



APONT
Aboriginal Governance
& Management Program

Independent Director Panel Discussions

Some Aboriginal organisations are choosing to invite independent directors onto their boards. The Commonwealth Government is requiring others to do so. There are pros and cons with this trend. The right person can add much to a board, bringing experience, opening doors to other potential supports and upskilling the other directors. The wrong person can erode the capacity of the other directors rather than build it.

Recently AGMP's Wes Miller brought his extensive experience of the issues to panel discussions on this important topic, convened and chaired by **PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting** NT Director Jenny Scott and Co-owner Jodie Sizer as part of October Business Month.

On 27 October in Alice Springs, Wes and Jodie were joined on the panel by Donna McMasters, Central Australia Aboriginal Congress Director. In Darwin on 28 October panellists with Wes included Olga Havnen, CEO of Danila Dilba and David Pugh, CEO of Anglicare NT and an independent director at Danila Dilba.

Some key points raised and discussed by panel members were that independent directors:

- As an idea, need the understanding and support of the CEO together with the other directors well before they are recruited;
- Should not be passive advisors – they are equally liable for the corporation;
- Need to come without agendas and be prepared to ask questions;
- Non-member directors may be able to ask the sensitive questions in environments where kinship and other relationships make that difficult for other directors;
- Should be part of a broader good governance strategy. They are not a silver bullet;
- Need to be aware of dual governance systems often present in Aboriginal organisation boardrooms;
- May look good on paper but can still need considerable orientation;
- May be needed because the sheer number of NT Aboriginal organisations dictates the need for more directors, independent or otherwise.

Discussion points about governance in general included:

- Good governance can lead to good outcomes;
- More funding needs to be invested in organisational capacity building;
- Compliance is not a full measure of an organisation's health;
- Board diversity is very important;

- The distinction between directors and management roles is critical, while they must work well together;
- Consideration should be given to international research regarding Indigenous governance, such as the Harvard Project and its application and relevance in Australian Aboriginal communities.



Alice Springs panellists Wes Miller, Donna McMasters, Central Australia Aboriginal Congress Director and Jodie Sizer of PricewaterhouseCoopers Indigenous Consulting