



NATSILS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER LEGAL SERVICES

National Priorities

STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-14

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Chairperson's Foreword

I am pleased to present the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services' (NATSILS) inaugural National Priorities Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014.

NATSILS is the national alliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) across Australia.

Our mission is to provide a national voice for ATSILS which focuses on law and justice reform.

To achieve our mission, we will share our cultural knowledge and expertise and work together to:

- > strengthen our collective performance and capacity to achieve law and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia;
- > deliver professional and culturally competent evidenced-based advice to respond to legislative and policy reforms of Australian governments; and
- > provide a cohesive stance on issues of national and international importance on law and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NATSILS does not embrace the term "Indigenous" and will use the terms Aboriginal peoples or Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout this Plan and in all our dealings to refer to Australia's First Peoples. NATSILS also use the terms customary law and lore in recognition of the use of both these terms by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Each term holds equal value and is used in recognition of the continued sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our inaugural Plan provides the foundation and strategic framework for NATSILS to build and strengthen our national voice to counter the adverse impacts of the justice system on our people.

As a national alliance, we are collectively committed to this Plan. We are confident that our partnership with governments will continue to strengthen based on a mutual desire and genuine commitment to achieve fair and equitable law and justice outcomes for Australia's First Peoples.



Shane Duffy
NATSILS, Chairperson



About NATSILS

We are the National voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and law and justice reform in Australia.

NATSILS is the national alliance of ATSILS operating across Australia. We are the national voice for ATSILS and law and justice reform in Australia.

NATSILS alliance members¹ are:

- > North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency
- > Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia
- > Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, South Australia
- > Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service
- > Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- > Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld) Ltd
- > Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

In 2008, the ATSILS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to formalise a national alliance, which in summary, would seek to:

1. Better co-ordinate and enhance the operations and delivery of legal services;
2. Provide an avenue (where appropriate) for a coordinated approach in liaising with Government Departments, groups and individuals with the aim of facilitating the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC);
3. Facilitate a coordinated and supportive approach to lobbying of International bodies and Commonwealth, State, Territory and Local governments in relation to legislative and regulatory reform where such is perceived to:
 - > Impact negatively upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
 - > Could impact positively on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
 - > Where appropriate, co-operate in the taking of formal legal action regarding such law and policy;
4. Better facilitate the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to appropriate legal or social justice matters; and
5. Facilitate a coordinated approach to obtaining, and or lobbying for, sufficient funds and resources to effectively and efficiently carry out the objectives outlined in the MoU.

Upon signing the MoU in November 2010, it was agreed that NATSILS would develop a Strategic Plan to formalise its national priorities, strategies and outcomes. Our Plan will continue to evolve to reflect changes to the MoU.

1. See end of Strategic Plan for contact details.

Working together



Our vision

Our work together will achieve justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our commitment

We share cultural knowledge and expertise and work together to:

- > strengthen our collective performance and capacity to achieve justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia;
- > deliver professional and culturally competent evidence-based advice to respond to legislative and policy reforms of Australian governments; and
- > provide a cohesive stance on issues of national and international importance on law and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

