

Indigenous Australian Women in Power:

*Barriers to and opportunities for better Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander representation in state and national politics*



INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN WOMEN IN POWER

This report was written by Zoe Moorman, as part of a University of Melbourne Public Affairs Internship placement with EMILY's List Australia between July and November 2015.

Content Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this document may contain the names and/or images of deceased peoples.

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Cover artwork by Carol Martin, 2005. The painting depicts how women are the product of the women who came before them, their mothers, grandmothers, mentors, lovers, friends etc....

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Background and Introduction

It is well known that the Indigenous peoples of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, have been routinely and systematically excluded from public life and political participation in Australia. The 1901 constitution contained (and still does contain) ethnicity-related clauses, such as sections 25, 51 and 127, and does not recognise that the communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians pre-date colonisation (despite the overturning of Terra Nullius in the courts with the Mabo case in 1992). Some parts of the constitution were amended or removed with the 1967 referendum, which enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be counted in the Australian census. The referendum changes also gave the federal government the power (so-called 'race' power) to enact laws specifically pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, such as outlawing discrimination and acknowledging land rights.

However, there still remains a "gap" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics reporting that Indigenous peoples have higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of

"The starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition – recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing."

- Paul Keating, Redfern Speech 1992

educational attainment and higher levels of poor health and chronic disease than their non-Indigenous peers (2014). This gap extends to political participation, as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still not registered to vote, and there have been only a handful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in Australian parliaments (ABS 2010). Since Mr Neville Bonner AO becoming a Senator for Queensland in 1971, Australia has not seen many Indigenous Australians being elected to state or national parliament, though there has been visible improvement. As of November 2015, there are:

- Three Indigenous persons in the national legislature: Ken Wyatt (MP for Hasluck), Nova Peris (Senator for the NT), and Joanna Lindgren (Senator for QLD)

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- One Indigenous person in the ACT Legislative Assembly: Chris Bourke
- One Indigenous person in the NSW Legislature: Linda Burney (MP for Canterbury)
- Six Indigenous persons in the NT Legislative Assembly: Alison Anderson (Namatjira), Adam Giles (Braitling), Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu (Arafura), Larisa Lee (Arnhem), Ken Vowles (Johnston) and Bess Price (Stuart).
- Two Indigenous persons in the Queensland Legislature: Leeanne Enoch (Algeria) and Billy Gordon (Cook).
- Two Indigenous persons in the Western Australian Legislature: Ben Wyatt (Victoria Park) and Josie Farrer (Kimberley).

This is a total of 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives (3 national, 12 state/territory) across all Australian parliaments today, out of the possible 226 national seats and 598 state or territory seats. This means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have 15 seats out of 824, or 1.8% of all seats, while they make up almost 3% of the Australian population (ABS 2011). Of these 15 politicians, 7 are current members of the Australian Labor Party, 4 of whom are women.

Australia has also seen two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people head governments: Marion Scrymgour (ALP) had a two-week stint as Acting Chief Minister of the

“So here I am, proudly elected, proudly black and proudly woman!”

- Josie Farrer, inaugural speech 2013

Northern Territory in 2008, which made her the first Indigenous Australian to lead a government, and she was closely followed by Adam Giles (Country Liberals), who is the incumbent Chief Minister and the first Indigenous Australian to form and lead a government at any level.

While these figures show that progress has been made towards better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander political representation and participation, the 1.8% of seats statistic is heavily weighted towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in the Northern Territory (7 out of the 15 seats held by Indigenous persons nationally), with the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly's

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members holding 24% of the seats. The nationwide statistic further ignores the complete lack of current or historical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in two states (Victoria and South Australia) and the current absence of Indigenous representation in Tasmania. Furthermore, the statistic does not address the massive deficit of representation at the national level (there have only been five Indigenous-identifying national MPs or Senators in Australian history, three of whom are incumbent). Contrary to the current state of affairs shows a sincere effort from the major parties to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and position them to run for office in the past five to ten years, the fight is far from over.

