

Identified Positions in Queensland: A Discussion on Purpose, Practice, and Possibilities

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Abstract: This discussion paper critically examines the concept and practice of identified positions in Queensland, specifically those targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Drawing on Indigenous standpoint theory and early-stage qualitative research, it interrogates the legislative, cultural, and organisational interpretations of these roles. The paper argues that, while identified positions are intended to address inequities and recognise cultural expertise, their inconsistent application and ambiguous purpose can contribute to confusion and tokenism. Through personal reflection, legislative analysis, and emerging insights from yarning sessions, this paper invites dialogue on how identified roles can be reimagined to foster genuine inclusion and structural change. It contributes to ongoing conversations about Indigenous employment, equity, and the responsibilities of organisations in creating culturally safe workplaces.

Key words: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, employment, Indigenous employment, identified positions, affirmative action measures, legislation, tokenism.

Terminology Statement

Indigenous: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Identified: A term used in recruitment to identify that the position is targeted only to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Professional position: Any employment held by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Overview

Before I begin, as part of my culture, I will introduce myself, tell you a little about who I am and where my family is from. I reflect on my Aboriginal practice to introduce myself and my community, and the importance of these protocols in the research context.

I am a proud Koori woman, from the Wiradjuri Nation, through my mother and grandparents, and Middle-Eastern, on my father's side. We are Burns (maternal grandfather) and Moran (maternal grandmother). I was born in Muloobinba (Newcastle, New South Wales), however I moved to Queensland and was raised in Winnam (Wynnum), on Quandamooka Country (Moreton Bay).

This paper briefly explores the question, What are identified positions in Queensland and why do we have them? This paper draws on my current research as a PhD student who is undertaking a critical review of identified positions through the voices and experiences of Indigenous Peoples working in professional positions, while this research has not been completed, some interesting themes are emerging. It is important to acknowledge and recognise that the use of this term "identified position" will be within the parameters of Queensland only, as this research does not touch on the other states and the term has a different meaning at a federal level.

One of the key themes that has emerged from this research is the understanding of what identified position are, and related questions such as, Why do we have identified positions?, Are they for closing the gap to address inequities?, Are they for cultural expertise and knowledge?, Are they simply a box-ticking exercise designed to meet hiring metrics.

Some would say yes to those questions; others would say that they are designed to meet inequities; and others do not know they even exist.

Conceptual Framing

Identified positions are often situated within the broader frameworks of affirmative action, human resource management and Indigenous employment policy. The Queensland Human Rights Commission (2020) links these roles to section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) (Queensland Government, n.d.), which allows for a genuine occupational requirement based on attributes such as race. However, the term “identified” is not explicitly defined in legislation and has evolved through practice. This paper draws on Indigenous standpoint theory (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Rigney, 1999) to frame the discussion acknowledging multiple worldviews and the importance of cultural knowledge.

Locating Identified Positions in the Literature

Identified positions sit at the intersection of human resource management (HRM), industrial relations, and affirmative action policy. Within HRM, they are often framed as diversity initiatives aimed at increasing Indigenous representation, yet their implementation frequently lacks the structural support necessary for meaningful inclusion (Bargallie, 2020; Steel, 2017). From an industrial relations perspective, these roles are enabled by legislative provisions such as section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld), which permits genuine occupational requirements based on race. However, the absence of a clear legal definition of “identified” has led to varied interpretations across sectors. Affirmative action literature further complicates this picture, highlighting tensions between equity drive intentions and the risk of reinforcing marginalisation when roles are poorly understood or inadequately supported (Henry & Leroy-Dyer, 2024; Lahn, 2018). The paper builds on these bodies of work by foregrounding Indigenous voices and exploring how identified positions are experienced in practice.

Current Understanding within the Queensland Context

Simply put, according to the Queensland Human Rights Commission (2020), an identified position, being in accordance with the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) section 25, is generally understood to mean a position to be filled only by a person that holds that attribute, such as race.

