



Measuring What Matters

Treasury

Australian Government

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Dear Measuring What Matters project team

**RE: Measuring What Matters consultations**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Commonwealth government's consultation process ahead of the release of the Measuring What Matters Statement (**Statement**). The Office of the Children's Commissioner Northern Territory (**OCC**) strongly supports this initiative to consider how we can better measure what matters in our society.

Our feedback is structured into:

- general comments – these are overarching principles and ideas we encourage the project team to consider in development of all objectives, policy areas and indicators; and
- specific comments – these are more directed suggestions for key indicators or policy areas we would like to see included in the Measuring What Matters Statement.

**General Comments**

*The voices of children and young people*

One of the responsibilities of the OCC is to advocate for and elevate the voice of children and young people in the Northern Territory. Accordingly, we strongly encourage the project to include children at all levels of the development, monitoring and evaluation of this project. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides guiding principles that complement each other to assure children have their rights fulfilled.<sup>1</sup> One of the guiding principles crucial to children's enjoyment of their rights is Article 12 – the right to participate and be heard. To achieve successful long term policy outcomes, Australia's policy landscape needs to privilege children's rights, participation and empowerment through all levels.

The Statement represents an excellent opportunity to include the voices of children in deciding what, how and why we measure outcomes of success. We encourage the Measuring What Matters team to review and incorporate the principles and indicators set out in the Welsh *Well-Being of Future Generations Act*, which is discussed in further detail below. In particular, we submit that effective consultation with and ongoing governance involvement of children will help achieve a more informed and successful set of measures as it will reflect the values of the younger generation.

Effective involvement of children means routine and meaningful consultations that effectively translate children's insights and lived experience into strategies and actions. In practice, children's participation in matters important to them or affecting them means providing space, voice, audience

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<sup>1</sup> Child Rights International Network, Child Rights, *General Principles* (2018) <<https://archive.crin.org/en/home/rights/themes/general-principles.html>>.

and influence.<sup>2</sup> When these mechanisms are assured, children’s participation is genuine and their involvement contributes towards successful outcomes, decisions, policy-making and engagement. If they are not, consultations are prone to becoming tokenistic and misrepresent the true voice of children. In order to maintain effective involvement, children must also be included in governance structures and monitoring and evaluation aspects of the initiative, in order to ensure they are able to actively participate in decision making throughout all phases of the process.

It is unclear from the information provided on the website what kind of consultation has occurred with children to date and, importantly, how this consultation was undertaken. Mechanisms exist across Australia specifically designed to gather children’s views and facilitate participation on issues affecting them (examples in footnote).<sup>3</sup> The OCC strongly recommends that these tools are used and promoted as part of development of the Statement in order to ensure inclusion of a diverse array of children’s voices. In the event this has not been considered, we strongly encourage the project team to review the sources in the footnote below and engage with State, Territory and National Children’s Commissioners, along with other youth advocacy organisations, to consider how best to undertake this work.

### The Welsh approach

The *Well-Being of Future Generations Act* in Wales is an excellent example of a future-minded approach to national measurement.<sup>4</sup> This legislation requires collaboration across government services towards 7 goals centred on prosperity, resilience, health, equity, cohesive communities, thriving culture and global responsibility. Fundamental to this approach is ensuring future generations have at least the same quality of life as we do now. The act aims for better decision-making by ensuring public bodies:

- take account of the long term;
- aim to prevent problems from arising or getting worse;
- taking an integrated and collaborative approach; and
- considering people of all ages and diversity.

A 2022 review of the Act found that the enthusiasm and commitment for the goals it espouses have extended beyond the organisations involved to the individuals who are covered by it; and that policy

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<sup>2</sup> L Lundy, ‘Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, *British Educational Research Journal*, vol 33 (2009) 933

<<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01411920701657033?scroll=top&needAccess=true>>.