As pointed out by Bill Shorten in his *Guardian* opinion piece (28 July 2015), true representation would require increasing these numbers by about a third. This paper will investigate routes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,

“Indigenous Australians constitute 3% of the Australian population. If 3% of the 822 MPs across Australia were Indigenous, we would have 24 members, a third more than now.”

- Bill Shorten, *The Guardian* 28 July 2015

particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, can take to become politicians, political candidates, or party members, in the hope that this will illuminate ways in which the major parties can

encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to step forward and take a more active role in public decision-making. This study will focus on women within the Labor party, and look at strategies that could be used by the Labor party and its affiliate groups as a part of the current Labor leadership's commitment to improving women's and Indigenous peoples' membership and candidacy numbers.

This study was based on qualitative interviews with the four incumbent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labor women – Senator Nova Peris OAM (Senator for the NT), Linda Burney (NSW MP for Canterbury), Leeanne Enoch (QLD MP for Algeester), and Josie Farrer (WA MP for the Kimberley). We discussed their paths to office, their triumphs and opportunities, their struggles and concerns, and

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their recommendations for improving representation and participation amongst their community. This paper has intended to collect and organise these stories in a way that does not speak *for* or *over* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but instead magnifies their voices in a way that can be useful to allies.

However, this project is also very much aware of the concerns many indigenous people have expressed about the party system, and their fears that toeing the party line may negatively impact their relationships with their communities. As such, it is warned that while these recommendations could help to actively recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, all parties must be sensitive towards the concerns and added responsibilities of their Indigenous members if they intend to continue growing Indigenous membership and representation.



Nova Peris OAM,
Parliament of Australia

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Indigenous women tell their stories: Reasons behind pursuing politics

There are many different ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have risen to public prominence. Here, we share their stories in the hope that other Indigenous Australian women will be inspired to become more politically active with a better understanding of what can help them to be elected.

Nova Peris OAM, Senator for the Northern Territory, is descended from the Gija, Yawuru and Iwatja peoples of the Kimberley and Arnhem Land, and she had a unique journey to join the Labor Party. As a nationally recognisable hockey player and athletics star after competing for Australia in the 1996 and 2000 Olympics, she was first asked to run for pre-selection in 2004, but turned it down due to wanting to care for her young children. When asked by Julia Gillard to run a second time, for the 2013 national election, she agreed, and was overwhelmingly endorsed by the executive to receive first billing on Labor's NT ballot, subsequently being elected in her first run for office. With this election, she became the first and so far only Indigenous Labor representative, male or female, in the national parliament.



Linda Burney,
NSW Parliament

Linda Burney, MP for Canterbury in New South Wales and a Wiradjuri woman, began in public service, working in community development, local government and the public service, while also participating in her local Labor branch. She cites her experiences in public service, such as her time as President of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, as being crucial in becoming competitive for a winnable seat in south Sydney, as her positions made her a public face within the community.

When she was approached by Labor Left to contest pre-selection against the incumbent Labor Right candidate, she says entering state government felt like the next natural step for her career. She has held the seat of Canterbury since 2003, holds the shadow ministries for Aboriginal Affairs and Education, and has been Deputy Leader of the Opposition since 2011.

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Josie Farrer, MP for the Kimberley in Western Australia, is a traditional Gidja woman, and had little formal education, rising to local prominence through community groups and local leadership positions. She was encouraged to enter politics by Barbara Miller from the Australian Electoral Commission back in the early 1980's, which eventually led to her 16 years on Halls Creek Shire Council, including a stint as President. She ran for Labor pre-selection after being tapped on the shoulder by Kimberley Indigenous community groups, after which the ALP community rallied around her and she received great support and mentorship from Labor executives, EMILY's List, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Labor members. She has sat in the Western Australian Parliament since 2013.



