

— Charles Prouse - Chairman, Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre EM16 Prouse

Agenda item 6 - Indigenous Entrepreneurship.

Indigenous peoples are First Nations peoples. By definition, we are First Traders – We established the first regional and the international trade routes. Our trade thrived. And we thrived with it.

Now we once again look to trade and business to re-establish ourselves as entrepreneurs as a pathway for success and pull our community out of the depths of disadvantage.

As chair of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre, I can tell you that we have Indigenous entrepreneurs within our 2000 plus alumni.

More and more Australian Indigenous leaders are turning to entrepreneurship. Be that as individual business owners and being part of the digital revolution of the 21st Century or harnessing the entrepreneurship of their community based organisations and developing business arms to those organisations with the profits going back into the funding of community social services.

I note that this topic of Indigenous entrepreneurship was initially in relation to extractive industries and what they are doing to our mother country and our rights to the economic potential our lands provide.

A Federal Court decision handed down just last week is the first time native title rights encompassing commercial rights have been recognized in Australia. Yanyuwa Native Title holders in northern Australia have welcomed the decision allowing them to take and use resources from the land for commercial purposes. This was based on historical evidence that the Yanyuwa traded commercially with the Macassan people of Indonesia and Timor through a network of exchange routes which criss-crossed the continent prior to British settlement.

This decision is the first of its kind and I hope it's not the last. More needs to be done to support Native Title holders access their Commercial Rights.

I offer EMRIP delegates here another significant positive story that I hope you might be able to use (or indeed this forum might consider) as a way of increasing the economic opportunity that should be given to Indigenous peoples.

I'm pleased to say that our Government last year implemented its first Indigenous Procurement Policy. It is one of the rare policies on Indigenous issues that has made an immediate positive impact and will continue to do so.

Out of the \$40B per year our government spends running its own day to day activities, last year, it committed 0.5% of the number of contracts it writes per year to go to Indigenous businesses. Last week, that number increased to 1.5% of the number of contracts it gives to businesses. By 2020, our government aims to have 3% of its contracts being with Indigenous businesses either directly or in sub-contracting arrangements. This should mean more than \$1B per year will go to Indigenous businesses by 2020.

From June last year, close to \$200M has been spent with Indigenous businesses. Indigenous Australians are reclaiming our status as entrepreneurs – as First Traders. One of our entrepreneurs worked with Sesame Street productions to promote the number five. If you saw the episode on Sesame Street (and who doesn't like Sesame Street) you would have seen 5 digital kangaroos bouncing over Uluru in the red centre of our country promoting the number 5 in Aboriginal language. This went global through the Sesame Street network. A great success for Indigenous business, language and youth education.

Our Indigenous business often contribute back to the community not only through buying off each other and employing community people, but we are seeing more and more of our businesses giving education scholarships to young Indigenous people and support community level programs and activities.

This resurgence of Indigenous entrepreneurs is being mirrored in the private sector. Some global companies have been encouraging Indigenous businesses through contracting and sub-contracting arrangements. They have been doing this in the United States and Canada where I know our Native American brothers and sisters have been able to access corporate and government supply chains for decades now.

Many of these companies are part of the United Nations Global Compact and many of them publicly support the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

But governments and the private sector must ask themselves a number of questions. Some of those questions include (but are not limited to):

How do public and private bureaucracies address their own behaviours and internal systems to reduce their resistance to engaging Indigenous businesses?

What are their own conscious and unconscious prejudices they must address?

How do governments and the private sector support Indigenous businesses to scale up so that Indigenous businesses can deliver multi-million dollar contracts and not just contracts valued in their thousands?

I'm pleased to say that although there's a long way to go, we have commenced this work and I encourage other member States to consider similar initiatives.

My recommendations therefore are:

EMRIP should encourage States to adopt Procurement Policies that give Indigenous peoples access to government contracts

EMRIP should recommend that multinational companies that are members of the UN Global Compact have Indigenous Procurement Policies supporting Indigenous businesses on whose lands they conduct their business.

Thank you