<sup>3</sup> National Children’s Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, *Children’s Rights Report 2015* (2015) <<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/publications/childrens-rights-report-2015>>;

Western Australia Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Speaking Out Survey 2021*

<<https://www.cryp.wa.gov.au/our-work/projects/speaking-out-survey/>>; Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, *Australia’s Children, Data gaps: voice of the child* (2020)

<<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/data-gaps/overarching-data-gaps>>; Queensland Family and Child Commission, *Rights, voices, stories project report: Identifying what matters to children and young people involved with the Queensland child protection system* (2021)

<<https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/RVSreport.PDF>>; CREATE Foundation, *Consultation Reports* (2021) <<https://create.org.au/consultations/>>; Children’s Health Australasia and the Starlight

Children’s Foundation, *Listen Carefully Project: Exploring best practice in implementing children and young people’s right to be heard in healthcare* (2021).

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government, *The Well-being of Future Generations* (Web Page) <<https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales>>.



teams in particular have been applying the principles and tools to achieve those goals.<sup>5</sup> However, it was also noted that the success to date has been more a result of positive leadership and commitment of participants than embedded processes and that improvements could be made in the implementation of the Act's goals. Further, the Well-Being of Future Generations Commissioner recommended that the Welsh Government produce a plan which address the recommendations set out in the review, including timescales for the delivery of annual reporting, monitoring, and reviewing progress, and collaborate between government departments.<sup>6</sup>

It is also noted that the Welsh Act requires that an indicator must, among other things, "be expressed as a value or characteristic that can be measured quantitatively or qualitatively against a particular outcome". The OCC supports the inclusion of qualitative measurements and submits that such metrics are equally as important as quantitative data in capturing the opinions and experiences of all members of the community.

#### Disaggregation of data

The OCC submits that regardless of what indicators are decided upon to inform objectives and policy areas of the Statement, in order to be an effective measurement, the data underlying these indicators must be capable of disaggregation into relevant sub-categories. We believe it is critical that, where possible, all data collected as part of this project be capable of disaggregation into the following categories:

- age groups
- gender
- geographic location
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage
- culturally or linguistically diverse

We further submit that it would be beneficial to have a measurement embedded in each indicator highlighting the gap between maximum and minimum value sets. This would help to highlight the inequality experienced in general and within in each sub-category for that indicator.

#### Existing data sets and information gaps

Where possible, measures should be based on existing national/international metrics to enable appropriate comparisons. In conjunction with this, it is critical that an analysis is conducted of existing or potential gaps in the data necessary to inform indicators.

In the Northern Territory context, the OCC collects and publishes various forms of data gathered from children themselves (through our consultations) and from publicly available data sources (e.g.

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<sup>5</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, *A government fit for future generations: A Review into Welsh Government's implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act* (Final Report, 12 December 2022) <<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/C28299-FG-Section-20-Review-ENG.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, *Section 20 Review* (Web Page) <<https://www.futuregenerations.wales/section-20/>>.



ABS,<sup>7</sup> AIFW<sup>8</sup>). An example of this can be seen in the data snapshots provided in our 2021-22 annual report.<sup>9</sup> However, significant gaps remain in data collection for the Northern Territory. For example:

- the mechanism to capture the prevalence of children with disability involved with or in the care of Territory Families, Housing and Communities (TFHC) is fundamentally flawed. The ‘no disability’ indicator in the Community Care Information System (CCIS) is selected where it is known that a child does not have a disability, but also for where disability status is unknown or has not yet been assessed. Working within a system which does not adequately capture the unknown status of disability results in an inability to adequately identify assessment service needs or support needs of a highly vulnerable cohort of children;
- the prevalence of disability among the parents of children with children protection involvement is also not captured in the Northern Territory. This again makes it impossible to gain an understanding of what supports may be needed by this cohort to better support positive parenting and ultimately support children to remain in the care of the families; and
- the prevalence of neurodevelopmental impairments, including foetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) is unknown. While similarities to a study conducted in a youth detention centre in Western Australia is informative due to similar demographics of those justice involved children in the Territory, an understanding of prevalence in the broader community in the Northern Territory is critical to inform effective policies and decision making.<sup>10</sup>

As part of the development of the Statement, we encourage the project team to consult:

- the Northern Territory Government’s Social Outcomes Framework for a better understanding of the Northern Territory context; and<sup>11</sup>
- the Closing the Gap targets and indicators, to ensure this initiative aligns with its goals and priority reforms.<sup>12</sup>

### Specific suggestions for indicators

The OCC encourages the project team to develop indicators in relation to:

1. child health, developed in coordination with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFW) and other appropriate organisations, noting the 19 key national indicators AIFW uses (including low birthweight, early childhood education, primary school attendance, family economic situation, social and emotional wellbeing, housing);<sup>13</sup>
2. the active involvement of children in decisions that will impact them (e.g. “percentage of children who say they feel they are actively involved in laws and policies that relate to them or relate to future generations”). See also reference to the Welsh indicator below regarding local decision making in their local area.