Josie Farrer,
WA Parliament



Leeanne Enoch,
Queensland Parliament

Leeanne Enoch, MP for Algester in Queensland, is a Nunukul-Nughi woman of the Quandamooka nation, with further ties to the Kanju peoples of North Queensland. She decided to join her local Labor branch after meeting a young Anna Bligh, then MP and future Premier of Queensland, in a field at a community event out bush. She said that it caused her to reconsider the importance of being a part of the political process, and realised that becoming a politician would be the "ultimate way to serve [her] community". Furthermore, she joined a branch with great female and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, making it easier to join and eventually become President of the branch, sharing the responsibility with two elders. She was finally elected to the seat of Algester earlier in 2015, becoming the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women to sit in the Queensland parliament. She currently

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sits in the Queensland cabinet, holding the ministries for Housing and Public Works and Science and Innovation.

The most important message from all of the stories of Labor's many amazing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is that there is no single model or career path for becoming a politician at any level of government. Some of the women interviewed had received little to no formal education, and instead learned the ropes through community connections or other jobs, such as Josie Farrer. Other women had come up through other service positions in the community, such as Leeanne Enoch and Linda Burney's beginnings as public school teachers, and then of course we have Nova Peris, who was in the public eye as a sportsperson before switching careers. The next great Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman to become a parliamentarian could truly be anyone.

"Be patient but ready"

- Leeanne Enoch's political mantra

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Opportunities and Support

One of the most important questions in finding out how to get more Indigenous women into positions of power is asking what helped them get there. The responses to this question were incredibly varied, but give guidelines for the kind of support networks required to run for office.

Support from other ALP members

One of the most important moments for many of these women was deciding to join the Australian Labor Party, the first step to getting pre-selected and eventually elected to government. Many of the women discussed the importance of the Labor Party's history with Indigenous affairs in their decision to join, with Josie Farrer talking about how important it was that the party was sympathetic towards the disadvantages suffered by Indigenous peoples.

After making the decision to join the Australian Labor Party, all the women interviewed were encouraged by the amount of support they received from their fellow Labor members and candidates in running for pre-selection and office. Nova Peris OAM praised the Northern Territory Labor "family" as very inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and she also noted the overwhelming support received from Julia Gillard (then Prime Minister) and the national Labor executive in being pre-selected.

Leeanne Enoch spoke of her first day being sworn in as a Member of Parliament, as the first Indigenous woman in Queensland to do so, where she described the obvious pride of her fellow ALP members in seeing her succeed.

She described it as a "We've done it!" moment, where she felt supported and encouraged by the party's enthusiasm for her win, and for greater Indigenous representation more generally.

"I am determined to make the point that Aboriginal people are part of the everyday life of this State [NSW] and have views just like everyone else. The days of fringe dwelling are over. The imperative of reconciliation is upon us."

Linda Burney, Inaugural Speech 2003

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Other women discussed Labor Party members – parliamentarians, executives, men and women – who encouraged or promoted their run for office. These are people such as Anthony Albanese (for Linda Burney), Karen Struthers (for Leeanne Enoch) and Jon Ford and Sally Talbot (for Josie Farrer), and former Tasmanian parliamentarian Kathryn Hay mentioned in her inaugural speech that an incumbent Senator even helped her to doorknock. This support for Indigenous candidates is also embodied by the mentoring relationship between Jenny Beacham (former ALP state secretary) and Carol Martin (first Indigenous woman in any Australian parliament), who worked together during Ms Martin's first run for office for the seat of Kimberley, WA. These individual relationships are just a few examples of the commitment to more equitable representation across all levels of the ALP, from individuals and branches to the executive.



Linda Burney (right) and Isabel Tarrago
at the 2005 National PEN Conference, Kooralbyn

EMILY's List

Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women elected to parliament since EMILY's List was founded have expressed gratitude for the support of EMILY's List in their campaigns and later political careers.

