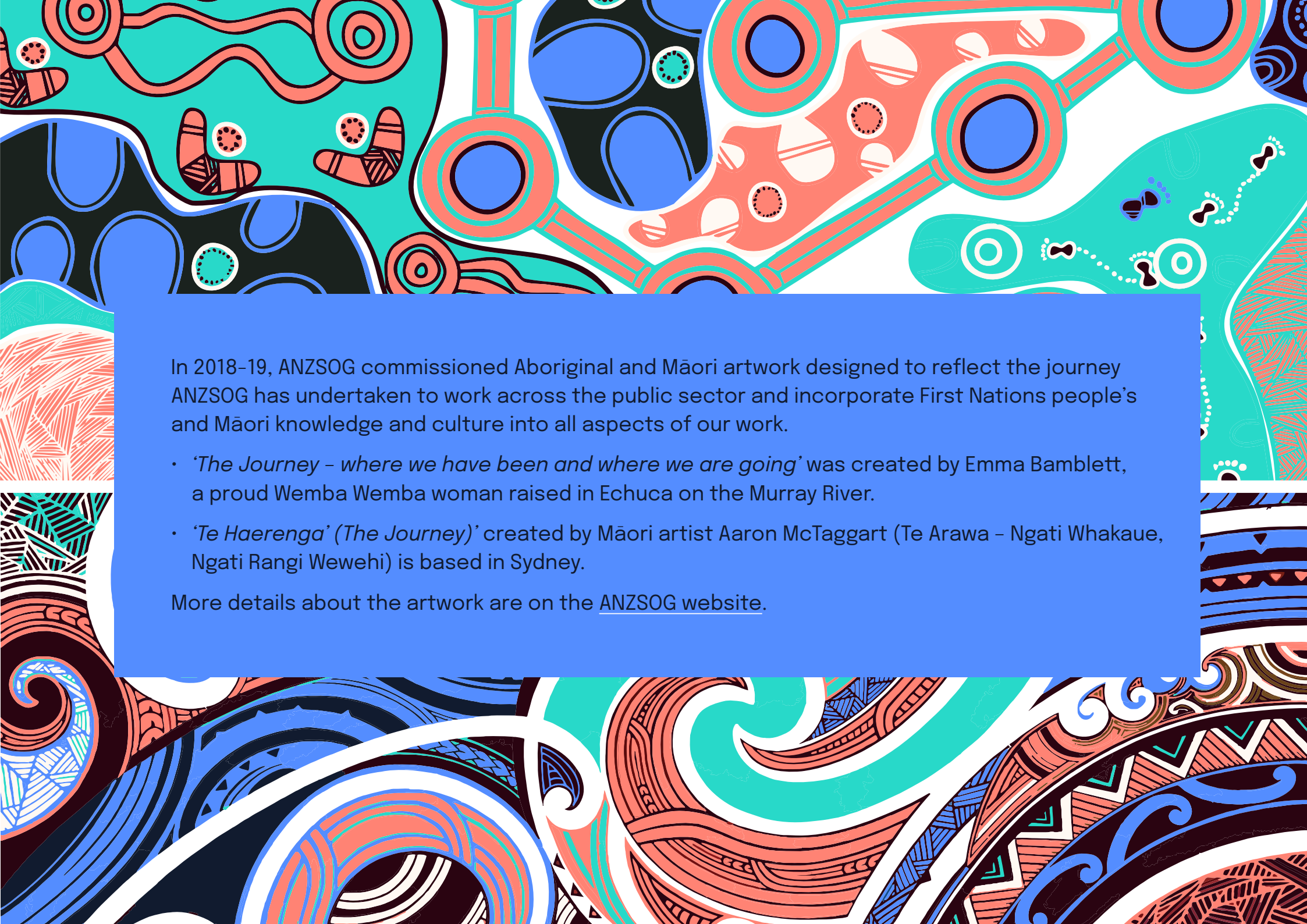
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Acknowledgements

The Australia & New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Traditional Owners, Custodians and First Nations of Australia, and Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty of Waitangi partners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

We acknowledge the Turrbal and Jagera peoples as Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which the conference was held in Meanjin Brisbane.



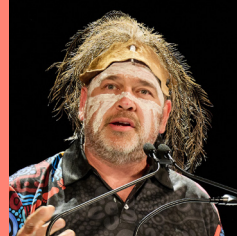
In 2018-19, ANZSOG commissioned Aboriginal and Māori artwork designed to reflect the journey ANZSOG has undertaken to work across the public sector and incorporate First Nations people's and Māori knowledge and culture into all aspects of our work.

- *'The Journey - where we have been and where we are going'* was created by Emma Bamblett, a proud Wemba Wemba woman raised in Echuca on the Murray River.
- *'Te Haerenga' (The Journey)* created by Māori artist Aaron McTaggart (Te Arawa - Ngati Whakaue, Ngati Rangi Wewehi) is based in Sydney.

More details about the artwork are on the [ANZSOG website](#).

Welcome to Country

The conference opened with a powerful Welcome to Meanjin, led by Shannon Ruska and Tribal Experiences dancers, honouring the Turrbal and Jaggera peoples, and reminding delegates of the enduring connection Aboriginal people maintain with the land. A respectful response from Māori participants set the tone of trans-Tasman partnership.



Lil Anderson – Conference Host welcome

Conference host Lil Anderson, former head of Te Arawhiti/ Office for Māori Crown Relations, welcomed over 480 attendees and acknowledged the support of ANZSOG and partners, including the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), Department Premier and Cabinet (DPC) Victoria, the Federal Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, and Services Australia.

Lil urged delegates to engage deeply, ask questions, and absorb the practical resources and ideas on offer:

“This is a unique opportunity – don’t leave the conference with an unasked question in your mind.”



Partners and Sponsors

Partner



Australian Government

National Indigenous Australians Agency

General Partners and Sponsor



Australian Government



Services Australia



Australian Government

Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing

Message from Professor Caron Beaton-Wells

ANZSOG Dean and CEO



Improving outcomes for First Nations peoples and Māori is the great unfinished business of the governments of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. The goodwill to work with communities is there, but changing the way government structures and institutions work is proving more difficult.