Employers in Queensland, Australia, commonly use the term “identified position” when advertising a position such as program officer (identified) with a reference within the job advertisement to section 25 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld); this is also referred to as an “affirmed position” but not usually advertised as that. The term “identified” is generally used to signify that the role is for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person. Interestingly, the term “identified position” is not explicitly referred to within the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) but is defined as a genuine occupational requirement for a position to be filled only by a person with that particular skill set, such as race (Queensland Government, n.d.). This terminology has been picked up by the private sector following policies developed by the Queensland Government using this terminology. To date, there is little evidence identifying the origin of the term “identified”; however, the concept of identified positions emerged in response to the findings of the Miller Report, officially known as the *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (Miller, 1985).

Research Approach

This paper draws on a research topic around the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional positions and also draws on the same research design: literature, both grey and academic, and Indigenous knowledges as a framework, specifically Indigenous standpoint. Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Rigney (1999) both articulate that there is more than just one interpretation and worldview. Additionally, I draw on my cultural practices such as how I conduct myself as a Wiradjuri woman. Yindymarra is the practice of Wiradjuri philosophy; it is our way of being, knowing, and doing. It is shared respect, being polite and gentle, and doing things slowly. It is shared knowledge and engaging in windangadurinya (deep listening) (Grant & Rudder, 2005; Lyons, 2022; Morris et al., 2022).

The method used is research topic yarning sessions. Drawing on Bessarab and Ng’andu’s seminal work, it is important to acknowledge there are different types or styles of yarns, such as social, collaborative, therapeutic, and research topic yarns (2010, pp. 40–41). Bessarab and Ng’andu articulate that research yarning enables both the participant and researcher to journey together on the topic of interest that is relevant to the research (2010, p. 38).

This research draws on data collected for my PhD thesis, being the experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional employment. This data is still in the early stages of analysis, and the insights provided here come from the themes that have emerged during this early analysis.

Emerging Insights

In the initial stages of data collection, some themes have emerged from the PhD research, such as the different understandings as to what an identified position is. However, this paper seeks to discuss identified positions in Queensland their purpose, practice, and possibilities. To answer the research question from a legislative level, the term has been coined in reference to *the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld) section 25 definition as a genuine occupational requirement for a position to be filled only by a person with that particular skill set, such as race. As stated by research participant 2: “An identified role means that the job can only be done by someone who is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.”

It is also important to note that the federal government in Australia uses the same term “identified” for very different purposes in accordance with their policies. For example, an identified position could refer to the job role and state, “We welcome candidates who bring strong cultural knowledge and the ability to engage respectfully and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”. These roles value inclusive communication and collaboration, and are open to all applicants committed to fostering positive relationships and understanding. Conversely, the term “affirmative measure”, used in accordance with the special measures under subsection 8(1) of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) (Australian Government, n.d.), is the term used within the federal government to fill vacancies that can only be occupied by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

While the term “identified position” is used at both state and federal levels with varying interpretations, this diversity offers an opportunity to clarify and strengthen understanding of its purpose and value. Some organisations describe identified positions as a way to foster inclusion and cultural richness, while many Indigenous Peoples view these roles as opportunities to contribute unique knowledges and perspectives that strengthen organisational capability and community connections (Steel, 2017). At this early stage of data collection, the integration of literature with yarning sessions has revealed valuable insights into how participants aspire to feel valued and make meaningful contributions; for example, “Yeah, it is that box ticking that I think can be dangerous. I think it can be a real risk, and it has been a real risk to community” (participant 15). Further insights were revealed when Lahn (2018) interviewed a total of 34 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander current and former Australian Public Services (APS) employees. This research explored factors influencing Indigenous employee retention within the APS. Findings highlight that participants possess valuable expertise on Indigenous matters, yet this knowledge is often underutilised—revealing an opportunity to better leverage these strengths and create roles that genuinely reflect their contributions, rather than simply meeting targets (Lahn, 2018).

Drawing on the discussion of the purpose, practice, and possibilities of identified positions, one could argue that the legislation is clear; it is race related, requiring knowledge and experiences, and the positions are to provide meaningful contributions at a cultural level, while also closing the gap and addressing inequities. However, unfortunately, the legislation is grey and interpretive, meaning that, at times, it is used for meeting targets. So, I ask the question, If you are considering having an identified position, what is the position and why do you want it in your organisation?

