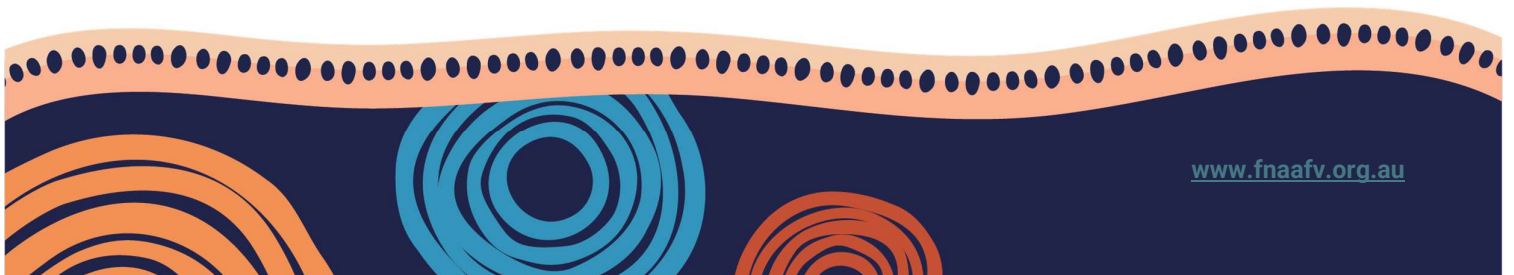




FIRST NATIONS
ADVOCATES AGAINST
FAMILY VIOLENCE



The First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence submission on the SCHADS Award provisional structure and pay rates





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Acknowledgement of Country

First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of all lands and waters across Australia. We wish to pay our respects to Elders, past and present, and to the youth, for the future. We extend this acknowledgement to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reading this Submission.



About the First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence

The First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence (FNAAFV) is the only National Peak Body Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) that supports Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services (FVPLS) around Australia who provide specialised domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) supports through culturally safe, holistic services to First Nations – predominantly women and their children. FNAAFV provides expert national advice in areas of policy, planning and law reform, sector capacity building, supporting innovation and best practice, and advocating for safety and justice for First Nations peoples affected by family violence. We collaborate across all sectors, both ACCO and mainstream with the aim of delivering safety and supporting self-determination for our First Nations peoples in line with [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

FNAAFV represents 16 FVPLSs, with 14 FVPLSs who are members of FNAAFV. The FVPLSs span more than 30 office locations across all jurisdictions. FVPLSs provide culturally safe and specialist legal and non-legal family and domestic violence assistance to more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. FNAAFV members include:

- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Western Australia (Perth Head Office, Broome, Carnarvon, Kununurra, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland)
- Aboriginal Family Legal Services Queensland (Toowoomba Head Office, Roma, Murgon and Gympie)
- Binaal Billa Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Forbes)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (Alice Springs Head Office, Tennant Creek)

- Djirra (statewide service with head office in Melbourne and 8 regional offices in Bairnsdale, Warrnambool, Bendigo, Echuca, Shepparton, Morwell , Melton & Mildura)
- Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation (Port Augusta Head Office, Ceduna, Pt Lincoln)
- Many Rivers Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Kempsey Head Office, Grafton)
- Marninwarnitkura Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Fitzroy Crossing)
- Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council Domestic and Family Violence Service (Alice Springs, NPY Tri-state Region)
- Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (Cairns Head Office, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Bamaga, Thursday Island and Brisbane)
- Thiyama-li Family Violence Service Inc. NSW (Moree Head Office, Bourke, Walgett)
- Warra-Warra Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Broken Hill)
- North Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Service (Darwin Head Office, Katherine)
- SiSTAS (Hobart Head Office, Tasmania)

FNAAFV works with its members, communities, governments, and other partners to raise awareness about family violence affecting First Nations people, and it also advocates for culturally safe legal and holistic responses to this issue. FNAAFV provides a unified voice for its FVPLS members in areas of national policy, planning and law reform, and representation as a member of the national Coalition of Peaks. FNAAFV’s work is informed by evidence, and we aim to ensure that all strategic planning and policy positions link to the Closing the Gap Agreement and Priority Reforms; National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children and associated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025.



