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YOUNG ABORIGINAL LEADERS MEET AT NSW PARLIAMENT

The Parliament of NSW welcomed 20 young Aboriginal leaders (aged 18–25) for its Young Aboriginal Leaders Program as part of the Bicentenary of the Legislative Council celebrations. The four-day initiative held from 17- 20 June was designed to empower and further inspire the next generation of Aboriginal leaders across NSW.

Selected after a state-wide call for applications, each participant arrived in Sydney on Gadigal land having travelled from across NSW – from Narrandera to Dubbo, Grafton, the Blue Mountains, Eden, Kiama, Newcastle, and from across Greater Sydney.

President of the Legislative Council, The Hon. Ben Franklin MLC said the young participants demonstrated passion, resilience, curiosity, and a deep commitment to their communities.

“Having already demonstrated significant leadership in their communities, these twenty Young Aboriginal Leaders came to NSW Parliament ready to share their stories, connect with each other and learn from the experience,” President Franklin said.

Participants were welcomed by the Parliament’s Aboriginal Engagement team, led by Joe Stewart and Damon Goolagong and after touring the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly chambers, learned about parliamentary processes, ways to participate in our democracy and the purpose of parliamentary inquiries. They also met with NSW Premier, The Hon Chris Minns MP.

The program provided an opportunity for the participants to meet and learn from other Aboriginal leaders who shared wisdom and modelled the resilience and innovation at the heart of Aboriginal leadership in this country.

From Professor Jack Beetson the Managing Director of Literacy for Life, to Deputy Secretary at Aboriginal Affairs, Shane Hamilton and National Institute of Dramatic Art’s Director of First Nations and Outreach, Travis Cardona – these leaders shared powerful insights into their careers, candid reflections on the challenges they have faced and how they lead with purpose and pride.

“It was truly inspiring to witness. Hearing from trailblazers like Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience founder, Jack Manning Bancroft, NSW Aboriginal Land Council Chief Executive, Clare McHugh, and sporting legend Timana Tahu has shown just how powerful it is when experience meets aspiration,” President Franklin said.



"I have no doubt the conversations, connections, and confidence the participants built during the Young Aboriginal Leaders Program will echo far beyond these walls," President Franklin said.

Program highlights also included time spent on Country with the La Perouse Aboriginal community, a private tour of the Gweagal spears at the Chau Chak Wing Museum and a meal shared with iconic Australian Indigenous Chef, Mark Olive.

The culmination of the project saw all participants deliver inspiring speeches in the Legislative Council chamber on an issue important to them and future projects they have planned for their communities. These speeches were recorded and are being shared with all Members of the NSW Parliament.

"Delivering the Young Aboriginal Leaders Program has been one of the genuine highlights of my career. The extraordinary participants grew together as individuals and now as a group of connected future leaders ready to support each other make an impact on their communities across NSW," President Franklin concluded.

Participant reflections from the program:

Eliza Darney - Tamworth, NSW

"The week made me feel strong, grounded, and connected to Country. I've always struggled with confidence within my own identity, but this program helped me grow as an individual and become more confident in who I am. The highlight for me was the Using Your Voice workshop with Natasha McNamara from NIDA. She taught us how to ground ourselves and speak with purpose."

Malek Lyons - Narrandera, NSW

"It's uncomfortable walking into NSW Parliament, but it's powerful. I've never been so interested or engaged in learning about the politics of Australia as I have over the last few days. I've learnt a lot from the program and from the other participants, and I leave with an understanding of how I can better advocate for our people. I've never had so much fire in me to get home and just rip in."

Jai McEwen - Central Coast, NSW

"Ben's (Legislative Council President, The Hon. Ben Franklin MLC) done an amazing job, organising the program and giving us the space to connect with each other and work on those relationships. The relationships we've built over the last four days are going to last for the rest of our lives."