

## Media Release

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### Historic national gathering for First Nations staff

First Nations staff from prosecutors' offices across Australia have come together on Dharug Country for a historic national gathering to advance justice and foster collaboration.

The first dedicated meeting of First Nations staff working with Directors of Public Prosecutions in different states and territories was held on August 8 and 9, hosted by the NSW Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) at the ODPP's Parramatta office on Dharug Country.

Attendees came from NSW, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Commonwealth DPP, and included prosecutors, paralegals, interns, witness support offices and administrative officers.

Damian Beaufile, Australia's only First Nations Crown Prosecutor, was instrumental in organising the gathering, along with First Nations solicitor Zachary Wone, who also works at the NSW ODPP.

"It's important to create a safe space for First Nations people who work in prosecution agencies to share their experiences, support each other and discuss opportunities for improvements in the criminal justice system so that it can better meet the unique needs of First Nations victims, witnesses and accused," Mr Beaufile said.

Jarra Somerville, a Legal Officer at the ODPP in Western Australia, said convening the gathering was "essential for advancing justice and empowering First Nations staff".

"By fostering dialogue and collaboration, we address unique challenges, enhance cultural competency, and drive systemic improvements that benefit both the justice system and the communities we serve," she said.



The event began with a Welcome to Country by Aunty Leanne King, followed by a welcome by the NSW DPP, Sally Dowling SC.

Over the two days, First Nations attendees met with Ms Dowling, Justice Louise Taylor of the ACT Supreme Court, and NSW District Court Judges Warwick Hunt and Sophia Beckett.

They also met with Avelina Tarrago, a former Commonwealth Crown Prosecutor and current Queensland Law Reform Commissioner, NSW Police Superintendent Greg Moore, and Aunty Barbara O'Neill, Walama List Elder.

The Walama List aims to reduce reoffending, address overrepresentation and increase First Nations peoples' participation in the NSW criminal justice system by providing a holistic, therapeutic approach to sentencing for First Nations people. It enables community participation in court processes and uses culturally appropriate programs and supports to address needs and risk factors that may lead to reoffending.

Justice Taylor and Ms Tarrago spoke of the importance of staying connected to kin, country and culture, especially when advocating for community in our roles.

Superintendent Moore, Aunty Barbara, Judge Beckett and Judge Hunt discussed co-designing programs within the legal landscape that centre First Nations voices and meet the needs of First Nations communities.

Judge Beckett also discussed how the *Bugmy* Bar Book – a legal resource for judges, lawyers and policy-makers – could be used by attendees. The *Bugmy* Bar Book summarises key research about the impacts of experiences of trauma, socioeconomic inequality, structural disadvantage and strengths-based rehabilitation.

Mr Beaufils, who is on the *Bugmy* Bar Book Committee, said the material in the book arms practitioners with reliable, evidence-based research about First Nations people.

Lauren Davies, the NSW ODPP's First Nations Project Officer, said the gathering was a success. "Not only were we able to meet and yarn with the incredible speakers, but the biggest highlight of the two days was the ability to connect with other First Nations staff across Australia."