

Push to end passive indigenous welfare delivers results

[Stephen Fitzpatrick](#)



Indigenous Affairs Editor Sydney



Noel Pearson in Sydney's Surry Hills yesterday. 'We're now not trapped in the usual service delivery welfare mode'. Picture: Britta Campion

Cape York leader Noel Pearson's drive to turn communities away from passive welfare reliance has showed results, with a major review coming down in favour of the system that underpins the "indigenous empowerment" policy shift being considered by the Turnbull government.

The Jawun model, which pairs nine discrete regions — Cape York, East and West Kimberley, northeast Arnhem Land, Victoria's Goulburn Murray, inner Sydney, the NSW central coast, the lower Murray, Lakes and Coorong in South Australia and the central NPY lands — with the corporate and government sectors, demonstrated "unquestionable" evidence of success, the KPMG review found.

The scheme had brought benefits both to the communities and to their corporate and government partners, it found, meaning Jawun could be "considered to have made an important contribution to practical reconciliation between corporate and indigenous Australia".

The NGO, of which Mr Pearson is patron, began 15 years ago with a landmark meeting in Cape York and a handful of corporate "secondees" — the first of whom was Alan Tudge, now Human Services Minister, but at the time a successful businessman.

Malcolm Turnbull, in his pre-politics life as a banker, was also involved in the scheme's beginnings. There have been 2000 secondees and 500 chief executives go through the program nationwide since.

Jawun-affiliated programs have ranged from the establishment of indigenous think tank the Cape York Institute to financial literacy programs, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility on the NSW central coast and a not-for-profit Cairns landscaping and civil construction business. Jawun's most recent significant endeavour has been the Empowered Communities report, a sophisticated and in-depth proposal for managing indigenous affairs handed to government 12 months ago, and about whose reception Mr Pearson said yesterday he had "reason to be optimistic".

The KPMG review — to be delivered today at a panel in Sydney featuring Jawun chief executive Karyn Baylis, Mr Tudge, Mr Pearson and other indigenous leaders — found that up to 90 per cent of the program's indigenous partners had experienced "a positive uplift" across seven capacity groups. "Secondees" had also returned to their workplaces with changed views on how to interact with indigenous organisations and communities, it found.

The review was funded by the federal government and the Commonwealth Bank.

The old model of indigenous affairs was one that "never interacted with anybody that made money or worked in an enterprise that made money", Mr Pearson told *The Australian*.

"We just engaged with public servants."

He said the shift in recent years — and Jawun's reason for success — had been redirecting indigenous affairs in the participating regions from a focus on social services delivery towards development.

"The whole development approach is centred on the importance of economic development," he said.

"(Previously) we had a surfeit of people that had knowledge in government and public service and social programs, but what we were short on was people who were from Qantas or KPMG or Macquarie looking at our problems."

The key was rolling the strong corporate-indigenous relationship kicked off by Jawun into one that then also included government. "We're now not trapped in the usual service delivery welfare mode," Mr Pearson said.

"We're throwing innovation back at government."

Mr Pearson cited as an example the establishment of the Cape York Academy, which operates three schools in Aurukun, Coen and Hope Vale in partnership with the Queensland government.

He also noted a social housing-style program in Kununurra, in WA's East Kimberley, which required participants to be in employment and for any children to be attending school.