Carol Martin (Inaugural speech, 2001): "I am profoundly grateful to Emily's List - the organisation involving amazing women by whom I have been fortunate

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enough to have been embraced and supported during the process of becoming a member of Parliament. The generous help given to me by those women was so important that its value is impossible to measure, but I thank them.”

Linda Burney (Inaugural speech, 2003): “I want to mention EMILY's List. EMILY has linked up Labor women in this place before we even came in. They taught me the value of ‘we’ and ‘us’, not ‘I’ and ‘me’. There are not enough women in our Parliament in any of the parties. Affirmative action is everyone's business. All I can say is the girls are in town, and there are plenty more where we come from.”

Leeanne Enoch also mentioned the importance of EMILY's List in making politics an achievable goal for her. She said she first decided she wanted to run for parliament at a PEN conference run by EMILY's List in 2005, where she saw trailblazers, like Linda Burney and Carol Martin, who had already done it and been elected as Aboriginal women, surrounded by Indigenous and non-Indigenous women committed to better representation.

Overall, the women interviewed all mentioned the work done by EMILY's List in a positive light, whether it inspired them to join politics or helped them to campaign and fundraise. Many also expressed great admiration for EMILY's List founder and inaugural co-convenor, the late great Joan Kirner AC.

Family

Family support was crucial to many of the women interviewed. Lidia Thorpe, who works for the Municipal Association of Victoria, talked about how her politically active family helped connect her with leadership positions in communities across the country, noting that it seemed relatively simple to become an advocate and representative of her community since other family members were already involved. Nova Peris OAM also discussed how important her family's support was in taking on national responsibilities, both in terms of sport and later politics, saying that it helped a lot when she was managing the pressures of the public eye. In terms of children, Linda Burney and Nova Peris OAM both discussed

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the impact of running for election on their children, and made the decision to run after their children were in school or teenagers.

Elders

The women interviewed for this study expressed gratitude and respect for the elders in their communities who pushed them forward towards public service. In her inaugural speech, Carol Martin praised “the support and strength of our Kimberley elders” and noted that “they were always willing to advise and direct”. Josie Farrer spoke of their help and “cultural leadership” in her own inaugural speech, while Linda Burney and Leeanne Enoch also acknowledged the role of their elders in their successes in their interviews. Nova Peris in particular noted the importance of elders in Northern Territory politics in comparison to national politics. The engagement of Northern Territory political parties with elders in ‘mainstream’ politics could also be a contributing factor to why there is so much greater Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the NT in contrast to other states and territories. Overall, elders are a great source of support and guidance within Indigenous communities.

Mentorship

Mentors and allies are incredibly important to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in parliaments around the country. Everyone cited mentors – formal, informal, or both – as being central to building the skill set and networks needed to be elected. Here at EMILY’s List, one of the most celebrated mentor partnerships is that between Jenny Beacham and Carol Martin (former MP for the Kimberley) which led to Ms Martin becoming the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman to be elected to any Australian parliament. Talking to Jenny Beacham, she spoke about what her role as a mentor was like, which she identified as including helping to negotiate party politics, fundraising, and keeping the campaign focused.

Leeanne Enoch spoke of her relationship with Karen Struthers, a fellow EMILY’s List member and the MP for Algeester before her, as central to putting her in

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the position where she could run for office. After the pair met at EMILY's List's Partnership for Equity Network (PEN) Conference in 2003, Ms Struthers immediately put her in contact with all the right people to position her for pre-selection.

Of course, not all mentor partnerships are quite as formal as these two examples. Josie Farrer noted that “without realising it, you do have mentors”, highlighting the importance of her community connections and networks in getting experience and being put forward for pre-selection.

Experience with other leadership roles

Many of the Indigenous women in parliaments around the country had experience in representing or leading their communities prior to running for Parliament. In Western Australia, both Josie Farrer and her predecessor Carol Martin served through their local shire councils (Halls Creek and Derby-West respectively) before being elected to the state parliament, giving them a familiarity with government processes and the effect of government on the community.

