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**Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
Eighth Session 20-24 July 2015**

**Australia Statement on Item 7: Study and advice on the promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples with respect to their cultural heritage**

Australia was pleased to make a submission to the study by the Expert Mechanism on the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples with respect to their cultural heritage.

In the submission, Australia set out a new approach to Indigenous Affairs. This includes improved engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and a new funding model. Australia's new Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) streamlines and focuses 150 disparate programmes on three priorities that are fundamental to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: improving school attendance, increasing workforce participation, and making safer communities. The IAS has been designed to allow for practical, place based solutions and has already seen a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that have received funding.

The Australian Government recognises the unique place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have in Australia. Under the IAS, activities which promote the maintenance of Indigenous cultures; increase engagement; strengthen the capability of Indigenous individuals, families, communities and organisations; and enhance Indigenous peoples' leadership and governance skills can be supported.

The Australian Government is also committed to building public support for a referendum to amend the Australian Constitution so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are recognised as the first Australians. Initiatives linked to this commitment are one of a number of activities that organisations can receive funding for under the IAS.

The Australian Government supports the recognition, maintenance and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture in other ways, including:

- Acknowledging the importance of intergenerational transfer of traditional knowledge;
- The importance of land and sea, both culturally and as a means to sustainably generate economic and social benefits.
- Facilitating the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestral remains from overseas institutions to their communities of origin.

- Recognising the fundamental role of culture and language in the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Supporting the identification, conservation and promotion of heritage places important to Indigenous people. Australia is a party to the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property and has implemented the Convention domestically.
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property rights, including traditional knowledge cultural expression.

Australia recognises the central role of culture in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and continues to support the maintenance of Indigenous culture and heritage.

*I thank-you.*