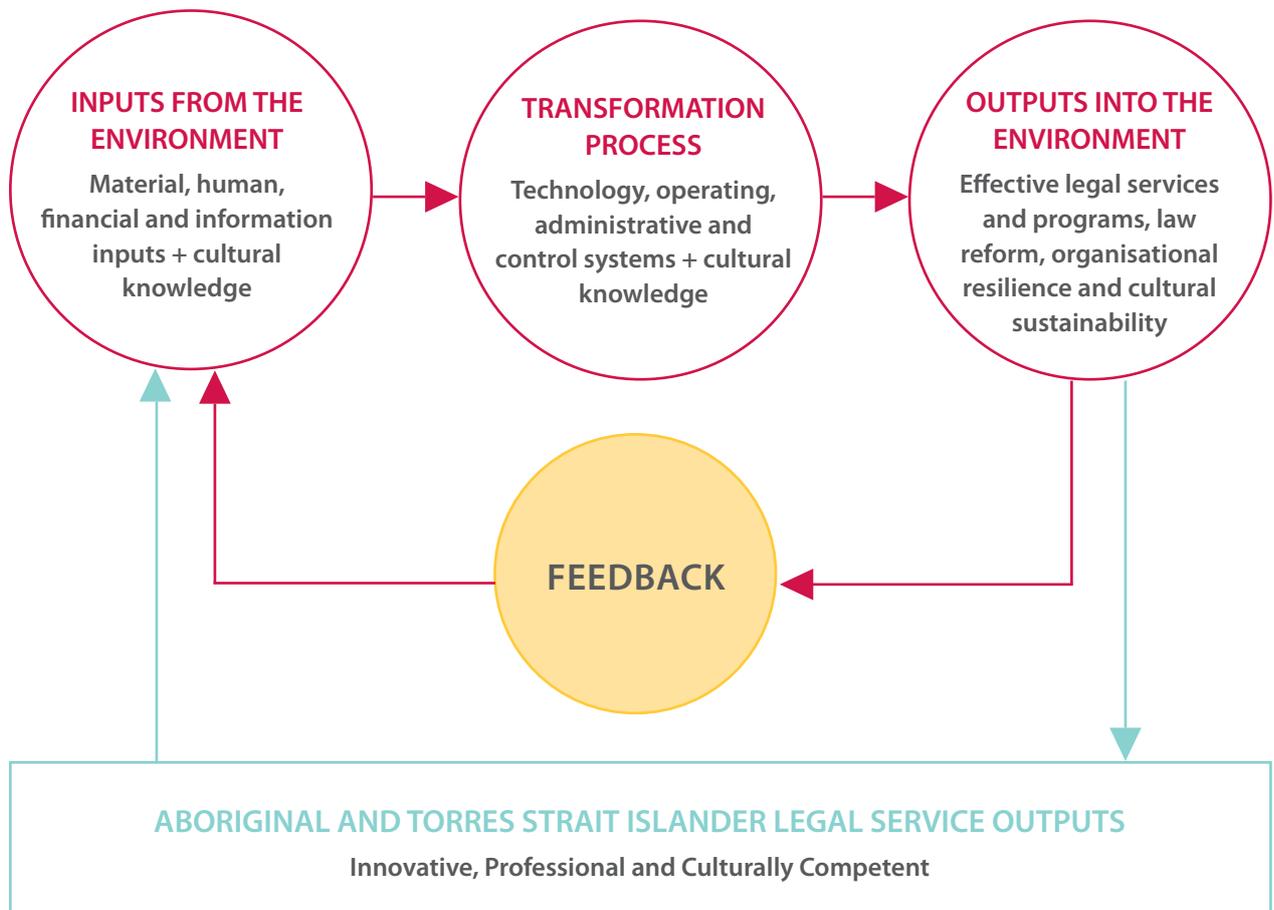
Our values

The traditional values of Care, Share and Respect underpin our commitment.

- > We Care for the human and legal rights, safety and psychological well-being of our clients, their families and communities.
- > We Share a common understanding of our clients' needs and challenges and diligently strive to achieve high quality law and justice outcomes.
- > We Respect the cultural diversity, values and beliefs of our clients, their families and communities and deliver confidential, innovative, professional and culturally competent legal assistance services.

Our business approach

Our business performance and approach is measured by the capacity of the alliance members to transform total resource inputs into innovative, professional and culturally competent outputs.