Taking another path, Linda Burney became involved in grassroots politics and joined the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, becoming an Executive Officer and later President of the organisation. This brought her into the public eye, as she sat on numerous boards (such as the NSW Board of

“This is not about tokenism, this is about cut through. This is about recognising the urgency of seeing more Indigenous people in all political parties and in our parliament.”

- Leeanne Enoch, Mabo Lecture 2015 at James Cook University

Studies) and held positions in both the government and non-government sectors, giving her the experience and confidence she needed to take the next step and become a parliamentarian. Leeanne Enoch had experience with leadership within her local ALP branch, as well as her professional responsibilities in the Australian Red Cross, which (similar to Ms Burney's experiences) brought her into contact with

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other leadership and public figures. These experiences with leadership roles, for all of these women, were cited as helping the transition into running for office.

Linda Burney highlighted the importance of these experiences of interacting with policy makers and parliamentarians as “demystifying” the political process, giving her the skills she needed to become a parliamentarian. Leeanne Enoch further added that her experiences in ALP executive roles helped to build relationships so that when she eventually ran, the trust from her party and the community was already there from her prior roles. More generally, all the women talked about how building networks with leaders and public figures through other roles (at work, in service, in advocacy, and in local politics) made it easier to understand how to run for pre-selection, how to get elected, and what to expect once they moved into the role.

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Barriers to Entry

While there are a great many aspects of life that we can identify as helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to participate in state and federal governments, it is just as important to understand the barriers as it is the opportunities. This section will discuss the problems our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women reported encountering in their journey, in addition to the extra pressures they face in public office as Indigenous women.

Pre-Selection in Winnable Seats

In my interview with her, as well as her speeches in Parliament and to the public, Leeanne Enoch has been very vocal about supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in pre-selection, and, more importantly, in seats the party believes it can win. In her Mabo Lecture at the James Cook University earlier this year, she said: “Political parties must take responsibility for putting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates into winnable seats, and providing them with the support and resources to win those seats and enter Parliament.” Enoch, Nova Peris, and Linda Burney all expressed support for quotas or affirmative action to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pre-selection, much in the same way that these methods have been successfully introduced in the Labor Party for women. Peris in particular talked about the work of the National Indigenous Labor Network (NILN) to achieve support for affirmative action targets at the ALP 2015 National Conference. Overall, pre-selection is a big hurdle for all people wishing to becoming a parliamentarian, but it is especially difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The Extra Portfolio

All of the women interviewed described Indigenous affairs as either a central part of their role in parliament or else as an extra unofficial portfolio to manage in addition to their other positions. Linda Burney described this ‘extra portfolio’ (before its appointment to her as an official one) as a “warranted” expectation from Indigenous people around the state. She also explained that the pressure

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from these expectations was quite high compared to the pressure experienced by non-Indigenous parliamentarians. Leeanne Enoch echoed this opinion, describing herself as having four portfolios – Algeester (her district), her two ministerial portfolios, and being a representative for the Indigenous community. This automatic presumption of Indigenous representatives having a more demanding position than non-Indigenous MPs and Senators could definitely be daunting to newcomers.

“White Man’s Parliament” and Historic Exclusion

Linda Burney reported that many members of Indigenous communities feel that state and federal parliaments are “the white man’s parliament”. This is in part due to historical issues that Indigenous communities have with the Australian government (such as the Stolen Generations and the Northern Territory Intervention), which carries over to the way communities and individuals interact with governments today. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are simply not enrolled to vote because being on the electoral roll used to mean that the government could take away their children. This creates a big problem when we discuss ways to boost Indigenous representation in parliaments around the country, as you cannot run for office without being on the electoral roll.

