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Albanese Pushes Indigenous Economic Plan at Garma Festival

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Prime Minister Anthony Albanese unveiled a First Nations Economic Partnership at the Garma Festival, but critics question its impact amid worsening Closing the Gap outcomes.

At the 25th Garma Festival in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (NT), on August 2, 2025, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a First Nations Economic Partnership to boost Indigenous economic development. The plan, involving the Coalition of Peaks and the First Nations Economic Empowerment Alliance, includes \$75 million to support Native Title holders in securing better deals and \$35 million for mobile Technical and Further Education (TAFE) programs, per ABC News. Albanese told festival attendees that

the initiative aims to unlock the economic potential of Indigenous lands, emphasizing partnerships with private capital, according to The Guardian.

The announcement follows a 2025 Productivity Commission report showing only four of 19 Closing the Gap targets on track, with Indigenous incarceration, child removals, and suicide rates worsening, per The Age. Albanese acknowledged the “unacceptable” data but defended his Australian Labor Party (ALP) government’s record, citing \$109 million for justice programs and a \$4 billion housing partnership delivering 2,700 homes in the NT, per the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Yothu Yindi Foundation chair Djawa Yunupingu urged collaboration, stating to ABC News that Indigenous communities must be part of Australia’s future, not left behind.

Opposition Leader Sussan Ley, visiting Western Australia’s Kimberley region instead of Garma, criticized Albanese’s focus as inadequate, arguing to The Australian that the ALP has “stepped back” since the 2023 Voice referendum failure. Shadow Indigenous Australians Minister Jacinta Nampijinpa Price told 9News that Albanese’s policies lack practical impact, pointing to persistent gaps in health and education. Independent Senator Lidia Thorpe called the plan “performative,” warning of a “second Stolen Generation” without structural reforms, per the National Indigenous Times.

The Coalition of Peaks endorsed the partnership, with deputy co-convenor Scott Wilson noting to 9News that jobs and housing access are critical for progress. However, critics argue the ALP’s \$75 million investment pales against the \$450 million spent on the failed referendum, per The Guardian. With Victoria’s net debt projected at \$194 billion by 2028-29, the Opposition demands more accountability, questioning whether Albanese’s plan will deliver measurable outcomes or remain symbolic.