

Submission by Australia

Review of the Facilitative Working Group of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform of the UNFCCC November 2023

Australia thanks the Facilitative Working Group (FWG) of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) for the invitation to make a submission.

Australia would like to acknowledge the efforts of the FWG, with the support of the Secretariat, in advancing activities under the second three-year workplan. The LCIPP and the FWG have facilitated valuable exchanges of experiences between Indigenous Peoples, and local communities and Parties towards finding climate solutions, and to achieve the objectives of the Convention and the Paris Agreement.

Australian Indigenous Peoples in climate action

In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have sustainably managed Australia's land and waters for more than 65,000 years. Australia sees the knowledge, science and practices of Indigenous Peoples as critical to climate action.

In Australia, we are working to support Australian Indigenous Peoples to continue to maintain and care for Australian land and waters. We do this through our Indigenous Protected Areas Program and Indigenous Rangers Program. These programs support Australian Indigenous Peoples to return and remain on their Country¹; keep Country healthy; transfer knowledge to younger generations; maintain languages and support health and well-being. Over the coming decade, Australia is boosting funding for Indigenous Protected Areas, doubling the number of our Indigenous Rangers and ensuring these rangers play a leading role in the preservation of Country. These management practices deliver climate solutions through their mitigation and adaptation co-benefits, while also achieving biodiversity outcomes.

Continuation of the LCIPP and the FWG

Australia supports continuing to strengthen exchanges of experiences in managing ecosystems, adapting to climate change, and implementing climate solutions. Australia played a leading role in the establishment of the LCIPP, and we strongly support its continuation and the development and implementation of a third workplan.

The FWG should consider lessons learned throughout the course of the LCIPP's first and second work programs, including views from both Parties, Indigenous Peoples' organisations and other stakeholders, when developing the third workplan and in the context of the FWG's operations.

Timeframe of the workplan and FWG membership

The LCIPP and FWG have both matured under the current three-year workplan, and with many important activities and deliverables. Australia sees merit in the current suite of activities in the workplan and is pleased to see progress being made against them. We acknowledge some of these activities are yet to be completed and may not be completed by the end of the three years. Because

¹ Australian First Nations people use the term Country to describe the lands, waters and seas to which they are connected: https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/stories-from-country-2022_0.pdf .

of that, consideration should be given to whether any uncompleted and/or partially completed activities should be continued into the next workplan.

To both maintain momentum and allow sufficient time to complete and reflect on activities going forward, we see merit in considering a four-year timeframe for future workplans. A longer timeframe would provide further certainty for activities and would allow for further maturity of both the LCIPP and the FWG. In considering the timing of future workplans, key UNFCCC and Paris Agreement milestones should be factored into deliverables, and aligned, wherever possible.

In addition to considering the timing of workplans, the FWG membership structure could also be reconsidered. It is problematic that currently, terms for all FWG members finish at the same time, with all new members then commencing together – leaving no continuity or mentorship. This simultaneous commencement for members means people may spend substantial time, all at once, learning the modalities and responsibilities of roles, sacrificing time better spent on implementation and action.

Rotating terms are a potential solution to this, in addition to considering the length of membership. Australia would welcome further discussion on solutions, but one example, FWG members could be elected for 4-year terms (in the first instance, 50% of members would have a 2-year term, with the other 50% to have a 4-year term). Decisions on which members rotate would be reached by consensus. This would be beneficial in ensuring that all FWG members are not new at the same time.

Australia also notes FWG members are under a lot of pressure to prepare reports and submissions for the LCIPP. We would welcome consideration on how the Secretariat, or other members of the LCIPP, could further support FWG members in handling this administrative load.

Integration across the UNFCCC

We have seen significant momentum in the LCIPP and the FWG providing advice on and facilitating the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in a broader range of work streams and programs. Australia would like to see the continuation of this proactive role. Outcomes of the LCIPP discussions and recommendations of the FWG should inform items under negotiation, wherever possible. Climate action can only benefit from the knowledge, science and practices of Indigenous Peoples. Many of the Convention and Paris Agreement discussions and decisions will also have direct impact on Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, and therefore must involve them in a meaningful way.

Australia's view is the FWG is operating well and fulfilling its mandate. We have seen consistent achievement of the FWG workplan activities, despite some difficulties encountered. Australia supports the current timings of FWG meetings, being immediately before UNFCCC intersessional meetings and UNFCCC COPs.

A strength of the FWG is its balanced engagement of Indigenous Peoples and Parties, building effective and genuine collaboration. Australia sees the equal participation in the LCIPP as integral to its success. Indigenous Peoples, and local communities should be treated as equal partners, with Parties, in the delivery of LCIPP workplan activities.