Josie Farrer echoed this, saying that in her own youth she felt estranged from

“The Aboriginal Community feels a great ownership of me and that’s another level of responsibility, so I get so many more requests from outside my area than most MPs. People also expect me to know everything about Aboriginal Affairs.”

- Linda Burney (in *You Can Do It!* p21)

the government who took her away from her family. When first spoken to about running for government positions, before her position on Halls Creek Shire Council, she originally said that government was not her world and that it had “nothing to do with us [Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Australians]”. It is quite possible that many more Indigenous Australians would step up to vote and run for office if the space was considered more inclusive of Indigenous perspectives, so hopefully the current boost in numbers will

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inspire others to vote, join a party, and continue to represent Indigenous voices on the party floor and in parliament.

Pressure of Being First

Leeanne Enoch, Linda Burney, and Carol Martin all discussed the pressures of being first in their inaugural speeches, and many of the women also mentioned this pressure in their interviews. There are still a great many 'firsts' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in politics left – first Indigenous women in the

“I am more proud than I ever thought possible to be the first Aboriginal woman elected to Parliament in Australia. Even as I address the House with emotions swelling inside me, I cannot help but feel a slight touch of disbelief that it has taken so long for a person like me to get here.”

- Inaugural speech by Carol Martin, former MP for Kimberley in the Western Australian Parliament

Victorian and South Australian parliaments, first Indigenous woman in the House of Representatives, first Indigenous woman in the Federal Cabinet, as Speaker of the House, leading a state, and leading the country – these are all very important firsts that are still to come. The pressure of that position as a trailblazer is still very intimidating to possible candidates, and it creates another barrier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women when they have no one to relate to or ask for advice that is in government.

Public Pressure and Prejudice

Nova Peris OAM also discussed the extra pressures of public life more generally, especially the extra stress and pressure of losing the anonymity of herself, her family, and her community. Given that Indigenous Australians in public life are few and far between, there are extra pressures on them to be perfect role models, which can be difficult to manage and intimidating for newcomers.

Furthermore, there is the problem of racism and prejudice against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which is still very much present today. Not many of the women spoke directly about their experiences with racism in the interviews,

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however, Josie Farrer's powerful inaugural speech, quoted below, spoke to the persistence of racism against Indigenous peoples.

Josie Farrer (inaugural speech 2013): "I understand firsthand the entrenched bigotry and prejudice that I and people like me suffer daily. In fact, during my preselection for the ALP it was suggested that I had no idea what Parliament is like and what being a member of Parliament involved. Who was I to think I could be a member of Parliament? I was growled at on the main street of Halls Creek and yelled at. "Do you understand that you will have to turn up to work every day?" Many members here will know that I served the Halls Creek community as a shire councillor for 16 years and I spent seven years as shire president. So why did this person think I could be treated this way? I can only assume that it is because I am black and worst of all I am a black woman."

Grief

Lidia Thorpe, Aboriginal activist and government relations advisor in Victoria, talked at length about the struggles of representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in terms of how hard life is for many ordinary Indigenous Australians. Ms Thorpe cited the suicide epidemic, health problems, and continuing isolation and racism as factors that made it hard to be a public face. As Indigenous public figures tend to be well connected in the community, every tragedy hits harder, especially when compounded by a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the community when acting as a representative at the higher levels of government.

Finances

Nova Peris OAM stressed the importance of finances and class status in greater Indigenous representation at state and national levels. There still remains a huge gap in education, employment and income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2014), which has a direct impact on the ability of Indigenous peoples to become involved in politics to the extent that they can run for office. Leeanne Enoch further added the personal note that sponsored places

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in conferences and other events allowed her to network within the party without worrying about the costs involved.

Cultural Differences between Indigenous and Parliamentary Politics

Indigenous forms of government work entirely independently of and differently to mainstream politics, and it is sometimes hard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to cope with the culture shock. English was not the first language of some of the women interviewed, such as Josie Farrer, and she said that “[Indigenous Australians] live in two worlds”, straddling two clashing cultural and political systems. These cultural difference can be extremely restrictive to the advancement of Indigenous Australians in politics.