ANZSOG's 2025 First Nations public administration conference *Leave a Legacy: Be a Transformer* in Meanjin/Brisbane was an opportunity to join a majority audience of public servants, listen directly to the voices of First Nations and Māori participants, and hear their perspectives on power sharing, co-management, and the need for genuine long-term engagement and collaboration with communities.

The conference featured a phenomenal line-up of 23 speakers and panellists – 21 of them First Nations and Māori – who challenged attendees' thinking, posed hard questions and laid out ideas for the practical changes we need to make. I thank each and every one of them for their generosity of time and spirit, in being part of the conference.

We heard that Indigenous peoples want more control over policies and governance, and for governments to step back and recognise their unique capacity to develop solutions. First Nations and Māori don't need or want governments to articulate a vision for their futures, as they are better placed to know what they need to shape their own destinies.

Too many First Nations peoples and Māori continue to be denied not just dignity, but the respect and opportunities to participate that many of us take for granted in the wealthy countries in which we live. Our institutions and systems are diminished by not realising the full richness inherent in First Nations and Māori cultures.

In Australia, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap provides a road map for change, but it is up to all of us in the public sector to make it happen. In Aotearoa New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal, and the settling of claims with Iwi is already providing a catalyst for self-determination, but more work needs to be done to build on those successes.

The appetite for change is there, but the hard grind of dismantling barriers, shifting power and changing how the public sector operates, remains. These changes must be woven into the broader work of the public sector and cannot be left to Indigenous agencies or to First Nations and Māori public servants to tackle.

This report records highlights of the conference and captures the mood of this exceptional event. It collects the key themes that emerged: the importance of public servants listening to First Nations and Māori, real power sharing, taking a long-term relational approach to working with communities, and recognising that First Nations are best placed to determine their own futures.

As the members of the ANZSOG First Nations Reference Group often remind me, this transformation is a long road. As an organisation, ANZSOG is looking to be here for that journey, as a partner that can withstand the inevitable waxing and waning in political fortunes, to be steadfast alongside First Nations and Māori public servants, academics, communities and organisations, as they work to transform government.

The 2025 Conference is part of that long road to change, and I hope that for the almost 500 attendees it was a time to reflect and sharpen their focus on how they and their organisations can work more effectively with First Nations and Māori and leave a legacy that better serves their interests.



Promotion and Engagement

ANZSOG promoted the conference widely across Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, to ensure as large and varied an attendance as possible. A broad range of speakers contributed to a diverse debate that did justice to the complexity of First Nations public administration. Beyond the conference, ANZSOG will house conference resources, including recordings of all panels on its website for free public access.



23 Speakers

19 Indigenous **15** women
4 Non-Indigenous **8** men

From across Australia and
 Aotearoa New Zealand



2 Full Days (Hybrid)

2 Ministers addresses
2 keynote addresses
7 panel discussions
12 yarning/ breakout sessions



Registrations

480, including **84** online
 Indigenous and non-Indigenous
 Representing the public sector,
 academia, not-for-profit, private,
 and communities



50,000 emails

sent in **7** campaigns through
 ANZSOG First Nations eNews



300,000

emails sent to subscribers
 across **13** ANZSOG eNews



1,423

new First Nations eNews
 subscribers since Nov 2024



11 ANZSOG event newsletters

to **15,000** subscribers have
 included the conference



27,000 LinkedIn followers

7 posts during conference
 attracted **13,000** impressions



Advertising

The Mandarin, Inside Gov (NZ),
 Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times,
 LinkedIn



Summary of Consistent Messages from Panel Sessions

Governments must transform themselves and the way they work

with First Nations and Māori by taking a long-term relational approach to build trust and connections with communities that go beyond the transactional and open the way for community-led policies and solutions.

Indigenous governance and knowledge must be embedded in policies

that use the strengths of Indigenous culture and recognises that communities know their own circumstances best.

Governments must change their internal structures, funding mechanisms and accountabilities

so they can move to genuine power-sharing with First Nations and Māori.

First Nations and Māori must be able to set their own goals and visions for the futures,

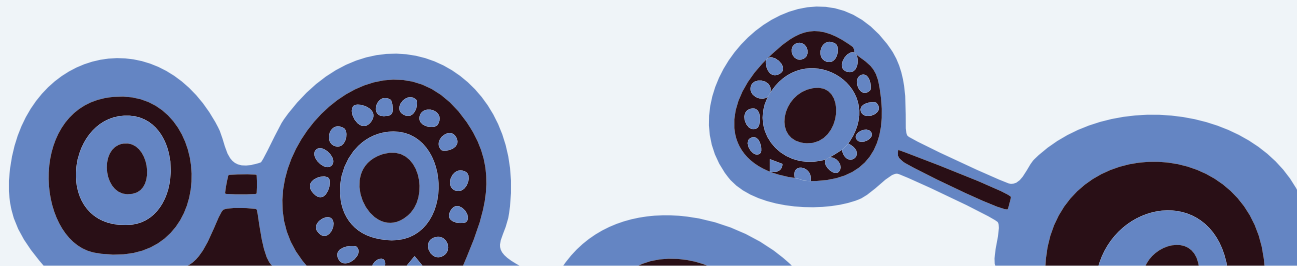
with government there to act as an effective enabler.

True accountability requires mechanisms that endure beyond election cycles,

are monitored independently and are embedded in law.

Decisions on how to measure transformation should be shaped by those most impacted

- children, families, and communities - not by bureaucratic processes, structures and KPIs.

