



2 November 2016

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Strive to Survive

The Board of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples met on Monday and passed a budget for the 2016/17 financial year along with a financial forecast which will likely see operations cease in December 2017 unless there is serious further investments.

In 2014, the Federal Government failed to honour the bipartisan support for the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples to act as a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, by not funding the Peak body. This is while Congress, as a charitable organisation, has been paying a Australian Government Statutory Body approximately \$20,000 per month for rent over the past 5 years, which it can longer afford.

Mr Rod Little, Co-Chair of the National Congress, said 'We have passed a "shoe-string" budget in order to continue our operations. As a Board we operate under severe constraints and have demonstrated due diligence in our operations. We have much more work to do as the Peak Body -- including resetting the relationship with the Australian Government.'

'There is a great deal to do to ensure that there is a level playing field for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities. The Government's own reports show the appalling state of our situation. Just look at the incarceration rates and the rates of domestic and family violence and child removal across the country -- Does this not tell you the efforts of governments are not having the desired impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?' said Mr Little.

Co-Chair Dr Jackie Huggins added, 'Whilst social indicators continue to deteriorate, Congress has operated with a declining budget and little to no response from Government, with the exception of a meeting with Senator Scullion two weeks ago. Senator Scullion has commenced meeting with us to renew the relationship between his office and Congress'. Dr Huggins said; 'It's about time we are recognised as the PEAK Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body in Australia.

Dr Huggins went on to say 'The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has a strong heartbeat and we are far from closing our doors. We have much more work around the Redfern Statement which is real and tangible, and aims to make a difference in the lives of our mob. Having our sectoral Peaks come together to progress the Redfern Statement proves the commitments to Congress and our communities' Dr Huggins said. 'A democratically elected body with a membership of approximately 9,000 people and 180 organisations, the National Congress is in the prime position to be the coordinating and unifying voice that can effectively inform the Government.

‘We are committed to a renewed National Congress’ said Dr Huggins.

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