Contribution and Limitations

The scope of this thesis is currently limited to Queensland; however, there is significant potential for future research to extend across other Australian states and territories. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine the concept of identified positions and interrogate the diverse interpretations of their existence. This discussion builds upon existing research that provides a platform for Indigenous professionals to articulate their experiences and perspectives within professional roles (Eva et al., 2025). Emerging themes from this research highlight the necessity of engaging with and clarifying the meaning of identified positions. Future inquiry should therefore consider how the literature aligns—or diverges—from the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples in professional contexts, particularly in relation to addressing interpretative inconsistencies and the tension between meeting employment targets and ensuring meaningful cultural knowledge contributions (Eva et al., 2024; OECD, 2019). This balance is delicate; care must be taken to avoid imposing additional burdens that result in unnecessary cultural load¹. Bargallie (2020) underscores the

¹ Cultural load is the invisible, often unacknowledged, extra workload placed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees in Australia to act as cultural educators, representatives, and support for their non-Indigenous colleagues and the wider organisation.

persistent challenge of Indigenous employees being expected to continually educate others about cultural differences. Without formal recognition of this labour, such expectations risk perpetuating cultural load through the ongoing requirement to inform and guide non-Indigenous staff (Sivertsen et al., 2023).

Future Research Possibilities

This discussion paper highlights the need for further empirical research into the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples in identified positions across different jurisdictions. Comparative studies between Queensland and other states and territories could illuminate how legislation and policy differences shape workplace realities.

Policy and Practice Implications

Policymakers and human resources practitioners are encouraged to critically reflect on the intent and implementation of identified positions: Are these roles genuinely fostering inclusion or are they inadvertently reinforcing tokenism? I pose there is an opportunity to co-design policies in collaboration with Indigenous communities to clarify the purpose of identified roles, embed cultural accountability, and ensure that these positions are supported by appropriate structures and recognitions. Dialogue between government, industry, and Indigenous professionals is essential to move beyond compliance and towards transformative practice.

Conclusion

This discussion paper has explored the contested and often misunderstood concept of identified positions within the Queensland, Australia, context, drawing on legislative frameworks, cultural perspectives, and emerging insights from Indigenous professionals. It has highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the term, the divergence between state and federal interpretations, and the lived realities of those navigating these roles.

Identified positions, while intended to address systemic inequities and recognise cultural expertise, risk becoming mechanisms of tokenism when their purpose is unclear or when structural supports are lacking. The voices of Indigenous professionals reveal that these roles can carry a significant cultural load, particularly when organisations fail to embed genuine inclusion or recognise the value of Indigenous knowledges.

As the research continues, it is critical that organisations and policymakers engage in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous communities to co-design roles that are culturally safe, structurally supported, and aligned with community aspirations. This includes clarifying the intent behind identified positions, ensuring alignment with legislative frameworks, and embedding accountability mechanisms that go beyond compliance.

The purpose of this paper has been to draw focus on the terminology of identified positions and gain a deeper understanding of its meaning at both a legislative and personal level. Through education, understanding, and action, there can be no confusion as to what an identified position is and why it is being advertised. We all have a part to play.

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About the author

Emma is a Koori, Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri Nation in New South Wales through her mother and grandparents, and Middle-Eastern, Jewish Australian on her Father's side. While Emma was born in Muloobinba (Newcastle, New South Wales), she moved and grew up in Winnam (Wynnum), on Quandamooka Country (Moreton Bay). Emma has a professional background in leadership, executive management, management, organisational change and Indigenous Engagement. Emma's research, informed by Indigenous methodologies, is on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Employment, reviewing State Government strategies, programs, policies and legislation focused on the targeted recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Please cite this article as:

Olssen, E. (2026). Identified positions in Queensland: A discussion on purpose, practice, and possibilities. *International Journal of Indigenous Business*, 1, pp. 116-120. DOI: 10.64222/IJRCX4635



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