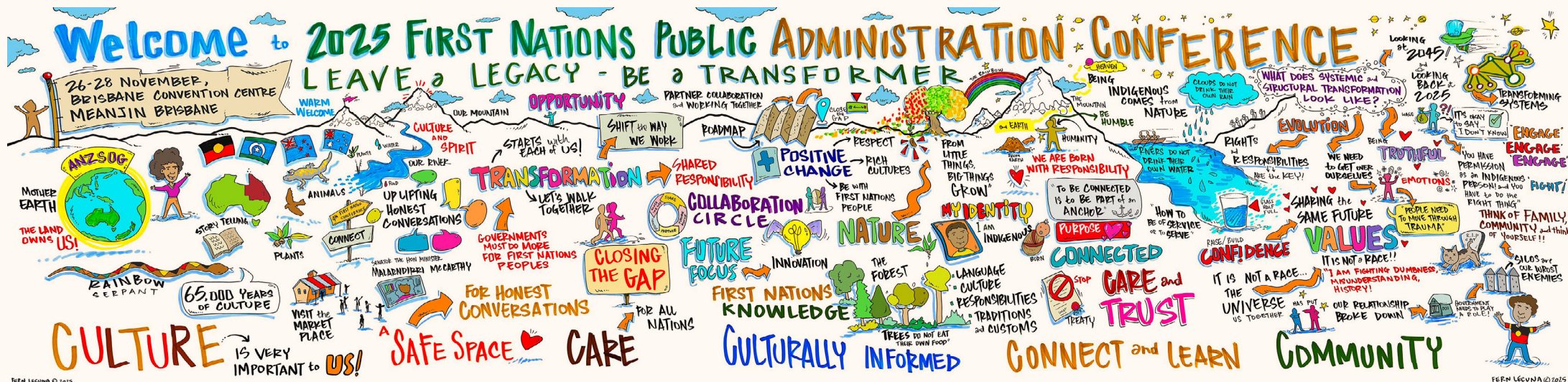






Day One

Wednesday 26 November 2025



Conference Program: Day One – Wednesday 26 November 2025

Setting the Scene



Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy

Minister for Indigenous Australians

The Minister called for public services to move beyond consultation to genuine power-sharing with First Nations, drawing on their strength, knowledge, and resilience. She emphasised the need for respect, accountability, and shared decision-making. She challenged public servants to always ask whose voices shape policy and whose lives are changed by it:

“Public services need to remember that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have built systems that managed the land and sustained the world’s oldest living culture for 65,000 years. Public services need to move away from imposing solutions and shift to working in partnership with First Nations people who have always known what works best for their communities.”



Hon Patrick Gorman MP

Assistant Minister for the Public Service

Patrick provided a video message reminding the audience that:

“Ten years ago, in 2015, across the entire Senior Executive Service, we only had 25 Indigenous Senior Executive Service leaders. Now, in 2025, that number is 111. It doubled in the last few years, directly because of our SES 100 program. That milestone is not only a better reflection of the community, but it also ensures better understanding of community needs and better policy development. There are now more First Nations senior decision makers in public agencies, who bring important perspectives.”

Conference Introduction



Julie-Ann Guivarra

CEO NIAA

Julie-Ann set the scene for the conference highlighting the importance of embedding First Nations 'systems thinking' for better, culturally informed outcomes. She spoke of NIAA's leadership in implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and called on everyone to reflect on their role in driving transformation:

"Our vision is clear, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are heard, recognised and empowered. Transformation is not just for one agency, but all agencies and individuals."



Professor Caron Beaton-Wells

Dean and CEO, ANZSOG

Caron addressed delegates as 'change makers' and emphasised the long journey ahead for dignity and justice for First Nations peoples and Māori. She stressed that governments must listen and respect Indigenous visions for the future, rather than seeking to rescue them, when they know best what they need:

"All Australians and New Zealanders are diminished when First Nations and Māori people are denied dignity and justice and when their potential goes unrealised."

"Transformation is a long road, a long game, and a long walk together."

Opening address

Māori Crown Relations - yesterday, today, tomorrow

Tāmami and Kirsti, representing the Tuhoe nation predominantly based in Central Eastern North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, shared perspectives on the Tuhoe journey towards Mana Motuhake (self-determination).



Tāmami Kruger

Chair, Tuhoe Te Uru Taumatua

Tāmami began by sharing his ancestry and his descent from the Mountain and the Mist Maiden, the responsibilities that flow from that and the importance of maintaining identity:

“Those origins are very, very real to me because they capture what my responsibilities are and what my purpose is and what I am accountable for.”

“Indigenous people want to learn, share and collaborate – but not by conceding and surrendering who they are – but by being themselves, and living and working with others who are different, like the forest with all its trees that live together harmoniously.”



Kirsti Luke

CEO, Tuhoe Te Uru Taumatua

Kirsti reflected on the trauma of colonisation and the ongoing process of recovery. She said that connectedness and connection were the superpowers of Indigenous culture, but that sense of connectedness had been disrupted by colonisation with traumatic effects for communities:

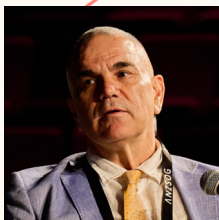
“Today we are in recovery. We are broken and there is dysfunction. There is no need to hide that. But the trick is to grow our children, in a way that there’s no marks on them of that trauma.”

Both emphasised the need for Indigenous communities to maintain their language, culture, and values, and for treaties to mark an end to destructive behaviour by the Crown, not serve as solutions themselves.



Session 1

Panel Discussion: What does systemic and structural transformation look like?



Dr Chris Sarra

CEO Stronger Smarter Institute

Moderator

The panel discussed, explored and shared not only their experience of what real public sector transformation looks like, but what it should look like 25 years into the future.



Geoff Richardson PSM

CEO, First Nations Development Services

Geoff believes transformation starts with truth-telling and learning from shared history. The Australian Public Service (APS) 100 programme, was celebrated for elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, especially women:

“We need our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters to be proud of their Indigeneity inside those public systems. It can be hard but if you don’t exercise your Indigeneity, it’s a wasted opportunity.”



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura Aotearoa New Zealand

Lil reports lessons from Aotearoa New Zealand show that Indigenous communities can outperform government in some areas. She called for humility in public service and for policies to be shaped by genuine engagement with First Nations and Māori:

“We overcomplicate the questions of working with First Nations. Basically, you work with them by talking to them, and changing your policies based on what they said.”



Kirsti Luke

CEO, Tuhoe Te Uru Taumatua

Kirsti clearly stated that change is generational and requires responsibility for others. She encouraged everyone, regardless of their role, to find ways to do the right thing and to embrace discomfort, as part of the process. That’s where you really learn:

“Whether you are the cleaner or the PM – you have permission to do the right thing. One block is being constantly told ‘you can’t do that’. It’s not true – find a way!”

