MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW GOVERNMENT’S ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS PLAN

The NSW Government today released its Aboriginal affairs plan that includes reforms to support more Aboriginal students to stay at school and transition to work; builds local decision making skills in communities and; ensures government and community are more accountable for how money is spent.

Called OCHRE – Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment – the plan was created through the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs which brought together four Aboriginal leaders, seven government Ministers and senior government officials.

The Taskforce, which held 27 forums and heard from more than 3000 people across NSW, was formed in response to reports by the NSW Auditor General and the NSW Ombudsman into the previous Government’s Two Ways Together plan.

“The NSW Government recognised that Aboriginal people must be at the heart of decision making if real improvements were to be achieved,” Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello said.

“We understood that to do things differently we must focus only on education, employment and accountability.

“OCHRE is not a quick fix. Sustainable change occurs over a generation and young Aboriginal people are at the centre of that change.”

As a result, the NSW Government will roll out the following initiatives in selected communities, to be evaluated ahead of a wider rollout:

- **Opportunity Hubs** to provide school students pathways to real jobs by getting local employers involved in career planning early on at school;

- **Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests** to provide a continuous pathway of learning from pre-school to tertiary education for Aboriginal language learners and teachers, at school and at home;

- **A Local Decision Making model** to develop the decision making skills of local Aboriginal governance bodies to make decisions about local service delivery;

- **Connected Communities**, a current initiative that is changing the way educational services are delivered in 15 regional schools by working in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

Underpinning these initiatives will be a new accountability framework that will embed a strong Aboriginal voice in design and delivery, improve coordination and oversight and ensure targets are meaningful and regularly and publicly reported on.
“The NSW Government is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal people, not just in the design stage, but in the delivery,” Mr Dominello said.

“An Independent Aboriginal Council comprising of Aboriginal members will be legislatively established to monitor and publicly report on progress of the plan.

“The Chair of the Council will be an independent Co-ordinator General, who will work with government agencies to broker solutions and obtain information to assist the Council in assessing the Government’s performance.

“Making people more accountable for how they spend money and what they achieve will be embedded in our approach,” Mr Dominello said.

Opportunity Hubs will coordinate local opportunities such as work experience, volunteering, mentoring and scholarships and match them with individual student’s career aspirations that will lead to a real job.

“The Opportunity Hubs will link local employers with local students to show them a real pathway that will provide incentive to stay at school and get a job,” Mr Dominello said.

“Through mentoring, including families, and making the opportunities visible, we can keep more Aboriginal students on track to employment and fulfilling lives.”

Mr Dominello said Aboriginal people told the Taskforce that teaching and preserving Aboriginal language and culture builds people’s pride and identity.

“Proud young people want to go to school, and proud parents want their kids to do well at school. We will train and employ more Aboriginal language teachers to grow more language learners by linking schools, TAFEs, universities and communities.”

Mr Dominello said it is important to strengthen community governance so Aboriginal communities have a genuine say in influencing what services are provided in their local area and how they are delivered.

“Local Decision Making empowers Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their futures and helps leaders develop their decision making skills. It will also build the capacity of government to work better with Aboriginal communities.”

Taskforce member Stephen Ryan, chairman of the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations, said appointing seven Cabinet Ministers to the Taskforce shows this government’s commitment.

“The Ministers showed enough respect to participate in an education process with us and from this we hope that we can set foundations for positive change,” Mr Ryan said.

“Our community doesn’t expect miracles. We realise change takes time and we realise that change for the better starts in our own hearts and homes. This Government is willing to help us develop tools that can be used for that positive change.”

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