First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence Submission

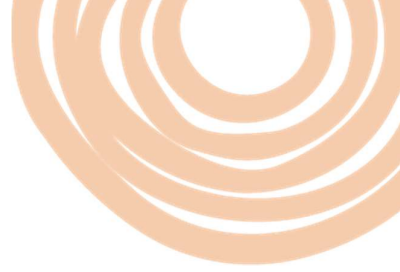
Response to the Commission’s Provisional Decision and Discussion Paper

FVPLSs operate in contexts of significant complexity, providing frontline legal and non-legal assistance to clients experiencing or at risk of DFSV. Our workforce includes lawyers, caseworkers, community engagement workers, counsellors, cultural advisors, and service managers, many of whom bring deep cultural knowledge and lived experience to their roles.

FNAAFV acknowledges the Commission’s provisional decision dated 16 April 2025 and the associated Discussion Paper issued on 6 May 2025. We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on matters raised in relation to the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHADS Award).

Importance of Preserving ERO Pay Rates for FVPLS Sector Employees

We strongly urge the Commission to ensure that the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) pay rates currently applying to Schedule B of the Award are preserved in any revised classification structure. FVPLS roles, particularly those performed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, have historically been undervalued and underpaid due to systemic gender and race-based discrimination. Any regression in pay as a result of structural adjustments would not only be unjust but would also risk breaching principles of equity, cultural safety, and Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3 (transforming government organisations).



We note the Commission’s principle that “no employee should have their pay reduced by the translation from the current classification structure to the new structure”. However, the proposed revocation of the ERO in tandem with translation methodologies based solely on descriptors or wage alignment poses a significant risk that some staff will be paid less in real terms, particularly where responsibilities are poorly matched to generic descriptors.

Workforce Challenges in the FVPLS Sector

The 2023 NAJP review highlighted the following workforce challenges faced by the FVPLS sector:

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced staff, particularly in regional and remote areas;
- Insufficient pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to progress into leadership roles due to limited recognition of lived experience and cultural authority within classification systems;
- Burnout and vicarious trauma, exacerbated by under-resourcing, limited support, and insecure funding;
- Wage disparities compared to mainstream legal and social service sectors, which hinder recruitment of qualified staff and create turnover risks;
- Lack of targeted investment in workforce development, especially for culturally competent and trauma-informed practice.

The provisional classification structure, if implemented without safeguarding ERO rates and recognising the unique workforce dynamics of the FVPLS sector, risks worsening these existing structural issues. A reduction in rates at any classification level, particularly at the senior practitioner or coordinator level, would intensify existing retention challenges and disincentivise long-term career



pathways within the sector. High staff turnover also erodes client trust and leads to service discontinuity, which is particularly harmful in the context of trauma-informed care.

Concerns Regarding Funding Responses

Funding for FVPLSs is already insufficient, fragmented across programs, and frequently misaligned with real costs of service delivery. A reduction in Award rates, even if unintended, may be interpreted by funding bodies as a signal to decrease or freeze baseline funding allocations. This would directly undermine service delivery, limit workforce development, and hinder the sector's capacity to meet community needs.

Support for a Delayed Implementation and Nuanced Classification Review

FNAAFV supports a delay in implementing the provisional structure for Schedules B and C to allow time to:

- Partner with FVPLSs to ensure the structure for Schedules B and C genuinely reflects the diversity of roles, including cultural work, advocacy, and community-led healing initiatives;
- Ensure that lived experience, cultural authority, and community standing are recognised and rewarded alongside formal qualifications;
- Build in career pathways that reflect the aspirations and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in legal and support roles;
- Protect ERO-derived pay rates as the foundation for any future progression model.

We are concerned that the current provisional structure risks flattening the complexity of roles within FVPLSs into standardised descriptors that do not reflect the depth of work performed, particularly



by cultural advisors, senior caseworkers, and leaders with lived experience but without formal tertiary credentials.

End notes

For any further information, please contact FNAAFV at info@fnaafv.org.au.