“All First Nations public servants stand on the shoulders of those who fought for us and we can’t forget that.”

Yarning / Breakout Session 2.1

The format of three concurrent yarning sessions following each panel discussion, provided informal opportunities for delegates to deepen the dialogue with key speakers, by asking questions through the Mentimeter App.



Jason Ardler

Founder/Director, Thirriwirri P/L

Facilitator



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura, Aotearoa New Zealand

Lil emphasised authenticity and humility in community engagement, urging leaders to model openness and ask First Nations staff directly how they wish to contribute. She highlighted the need to value Indigeneity at the heart of public service and to confront unconscious bias and racism within institutions:

“If you are a leader don’t make assumptions - simply ask First Nations staff how they wish to contribute and what support they need.”



Talava Tuhipa-Turner

Manager Strategy and Legislation, Homes Victoria, DFFH (VIC)

Facilitator



Kirsti Luke

CEO, Tuhoē Te Uru Taumatua

Kirsti encouraged resilience and adaptability, critiqued superficial consultation, and stressed the importance of raising a positive next generation. She argued that co-governance should be led overwhelmingly by Māori and that emotional investment, not legislation, drives real change. Her advice: keep asking questions and don’t measure success by immediate results:

“Use every opportunity, because there are always opportunities. They might not be packaged up nicely but you make the most of what you have – that’s the Iwi way.”

“Collectively, strand by strand, you are making change – you are raising a hopeful next generation just by asking questions – keep asking questions and don’t use results now as a measure.”

Yarning / Breakout Session 2.3



Te Rau Kupenga

Managing Principal,
Te Amokura Consultants

Facilitator



Geoff Richardson

CEO, First Nations Development Services

Geoff reflected on his career, the privilege and responsibility of public service, and the importance of living authentically as an Indigenous public servant. He advised networking, building community, and remaining true to values as vitally important to transforming structural change. Systemic transformation, he argued, is ongoing and requires continual reflection and adaptation:

"I always found being a public servant a privilege. Remember, people fought for us to be in there. The public service has given me more than I'd ever given it. It's a gift that keeps on giving if you're willing to give it a go."

*"Network like your life depended on it.
Act like a community inside the public service."*





Conference Program: Day Two – Thursday 27 November 2025

Session 3 – Panel A

Panel Discussion: What approaches can we adopt, to enhance and sustain First Nations and Māori-led development?



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Moderator

The morning sessions featured two panels looking at what governments must do differently to encourage First Nations and Māori-led development, both moderated by Lil Anderson.



Natalie Siegel-Brown

Inspector-General, Office of
the Inspector-General of Aged Care

In her former Productivity Commissioner role reviewing government progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Natalie said that partnerships outlined in the Agreement were about sharing power, not symbolic gestures. She urged public servants to reflect on how their individual behaviours could change to share power, not rely on executive decisions:

“The biggest inhibitors are not just funding cycles or electoral cycles, but the transactional nature of bureaucracy. Partnerships and development require relationship building. When it gets to middle management and below, the structures prevent public servants from developing relationships – despite the rhetoric of leaders.”



Councillor Marc Sutherland

Councillor, Tamworth Regional Council, NSW

As the first Aboriginal councillor elected to Tamworth Regional Council, Marc outlined the *Mara Ngali (Two Hands)* initiative in Tamworth, which integrates Indigenous knowledge into governance. He said that First Nations must be at the core of change, otherwise outcomes will remain the same:

“Public servants can’t build relationships from behind desks. Engaging with the community isn’t a task, it’s a responsibility – and the relationship you build should outlast individual programs.”



Donna Flavell

CEO, Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Inc

Donna explained how her Iwi (tribe) had grown its asset base and provided tertiary education and housing for its members. She said that governments must understand the context of each Iwi and their situation, before working with them to design solutions:

“Waikato Tainui has achieved a reduction in child removals, because the Crown did not look at the other issues happening in the background. We can do it and do it from a strengths-based approach.”

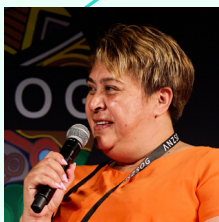
“The challenge for public servants is to be enablers, be supportive to the aspirations of those communities – they don’t need you to tell them what to do, they need money to make things go faster.”





Session 4 – Panel B

Panel Discussion: What approaches can we adopt, to enhance and sustain First Nations and Māori-led development?



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Moderator



Natalie Walker

Managing Director, Inside Policy

Natalie stated that evidence shows First Nations-led change delivers better outcomes in areas like child separation, youth justice, and mental health in remote communities. She outlined three keys to governments building successful partnerships: 1) treating partnerships as long-term enduring projects, 2) putting everything on the table to be changed, 3) acknowledging their own shortcomings rather than criticising communities:

“Things happen when governments put their hands up and say ‘we’ve got a lot of work to do’ - rather than focus on First Nations organisations as not big enough, not well governed enough, or whatever. There is just not enough discussion within governments of what the agency needs to do differently or better.”



Travis Lovett

Executive Director, Centre for Truth Telling and Dialogue, The University of Melbourne

Travis highlighted Victoria’s statewide Treaty with First Peoples and the work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission to address ongoing discrimination and disadvantage. He said that First Nations groups have already mapped out plans for youth justice, environment, and other issues. And governments must engage with these groups:

“The Victorian Treaty did not give us everything we wanted, but we can go back in the future, and we will keep at them. One of the biggest legacies will be creating an official public record of what happened to First Peoples, which will be included in the curriculum in Victoria.”



