

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2026

To: Closing the Gap Review Team, Productivity Commission

Email: ctg.review.2026@pc.gov.au

From: JCL Productions Pty Ltd

Date: October 2026

Subject: First Nations Representation, Cultural Safety, and Structural Reform in Australia's Entertainment Industry (Film, TV, and Stage)

1. Executive Summary & Organisational Context

JCL Productions Pty Ltd, established in 1989 by President and Director Jon-Claire Lee, is an independent Australian film, television, and stage production company based in Beecroft, New South Wales. Over more than three decades, JCL Productions has been committed to producing high-quality creative work, advocating for multicultural inclusion, combating systemic racism, and advancing authentic representation across Australia's arts and screen sectors.

This submission responds to the Productivity Commission's call for submissions on the 2026 Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It addresses the state of First Nations creators, performers, writers, crew, and community leaders in the entertainment industry (film, television, and theatre).

Entertainment, storytelling, and broadcasting are fundamental drivers of national culture, truth-telling, and identity. The arts directly intersect with key socio-economic targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly **Target 8 (Economic Participation)**, **Target 14 (Social and Emotional Wellbeing)**, **Target 16 (Cultures and Languages)**, and **Target 17 (Access to Information and Representation)**. To achieve genuine structural reform, the 4 Priority Reforms of the National Agreement must be intentionally embedded across Australia's arts funding bodies, screen agencies, commercial network broadcasters, and mainstage theatre institutions.

2. The Current State of First Nations Communities in the Entertainment Industry

While Australian film, television, and stage productions have seen a growing appreciation for Indigenous stories over the past decade, significant structural inequalities remain entrenched across the entertainment ecosystem:

- **Tokenism vs. Ownership:** First Nations stories are frequently greenlit or funded through mainstream entities that retain ultimate creative control,

financial benefit, and IP ownership, rather than placing governance and creative authority in First Nations hands.

- **Cultural Safety and Workplace Harassment:** First Nations actors, crew, and creatives routinely face institutional racism, unsafe set environments, cultural fatigue, and an absence of formal cultural protocols on mainstream productions.
- **Economic Disparities and Career Pipelines:** First Nations creatives remain severely underrepresented in executive, showrunner, head-of-department (HOD), and board-level decision-making roles, restricting long-term career sustainability and wealth creation.
- **Inadequate Support for Independent & Community-Controlled Arts:** Indigenous-led production companies and independent theatre collectives face persistent underfunding and administrative hurdles when competing against established mainstream legacy institutions for arts grants and production budgets.

3. Key Recommendations Aligned with the 4 Priority Reforms

To address these disparities and support self-determination for First Nations arts practitioners, JCL Productions proposes the following recommendations organised under the four Priority Reforms of the National Agreement.

Priority Reform 1: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making

- **Co-Designed Commissioning Frameworks:** Public funding bodies (including Screen Australia, Creative Australia, and State Screen Agencies) must mandate that any project containing First Nations themes, characters, or cultural knowledge involve First Nations co-design and shared decision-making authority from concept development through to final distribution.
- **Equal Representation on Funding Panels:** Establish guaranteed 50% First Nations representation on all assessment panels, funding boards, and advisory committees that oversee screen and stage grants impacting Indigenous content or communities.

Priority Reform 2: Building the Community-Controlled Sector

- **Direct Funding to First Nations Production Entities:** Shift federal and state arts funding away from mainstream intermediaries by ring-fencing a meaningful proportion of production grants directly for First Nations Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Indigenous-owned production houses, and First Nations theatre companies.
- **Capacity and Sector Strengthening Plans:** Implement long-term capacity-building grants tailored for First Nations film, TV, and theatre infrastructure, enabling Indigenous enterprises to retain distribution rights, build commercial independence, and foster sustainable employment pipelines.

Priority Reform 3: Transforming Mainstream Organisations

- **Mandatory Cultural Safety Standards:** Mainstream production companies, broadcasters, screen agencies, and theatre venues must be held accountable for maintaining culturally safe workplaces through mandatory Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols, cultural safety training, and dedicated First Nations cultural advisors on set.
- **Industry Accountability and Reporting:** Require all major screen bodies, television networks, and mainstage theatre companies receiving public funds to publish annual Closing the Gap statements detailing First Nations employment numbers, board representation, and expenditure allocated to Indigenous contractors.

Priority Reform 4: Shared Access to Data and Information

- **Indigenous Data Sovereignty in the Arts:** First Nations creatives and peak arts bodies must retain ownership and governance over data collected regarding Indigenous participation rates, box office/viewership metrics, and funding allocation across film, TV, and stage.
- **Transparent Industry Audits:** Establish baseline metrics and publish triennial reviews tracking First Nations employment across key technical and creative categories (e.g., Directors, Writers, Cinematographers, Editors, Producers).

4. Impact on Socio-Economic Outcomes (SEOs)

Investing in First Nations leadership across entertainment directly drives positive socio-economic progress:

Target / Outcome PDF	Entertainment Industry Strategic Impact
Target 8: Economic Participation	Expands sustainable employment, high-skill creative jobs, and business ownership for First Nations practitioners in film, television, and theatre production.
Target 14: Social & Emotional Wellbeing	Promotes community healing, pride, and psychological wellbeing by replacing harmful stereotypes with authentic, empowering First Nations narratives and screen representation.
Target 16: Indigenous Languages	Provides mainstream and community broadcast platforms to preserve, revitalise, and promote First Nations languages through film scripts, television programming, and theatrical performances.
Target 17: Access to Information & Digital Inclusion	Ensures First Nations communities have full access to culturally relevant media and screen storytelling that reflects their lived experiences and cultural heritage.

5. Conclusion

True progress on Closing the Gap cannot be achieved without transforming the cultural institutions that define Australia's national identity. By empowering First Nations storytellers, enforcing cultural safety, directing resources to Indigenous-owned creative enterprises, and honouring Indigenous Data Sovereignty, governments and industry leaders can ensure that First Nations voices lead the future of Australian film, television, and stage.

JCL Productions welcomes further engagement with the Productivity Commission to discuss these recommendations in detail.

Submitted by:

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