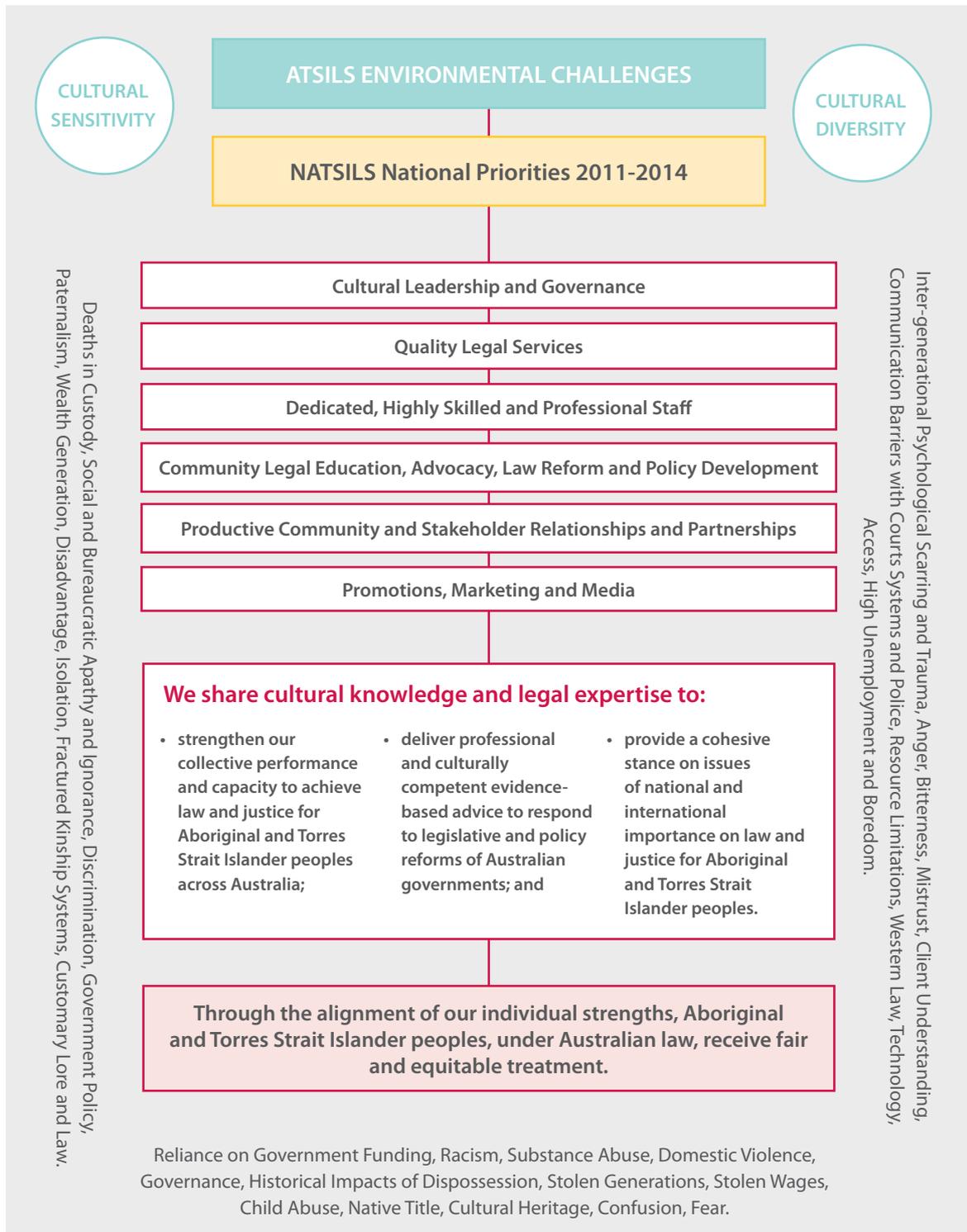


Our guiding principles

Human rights	The Articles contained in the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples underpin our commitment.
Culture	We acknowledge, value, honour and respect the knowledge and learning of our cultures, including through our customary law and lore. Our cultures are not to be compromised or devalued in the delivery of our services.
Leadership	Our decisions and actions are guided by cultural knowledge, leadership and good governance.
Integrity	Our integrity is measured by the way we put our values into action and through accountable and transparent business systems.
Diversity	The value of diversity is acknowledged across our communities, reflected in the composition of our Board membership and staff and through the sensitive way we deliver our services.
Collaboration	We work in collaboration and share a mutual responsibility, dedication, commitment and passion for the delivery of quality services to our clients.

Our challenges

NATSILS is acutely aware of the complex legal, historical, cultural, geographical and socio-economic challenges that adversely impact upon the client base and service delivery of each ATSILS.





National priorities

To be the leader and principal representative on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law and justice reform.



Priority
Cultural Leadership and Governance

Strategy

To be the leader and principal representative on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law and justice reform.

Maintain consistent cultural leadership and governance.

Maintain effective, efficient and accurate data collection.

Outcome

NATSILS will be recognised by the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples as the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law and justice reform.

All ATSILS board structures will be of an appropriate size and composition to reflect cultural and jurisdictional diversity.

The governance of all ATSILS will reflect sound:

- > Strategic and business planning;
- > Risk management;
- > Financial management and reporting;
- > Human resource planning and control;
- > Compliance and accountability; and
- > Transparent and culturally informed decision-making.

Customary law/lore, where appropriate and relevant, will be integrated into the Constitution of all ATSILS.

The funding of all ATSILS will reflect and meet demand.

All ATSILS will maintain the collection, analysis, maintenance and storage of accurate data to inform evidence-based advice and future direction.



Priority

Quality Legal Services

Strategy

Maintain the consistent delivery of quality legal services.

Maintain capacity of ATSILS to respond to client demand and improve quality of service delivery in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Maintain a consistent national approach to monitor the implementation of the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendations.

Lead the development of an ATSILS National Cultural Competency Framework to accurately measure law and justice outcomes.

Outcome

All ATSILS will meet or exceed national legal service delivery standards in accordance with funding agreements.

Maintain capacity of ATSILS to respond to client demand and improve quality of service delivery in metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Adverse impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are lessened as evidenced in the evaluation reports of governments.

The framework contributes to improvements in the consistent delivery of law and justice outcomes.



Priority
**Dedicated, Highly Skilled
and Professional Staff**

Strategy

Maintain safe and professional workplace environments.

Ensure ongoing professional development for ATSIILS staff

Establish and maintain an effective and efficient succession planning mechanism across ATSIILS.

Outcome

All staff will feel valued and able to work in safe, healthy and professional environments.

All staff will have access to quality professional development programs to continuously improve individual and organisational performance.

Number and quality of staff trained and retained.



Priority

Quality Community Legal Education, Advocacy, Law Reform and Policy Development

Strategy

Develop innovative community education programs, strategies and plans.