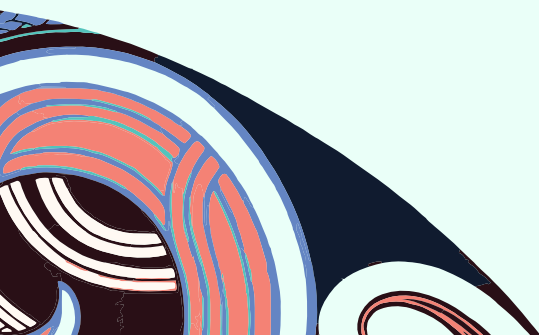
Jess Smith

Deputy Chief Executive,
Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga Ministry
for Housing and Urban Development

Jess considers ‘partnership’ is an over-used word, and it’s true meaning and the importance of relationships, is overlooked by many in the public service. Even though most First Nations and Māori public servants enter the bureaucracy with established relationships with communities, they are not necessarily recognised or acknowledged:

“All public servants need to build networks and connections with First Nations and do that as a core part of their work.”

“We need to make sure that all the knowledge and insights from partnerships are held somewhere, for when governments change.”



Yarning / Breakout Session 5.1

Discussing the transformative power of truth telling, self-determination, and cultural pride, was the focus of this yarning session.



Te Rau Kupenga

Managing Principal,
Te Amokura Consultants

Facilitator



Travis Lovett

Executive Director, Centre for Truth Telling
and Dialogue, The University of Melbourne

Travis reminded participants of
the importance of honest dialogue
to First Nations healing:

*“What is there to fear in truth telling?
There’s nothing, because we as
First Nations people want to heal.”*



Donna Flavell

CEO, Te Whakakitenga o Waikato Inc

Donna reinforced the importance
of identity and heritage, stating:

*“Be proud of who you are
and where you come from.
That’s a strength.”*

The session explored how allies can
support change, the need to move
beyond symbolic gestures, and the
value of community-driven approaches
for lasting impact.

Yarning / Breakout Session 5.2

This yarning session explored First Nations and Māori-led development, highlighting the importance of genuine partnership, cultural humility, and building frameworks that embed community-driven decision-making.



Talava Tuhipa-Turner

Manager Strategy and Legislation,
Homes Victoria, DFFH (VIC)

Facilitator



Natalie Walker

Managing Director, Inside Policy

True transformation requires governments at all levels to actively listen, consult, and remain accountable to community priorities. Natalie noted:

“When you’re humble, you’re open to learning and you’re not coming at a problem as the smartest person in the room. But humility shouldn’t translate into leaving the room – that’s not humility.”



Councillor Marc Sutherland

Councillor, Tamworth Regional Council, NSW

Practical advice for allies and government workers included embracing flexibility around how they engage with communities; the value of data sovereignty; fostering cultural safety; prioritising truth telling.

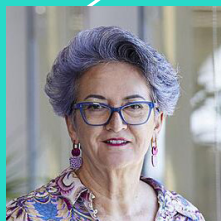
Marc said we need to nurture First Nations intergenerational resilience and recognise that:

“Aboriginal culture is not the load, the system is the load.”



Yarning / Breakout Session 5.3

Explored transformative approaches to First Nations and Māori-led governance, emphasising the need for authentic engagement, listening, genuine partnerships, accountability, and culturally safe systems. Speakers challenged the tendency to settle for superficial change.



Sharon Nelson-Kelly

Senior Advisor First Nations and Māori, ANZSOG

Facilitator



Natalie Siegel-Brown

Inspector-General, Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care

Natalie urges leaders to build relationships before projects begin, which allowed the pursuit of deeper, systemic transformation:

“Low hanging fruit is the enemy of reform.”



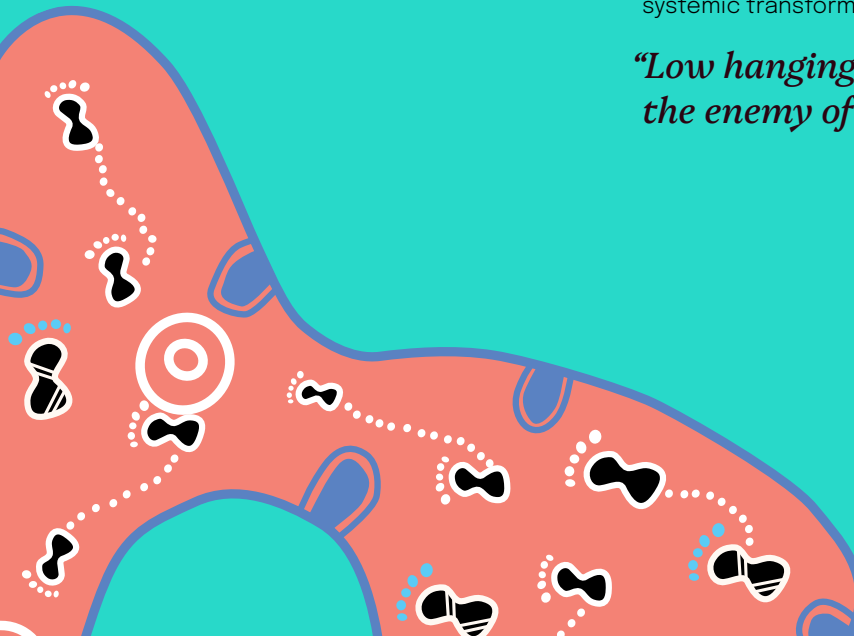
Jess Smith

Deputy Chief Executive, Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga Ministry for Housing and Urban Development

Jess spoke of the importance of moving beyond tokenistic consultation towards shared decision-making and making relationship building part of the core work of the public service. She noted the importance of listening as part of relationship-building:

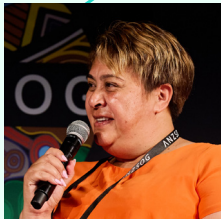
“How you listen is just as important as what you deliver.”

Discussions with the audience covered the need to move beyond tokenistic consultation towards shared decision-making, with practical advice for fostering resilience, supporting emerging First Nations leaders amongst your colleagues or team members; and driving lasting change through community-led solutions.



Session 6 – Panel A

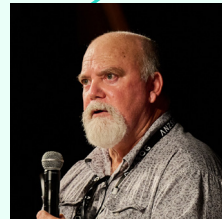
Panel Discussion: What do we need to do to change the way we work?