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EMILY's List: the Partnership for Equity Network and our women

Carol Martin, an EMILY's List supported candidate in Western Australia, became the first Indigenous woman in any Australian parliament in 2001. After her win, she challenged EMILY's List to develop a stronger partnership with Indigenous women to continue the fight for equity, justice, and rights for Indigenous communities. In response, a conference was held in Alice Springs in 2003, which officially launched the Partnership for Equity Network (PEN), which aims to assist the election of more Indigenous women to parliaments, to create a network of Indigenous women, and to support Indigenous women in their struggle to achieve equity for all Indigenous Australians (EMILY's List Annual Report 2002/2003: 7).

It is important to show that Indigenous women are not just interested in doing the hard yards in caring for our families. [...] We have a role to play in both economic and social policy development."

- Marion Scrymgour, former MP for Arafura (NT), in *You Can Do It!*

Since PEN began, it has been active in creating a network to support Indigenous Labor women, provides mentoring programs for Indigenous women (such as the 'Sistas Are Doing It For Themselves' series), and has created practical guides for Indigenous women intending to run for office, such as *You Can Do It: Getting More Involved in Public Life* (2006).

Since 2001, when EMILY's List supported Carol Martin's successful campaign, EMILY's List has supported a further eight successful Indigenous women candidates. These include incumbents Senator Nova Peris OAM (NT), Linda Burney (NSW: Canterbury), Josie Farrer (WA: Kimberley), and Leeanne Enoch (QLD: Algester), as well as former members Malarndirri McCarthy (NT: Arnhem), Marion Scrymgour (NT: Arafura) and Kathryn Hay (TAS: Bass).

During this research, I asked the Indigenous MPs supported by EMILY's List how they interacted with the organisation's programs, and what they found most helpful. The consensus amongst many of the women is that the original PEN conferences were a massive success, with member for Algester Leeanne Enoch

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identifying the conference as the moment she realised she wanted to run for office.



Leeanne Enoch (left) and Heather Castledine
at the 2005 National PEN Conference Kooralbyn

What the Partnership for Equity Network Should Look Like

All the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women interviewed for this paper had ideas about ways that political engagement with Indigenous women could be improved. Nova Peris OAM noted that there are many seats in the country that do have a majority Indigenous constituency, which could be sites of political power and voice for Indigenous peoples, but this has not translated into representation for a long time, possibly due to the gap in registered voters. Leeanne Enoch said that we need more Indigenous people registered to vote and engaged with the whole political process, based in engaging with local communities, if we are to see stronger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in parliaments.

Lidia Thorpe suggested that getting younger women involved could be a solution to this problem of political disengagement. She said that many 13-to-14-year-old Indigenous women are treated as adults and caregivers within the family and, if EMILY's List is primarily targeting older women, it could already be too late

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to redirect women who had already disengaged from mainstream politics. One way to do this, she said, would be to have mother-daughter or family events. This would also help with the issue that many women cannot go to conferences or events due to child care needs.

Linda Burney had several recommendations for improvements to the PEN model. Some of the things she recommended were: the employment of an Indigenous woman at EMILY's List; a commitment to be actively reflective and respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture across all EMILY's List action groups; accountability to the 2015 ALP National Conference resolution; and a biannual convention focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labor women in order to prioritise the pre-selection and election of the Indigenous women members. Both Linda Burney and Leeanne Enoch were passionate about getting more practical support for Indigenous women interested in running for office, with Ms Enoch despairing that so many are "hung out to dry" during the complicated and often faction-driven pre-selection and fundraising processes. Overall, most wanted a more nuts-and-bolts approach to encouraging Indigenous women to run for parliament over the more generalised networking and consciousness-raising efforts.



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