Australia views the current approach of the LCIPP workplan as elevating the leadership role of Indigenous Peoples in transformative climate policy actions. Australia would like to see the continued work of Activity 6 in the workplan, and for the FWG to be directly and effectively involved in more constituted bodies, if possible.

To enhance the consideration of the views of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, Australia would support further work to enable the FWG to respond to requests for submission where relevant. This would allow for the LCIPP's views and recommendations to be provided regarding major milestone events and formal UNFCCC processes, with input then to be considered by Parties.

There is significant momentum across United Nations fora highlighting the role of Indigenous Peoples in achieving environmental outcomes. For example, the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework has embedded Indigenous Peoples' role as stewards of biodiversity across the framework. The UNFCCC should learn from and leverage lessons learnt in the CBD and other fora, where appropriate, to support collaborative climate solutions.

Regional Gathering reflections

Australia recently had the privilege of hosting the Pacific Regional Gathering, under LCIPP Workplan activity 2. This was the first time such an event with Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, from across the Pacific region has been held to discuss climate impacts and solutions. The event was Indigenous-led, with organisation being managed by Cathy Eatock as Pacific Indigenous representative to the FWG, current FWG vice co-chair, and co-chair of the Indigenous Peoples Organisation of Australia (IPO).

In hosting the Pacific Regional Gathering, we found some UNFCCC modalities and/or ways of working difficult to effectively engage in at times, especially given our unique, yet important, governance arrangements with the IPO. The mandated requirements of the United Nations applying to the delivery of the Indigenous-led event often made communication between UNFCCC, Australia and IPO difficult, at times, and made the organisation and running of the event more difficult than it would have otherwise been.

The Gathering offered an invaluable opportunity for Indigenous Peoples, and local communities from across the region to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge. It was also an invaluable opportunity for Parties to meet, exchange views, and build relationships with Indigenous Peoples, and local communities. If the third workplan continues the regional gathering activities, processes and requirements should be streamlined to support their delivery, enable participants to get the most out of them, and allow host countries to focus their efforts more on content and engagement.

A learning from our hosting of the Pacific Regional Gathering is that many Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, want to engage in and have much to contribute to climate discussions. The broader facilitation of information sharing, and training sessions for Indigenous Peoples, and local communities ahead of COPs, in particular, may help build a better understanding of:

- the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and
- how people and communities can be more effectively and directly involved in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.

Participants at the Pacific Regional Gathering also showed a strong desire for further digital engagement and collaboration, potentially through a "hub". Further consideration should be given to if and how this may be facilitated through the existing LCIPP digital architecture and web platforms.

Capacity building

In Australia's view, the FWG has done a good job of facilitating the exchange of knowledges and experiences in addressing climate change. Workplan Activities 1, 4, 5, 7 and 9 have been effective in facilitating this. The FWG has also effectively facilitated the capacity building of both Indigenous

Peoples, and local communities in UNFCCC processes and the capacity of Parties to engage with Indigenous Peoples, and local communities.

Australia values the FWG's facilitation of the capacity building of Parties, constituted bodies and other stakeholders to effectively engage with Indigenous Peoples, and local communities through many of these workplan activities, particularly activities 2 and 3. The Regional Gatherings are a key opportunity for Parties, constituted bodies and other stakeholders to be immersed in events, activities and discussions where Indigenous knowledge holders share their knowledge, science and practices. This immersion increases the capacity of Parties and other stakeholders to engage with Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, in a more effective and meaningful way.

Australia strongly advocates for consideration to be given to the extension of UNFCCC funding to cover FWG members for their participation in the first week of intersessional negotiations and COPs, in addition to the pre-sessional FWG meeting. Australia is concerned that many Indigenous representatives on the FWG and developing country party members are not able to attend LCIPP mandated events in the first week of negotiations, leaving many FWG members only partially fulfilling their role, having to self-fund their stay, or fundraising to find financial support. Beyond the LCIPP mandated events, the broader negotiations and processes would benefit from enhanced engagement by Indigenous Peoples if they could be centrally funded to stay on for the first week. Australia would see the continued participation of Indigenous Peoples in these meetings as further facilitating the capacity building of Indigenous Peoples in UNFCCC processes, and the capacity of Parties to engage with Indigenous Peoples. Funding should also extend to ensuring translation services for all FWG meetings, noting the diverse participation required.

Summary

Australia is a strong supporter of the LCIPP, the FWG and the full, effective and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples, and local communities, in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement processes. Australia thanks the FWG for the opportunity to provide input on the LCIPP review, and we look forward to proactively engaging leading up to and at COP29.