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Moderator



Craig Leon

Managing Director, Conscious Solutions

Craig stressed that the power and knowledge of First Nations public servants in the APS is untapped and underutilised and called for equal seats at the table, so First Nations voices influence outcomes. He encouraged executives to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and learn from their insights, and told public servants to “take your power back”:

“There are a lot of power imbalances in the public service, but you are not powerless. Have your idea in your back pocket ready to go when the time is right.”

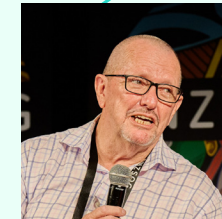


Assoc Prof Sacha McMeeking

Senior Research Fellow,
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

Sacha said that changing habits and routines within the public service was the vital ‘missing middle’ between a moral belief and delivering observable outcomes. She said Aotearoa New Zealand’s response to COVID had shown that new ways of working were possible, but the system was now reverting to risk-averse ways. She said that one of the worst legacies of colonisation was that it led to First Nations losing trust in themselves:

“Indigenous public servants add the gift of imagination, because when you’ve only got one knowledge system to work with, you won’t get the outcomes you get with people who are working across multiple knowledge systems.”

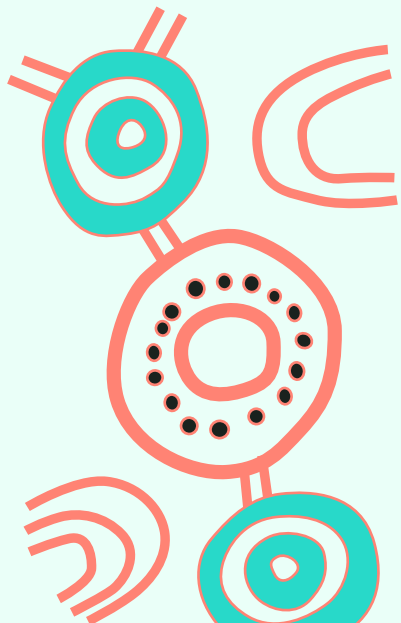


Sam Jeffries

First Assistant Commissioner,
First Nations Systems Lead Australian
Public Service Commission

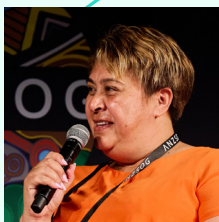
Sam said that systems change for government is difficult, because it is not the small steps they prefer to make. As senior executives in the Australian Public Service have not got the relevant experience to develop relationships that lead to a ‘relational’ way of doing business, and that too many SES level public servants are stifled by risk-averse ways of working:

“The development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be transformational, it must be relational, and we need a developmental approach. We cannot do this in a transactional environment and that needs to the insight of your senior leaders.”



Session 7 – Panel B

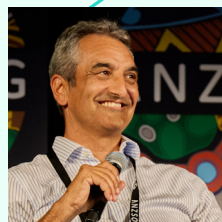
Panel Discussion: What do we need to do to change the way we work?



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Moderator

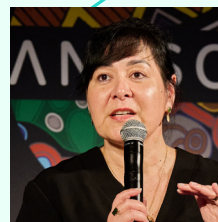


Jason Ardler

Founder/Director, Thirriwirri P/L

Jason told public servants to stick to their values, be clear about purpose, be ambitious but stay humble. It requires courage and the daily support of public sector leaders:

“Start with a ‘Yes’ mindset. Say yes to initiatives and then work out how to make them happen, rather than defaulting to ‘No’. System change is hearts and minds work. A lot of it comes down to how leaders behave, and the things that leaders pay attention to. Leadership is a verb not a noun: are we talking about this every day? Are we outlining on Monday what we’ll do this week? Is it part of every conversation that you have?”



Tia Warbrick

Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive Strategic Engagement, Māori Partnerships and Data Capability, Stats NZ

Tia critiqued how data about First Nations often reinforces a deficit model, focusing on negative indicators rather than the full story communities want to tell. She stressed the need for an action plan for change, noting that transformation is slow and incremental, but requires deliberate steps that go beyond cultural capability programs:

“There are some key things you can do to shift your behaviour. You need to know how to engage with the communities you are serving, you need a plan to shift you as an organisation from here to there.”



Leanne Liddle

Executive Director, Cultural Reform,
Northern Territory Police

Leanne shared her experience working to eradicate racism in the Northern Territory Police Force, acknowledging the challenge but noting progress in behaviour. She said to succeed you needed to find good people to spread your message, and that promoting good values would attract good people:

“It’s always right to do the right thing, you have to be courageous, even if it’s just standing with someone who is struggling and saying you’ve got their back. I like to say that ‘the standard you walk past is the standard you accept’, but I advise you to pick your battles and put your energy into the fights that matter, and work with the good people around you.”

Yarning/ Breakout Session 8.1

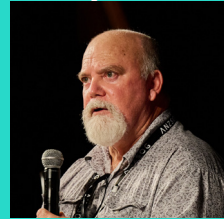
This yarning session brought together leaders to discuss cultural competence, systemic change, and the lived experiences of First Nations people in the public sector.



Talava Tuhipa-Turner

Manager Strategy and Legislation,
Homes Victoria, DFFH (VIC)

Facilitator



Dr Craig Leon

Managing Director, Conscious Solutions

Craig advised public servants to:

“Be true to yourself – surround yourself with good people, good people who think differently and who are smarter than you.”



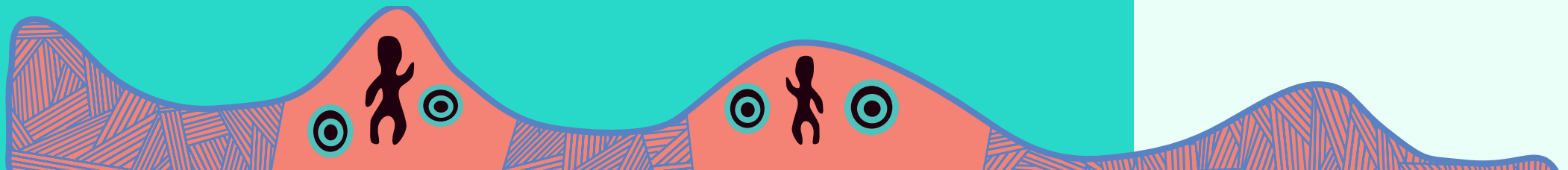
Leanne Liddle

Executive Director, Cultural Reform,
Northern Territory Police

Leanne called for pride and advocacy, stating:

“I want people to stand tall and be proud of who they are and remind others of why First Nations peoples are still the most disadvantaged [so we keep doing something about it].”