Advocate and influence national change in discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes and behaviours towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within agencies in the justice system.

Advocate nationally and internationally on key justice issues to influence the public policy agendas of governments.

Monitor and promote the development and opportunity for research surrounding law and justice reform.

Outcome

Number of programs and reported increases in the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals about their rights.

NATSILS will contribute to the introduction and implementation of cultural competency programs within relevant agencies.

NATSILS will prepare high quality submissions for consideration and action at national and international forums.

NATSILS will prepare high quality submissions to improve legislative and policy responses on law and justice reform.



Priority
Productive Community Stakeholder Relationships and Partnerships

Strategy	Outcome
Maintain effective relationships and partnerships with key government, non-government and community stakeholders.	Increased stakeholder awareness of challenges and enhanced profile, image and capacity to leverage alternative financial backing and pro-bono support.
Maintain positive and proactive relationships with Government Ministers, Shadow Ministers and their staff.	Enhanced political awareness of the challenges and increased support for the role, responsibilities and functions of ATSILS.
Convene periodic National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Think Tanks on issues of strategic importance.	Think Tanks will provide the opportunity for senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to provide informed cultural advice and direction on contemporary issues and challenges.



Priority
**Quality Promotions,
 Marketing and Media**

Strategy

Develop and maintain a NATSILS Communication, Marketing and Media Strategy.

Conduct an annual NATSILS Legal Rights Conference to monitor trends, and review, evaluate and continuously improve law reform agendas.

Develop and post a national website to enhance profile of NATSILS and ATSILS.

Maintain appropriate NATSILS media resources.

Outcome

NATSILS maintain positive relationships across community, stakeholder and media networks.

A NATSILS Legal Service Conference will be hosted by an ATSILS in their State or Territory on an annual basis.

NATSILS website will remain up-to-date and be accessible via each ATSILS' own individual websites.

NATSILS will have access to media resources.

Our plan

Recommendation 105 of RCIADIC stated, in part:

“That in providing funding to Aboriginal Legal Services governments should recognize that Aboriginal Legal Services have a wider role to perform than their immediate task of ensuring the representation and provision of legal advice to Aboriginal persons.”

NATSILS' National Priorities Strategic Plan 2011 – 2014 coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) handing down its report to the Australian Government.

The RCIADIC identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had been disadvantaged and discriminated against within Australian society and this contributed to adverse contact with the legal system and over-representation within the prison system.

Twenty years on, the Australian Attorney's-General Department acknowledges that these factors continue to negatively contribute to the "ability of many Indigenous Australians to fully participate in (Australian) society"². Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 13.5 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.³

The RCIADIC recommendations continue to guide the present work of the ATSILS and influence the Australian Government's policy and programs agenda on law and justice, as reflected in:

Closing the Gap

Each of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments through COAG⁴ has committed to the national "Closing the Gap" policy agenda. The Safe Communities Building Block contained in the "Closing the Gap" policy is designed to focus stakeholder effort on strategies that address disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009-2015

Each of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments through the Standing Council on Law and Justice have committed to the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009 – 2015. This Framework seeks to address the COAG Safe Communities Building Block by emphasising the need for programs that deliver community legal education, victim support, partnerships with stakeholders, support for early intervention, and increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to family law support services. The Framework jointly commits Australian governments to ensure that "the findings of the RCIADIC continue to guide governments, service providers and communities to address current issues in law and justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples".⁵

2. Australian Government, Attorney-General's Department, *Indigenous Legal Assistance and Policy Reform Program Guidelines*, July 2011, page 1.

3. Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2009, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

4. Council of Australian Governments.

5. Standing Committee of Attorney-General's National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework 2009 - 2015.

Indigenous Legal Assistance and Policy Reform Program and Guidelines

The Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department's Indigenous Legal Assistance and Policy Reform Program and Guidelines 2011-2014 outlines the Australian Government's funding priorities for the next three years.

Australia's Obligations to Human Rights

Australia is a member of the United Nations and a signatory to a number of international human rights instruments. The Australian Government has human rights obligations under these international instruments and is bound to comply with their provisions and to implement them domestically.

Accordingly, NATSILS will use these instruments as a framework for evaluating Australia's human rights performance, particularly when assessing the appropriateness of proposed legislative or policy reforms relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

NATSILS Alliance Member Contact Details



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Civil Tel: 08 8982 5129
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www.naaja.org.au



Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia

Piccadilly Suites
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Perth, WA 6000

Telephone: 08 9265 6666
Toll Free: 1800 019 900
Fax: 08 9221 1767

www.alswa.org.au



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service

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Preston, Vic 3072

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Toll Free: 1800 064 865
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www.vals.org.au



Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service

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Alice Springs, NT 0870

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www.caalas.com.au



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