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (Web Page) <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>>.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies (Web Page) <<https://aifs.gov.au/>>.

<sup>9</sup> Office of the Children’s Commissioner (Northern Territory), *Annual Report 21/22* (Annual Report, 2022) <[https://occ.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1177563/occ-annual-report-2021-22.pdf](https://occ.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1177563/occ-annual-report-2021-22.pdf)>.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Nine out of ten young people in detention found to have severe neuro-disability’ Telethon Kids Institute (online, 28 February 2018) <<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/news--events/news-and-events-nav/2018/february/young-people-in-detention-neuro-disability/>>.

<sup>11</sup> Chief Minister and Cabinet (Northern Territory), Northern Territory Social Outcomes Framework (Final Report, 2021) <[https://cmc.nt.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1002747/social-outcome-framework.pdf](https://cmc.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1002747/social-outcome-framework.pdf)>.

<sup>12</sup> Closing the Gap, *Targets and Outcomes* <<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>>.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Children’s Headline Indicators (Web Page, 18 September 2018) <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/childrens-headline-indicators/contents/about>>.



3. the active involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in decisions made that will impact them. See also reference below to the Welsh Indicator 23 below regarding local decision making in their local area.
4. Homelessness, which incorporates the varying forms of homelessness (see Homelessness Australia for a useful guide in this regard).<sup>14</sup> See also reference below to Welsh Indicator 19 below regarding households in material deprivation, which should also be considered in development of this indicator.
5. the number of children in the care of child protection services and under youth justice supervision. This should include metrics on:
  - a. children who are engaged with both child protection services and the youth justice system;
  - b. details of what kind of child protection involvement, e.g. still with family, in out of home care (in its various forms)
  - c. details of what kind of youth justice supervision (e.g. detention, bail supported accommodation, community supervision, diversion)
6. the existence and protection of items and locations of cultural significance, in particular those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander significance. See below Welsh Indicators 39 and 40 (while noting such indicators would need to be tailored to the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural significance).<sup>15</sup>
7. the prevalence of people who speak First Nations languages, as well as people who speak languages other than English. See reference below to Welsh Indicators 36 and 37.
8. environmental issues, including carbon emissions attributable to Australia (i.e. of goods consumed in Australia and those exported), environmental degradation (i.e. deforestation, habitat destruction on land, in oceans and in the air), ecological/biodiversity destruction and any other environmental metrics considered appropriate by advocates in this area. See also Welsh indicators 40 to 45.
9. The OCC endorses the following indicators used in the Welsh approach and supports their inclusion in the Statement:<sup>16</sup>
  - a. Indicator 17 - Pay difference for gender, disability and ethnicity.
  - b. Indicator 18 - Percentage of people living in households in income poverty relative to the UK median, measured for children, working age and those of pension age.
  - c. Indicator 19 - Percentage of people living in households in material deprivation.
  - d. Indicator 22 - Percentage of people in education, employment or training, measured for different age groups.
  - e. Indicator 23 - Percentage who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area.
  - f. Indicator 36-37 – indicators relating to the Welsh language.
  - g. Indicators 40-45 indicators relating to the environment.
  - h. Indicator 50 – status of digital inclusion in relation to the minimum digital living standard.

<sup>14</sup> Homelessness Australia, *About Homelessness* (Web Page) <<https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/about-homelessness/>>.

<sup>15</sup> Welsh Government, *Well-being of Wales: national indicator technical descriptions and data links* (Web Page) <<https://www.gov.wales/well-being-wales-national-indicator-technical-descriptions-and-data-links>>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Thank you for considering this submission. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Shaun Rich, Strategy Officer via email at [shaun.rich@nt.gov.au](mailto:shaun.rich@nt.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



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