The session addressed challenges such as lateral violence, cultural load, and the need for genuine relationships, urging organisations to create culturally safe environments and for individuals to seek support, champion others, and never lose sight of their roots and purpose.



Yarning/ Breakout Session 8.2

This yarning session explored leadership, systems change, and the importance of culturally grounded transformation in public service. Speakers emphasised that true leadership is active and adaptive.



Te Rau Kupenga

Managing Principal,
Te Amokura Consultants

Facilitator



Jason Ardler

Founder/Director, Thirriwirri P/L

Jason said:

“Leadership is about taking action and acknowledging you don’t have all the answers. It’s not about your expertise...if we’re trying to understand systems change, we need to understand the perspective of those the systems are supposed to be serving.”



Assoc Prof Sacha McMeeking

Senior Research Fellow,
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

The discussion highlighted the need for shared purpose, authentic partnerships, and the courage to embrace discomfort and uncertainty. The session ended with a call from Sacha to:

“Invest in Indigenous leadership, build operational systems that support real change, and foster environments where everyone is empowered to act and grow.”

Yarning/ Breakout Session 8.3

Highlighted the importance of genuine engagement, resourcing, and the need to move beyond transactional relationships.



Jess Smith

Deputy Chief Executive,
Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga Ministry
for Housing and Urban Development

Facilitator



Sam Jeffries

First Assistant Commissioner,
First Nations Systems Lead
Australian Public Service Commission

Sam reflected on the value of trust emphasizing that trust underpins effective collaboration and progress:

“Throughout my career, the thing that’s been most telling for me is relationships...Trust is the only currency.”



Tia Warbrick

Deputy Government Statistician and
Deputy Chief Executive Strategic
Engagement, Māori Partnerships
and Data Capability, Stats NZ

Tia said public services needed to take action to address systemic barriers and recruitment challenges that were causing underrepresentation of First Nations people in senior roles:

“You need to make a conscious effort to develop more inclusive recruitment pathways which recognise the unique value and relationships that First Nations staff bring to public service.”

The discussion addressed systemic barriers, such as underrepresentation of First Nations people in senior roles, recruitment challenges, and the risk of losing hard-won gains during periods of budget cuts.

The session concluded with a call to learn from past high-water marks, invest in relationships, and ensure that Indigenous voices remain central to policy and decision-making.



Conference Dinner



Lil Anderson

MC



Stan Grant

Guest speaker



Ngā Mania Onewhero

Entertainment

Over 250 conference attendees attended the conference dinner, which enabled them to deepen their connections with each other in a relaxed social environment. The Brisbane-based, Māori cultural performing group enthusiastically entertained everyone and contributed to the relaxed, Trans-Tasman dinner vibe.

Stan Grant was an inspirational guest speaker, sharing captivating, candid stories about his life experiences growing up in regional NSW, and the influences, beginning with his family, that had a significant transformative impact on his life journey and career choices.

Stan spoke of how his work overseas in many war-torn zones led him to become a world-renowned journalist for many years. His return to Australia and the Adam Goodes incident, made him re-focus on racism, and the reality of what has not changed for Aboriginal people in Australia. He spoke about how his own Aboriginality prompted a deep personal decision to leave journalism and instead, follow other passions.

The informal 'poolside' chat format with host Lil Anderson created a relaxed story-telling atmosphere – judging by the number of people wanting to connect with Stan for photos, he enthralled the audience.

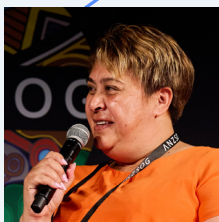




Conference Program: Day Three – Friday 28 November 2025

Session 9 – Panel A

Panel Discussion: How can we effectively monitor transformation and be accountable?



Lil Anderson

Principal Consultant, Te Amokura,
Aotearoa New Zealand

Moderator

Two panels on Day Three tackled the issue of how the transformation we want can be monitored and measured in ways that meet First Nations and Māori expectations, and how improved accountability can drive transformation.



Selwyn Button

Productivity Commissioner

Selwyn spoke about the role of the Closing the Gap targets and sharing success stories as models for others, he advocated for offering solutions to government agencies, not just criticism. He said that Aotearoa New Zealand is ahead of Australia in integrating statistical data from communities with that held by government:

“We can’t slap government in the face and tell them they’re doing everything wrong, without offering them solutions. We try and find the stories of success, and hand those on to others who are looking to start their journey and need a place to start.”



John Ryan

Former Auditor General New Zealand

John outlined his efforts in his seven-year term as Aotearoa New Zealand’s auditor-general to address systemic blindness to accountability for outcomes for Māori. He stressed the need for governments to measure whether they were building or destroying trust and said that independent voices were essential for accountability:

“Fragmentation of government services can become a way to avoid accountability for overall outcomes.”

“A lot of the things governments do, don’t have a strong mandate within the public sector – they have a voice but no teeth. The general view in the public sector is not to change because change is scary.”

“In my view the product of the public service is trust – and we have no idea, typically, if we are building it or destroying it with the systems that we have.”

Session 10 - Panel B

Panel Discussion: How can we effectively monitor transformation and be accountable?



Chris Sarra

CEO Stronger Smarter Institute

Moderator



Hera Douglas

Chief Advisor, Aroturuki Tamariki/
Independent Children's Monitor

Hera emphasised a rights-based approach, starting and ending with conversations with children impacted by government policies and actions, and a focus on their lived experience over agency data. She criticised populist laws passed without considering harm to young people and the burden placed on communities to navigate systems they didn't create:

"You hold in your head and your heart the people you are doing this work for – that is what keeps me centred, even now. Laws are not scrutinised from the position of young people who will be most affected. I can't imagine that if they had conversations with these kids, that they would ever pass these laws."



Natalie Lewis

Commissioner, Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner,
Queensland Family and Child Commission

Natalie criticised short-term, performative reforms and the failure to embed obligations in domestic law. She warned that Australia's reluctance to embed its obligations to First Nations under international law into domestic law, meant agencies could avoid accountability. She said that transformation required statutory independence and mandates focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

"It's important that people can see their stories reflected in the data and the reports – it means something."

"We get frameworks that are warm and fuzzy but are sufficiently vague and ambiguous that no one needs to be accountable."

"Our kids are more than half of the children in those systems. The data-points the departments use to measure their performance, often have very little to do with good outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children."

Yarning / Breakout Session 11.1

Focused on the challenges and opportunities in transforming systems for First Nations children and young people. It emphasised the importance of listening to lived experience, breaking down departmental silos, and recognising the intersectionality of issues such as justice, education, and health. The session called for a shift from risk-averse, process-driven approaches to ones that centred community leadership and intergenerational healing.



James Green

Executive Director Advisory, ANZSOG

Facilitator



Natalie Lewis

Commissioner, Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission

Natalie highlighted the need for genuine power-sharing and the value of young people's voices, stating:

"I know the best contribution I can make in my role is to give up space to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people."



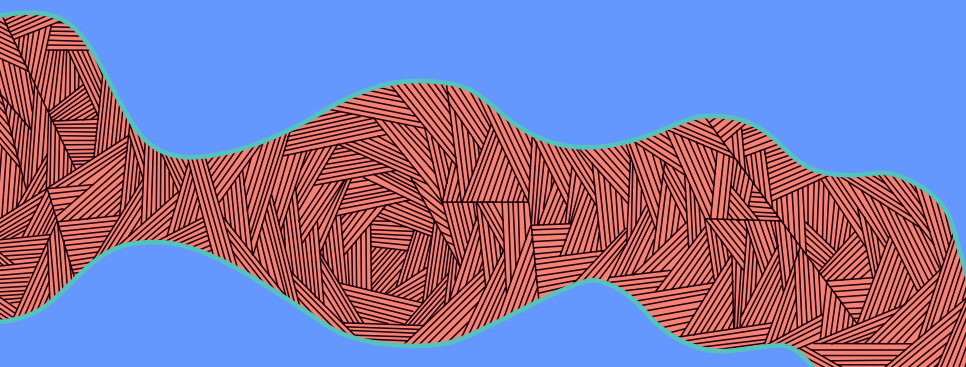
John Ryan

Former Auditor General New Zealand

John said that lifting expectations, independent monitoring with community involvement, as well as removing departmental silos that created a lack of accountability and acknowledging the urgency, and the possibility, of real change were needed to lift outcome for Māori:

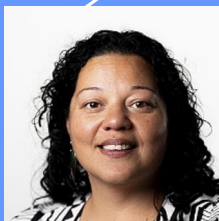
"Māori have sat at the bottom of every indicator for generations and the public service has a role to play in that – but did the red light go off, did anyone take it seriously, or is our system blind to that accountability?"

"Lifting expectations, independent monitoring with community involvement, as well as removing departmental silos that created a lack of accountability and acknowledging the urgency, and the possibility, of real change, were needed to lift outcomes for Māori."



Yarning / Breakout Session 11.2

Explored the value of qualitative data and the vital role of public servants in driving meaningful change. Overlaying departmental data with community-based insights creates a more holistic picture, and lived experience must be reflected in reporting, as part of sharing power with First Nations.



Talava Tuhipa-Turner

Manager Strategy and Legislation,
Homes Victoria, DFFH (VIC)

Facilitator



Selwyn Button

Productivity Commissioner

Selwyn reminded attendees:

“The work that we do as public servants is important – it has real importance. We can’t lose sight of that.”



Hera Douglas

Chief Advisor, Aroturuki Tamariki/
Independent Children’s Monitor

Hera stated, accountability needs to be built into systems, and data and storytelling were crucial for this. Hera Douglas spoke about individual accountability for public servants, saying:

“If you can’t live with something and you didn’t say something, how would you feel about that? It’s your own personal integrity to speak up.”

The discussion highlighted the need to build data capability within communities, reduce reporting burdens, and foster trust through genuine relationships.



Conference Marketplace

The marketplace was a vibrant and engaging hub showcasing sponsor and partner information regarding First Nations-led programs, services and products, as well as First Nations artists and businesses. Attendees were able to connect and engage with stall holders and purchase unique items throughout the event.

Indigenous Business Australia

Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority

The University of Melbourne

FN artists and businesses

Blakbird Designs

Blak Botanics

Cholena's Art of Place

Delvene Cockatoo-Collins

Dreamtime Artistry

Flashblak

Glass Art Dreaming

Helen Rose

Muralappi Arts

Murri Girl Designs





Wrap up and going forward

Conference Host Lil Anderson thanked attendees for bringing their warmth and energy to an amazing three days. She closed by saying:

“We’ve learned together, we’ve laughed together and we’ve cried together. We’ve had the inspiration of our speakers to encourage us, and we’ve had practical tools and examples to go away and use – and now it’s up to us. So, I want you to make sure you do something with the knowledge that you’ve gained. Big or small – just do it.”





Conference Graphic Facilitator



Fernando Lecuna

Duel Designs Pty Ltd

Fern used his expertise and acute listening skills, to distil the complex web of stories and ideas into a compelling visual narrative. An impressive reference point and reminder for participants and anyone reading the report, of what's required of public servants to work differently - to develop and deliver effective public administration to all First Nations and Māori communities and leave a true legacy.

Thank you

ANZSOG thanks you for your support to bring the 5th First Nations public administration conference to you.

Visit www.anzsog.edu.au to learn more about how ANZSOG is working to elevate First Nations and Māori perspectives, knowledge and leadership in public governance and services, through its learning programs, insights, and events.



Conference Video Recordings and Highlights Reel

We encourage you to share these links and resources to build the capability of your team, colleagues, and others within your networks.

All resources are FREE via www.anzsog.edu.au/first-nations-maori/conferences-and-resources



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