

**Submission
No 21**

FOOD PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY IN NSW

Organisation: New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council

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Committee on Environment and Planning
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street, SYDNEY NSW 2000
Via email: environmentplanning@parliament.nsw.gov.au



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Aboriginal Land Council**
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Inquiry into food production and supply in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (**NSWALC**) and the network of 120 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (**LALCs**) represent over 23,000 Aboriginal people in NSW. We are the democratically elected voice of Aboriginal peoples in NSW.

We note the Legislative Assembly's Committee on Environment and Planning will look at the issue of food production and supply, examining how food security and equitable access to food can be improved in NSW, and how we can promote more productive and sustainable methods of producing and transporting food. NSWALC acknowledges that this inquiry has had its deadline for submissions extended due to the ongoing impact of the COVID pandemic on the food supply sector, which has particularly impacted Aboriginal communities in NSW.

Longer-term food security solutions need to be developed that take into account structural inequities. As academic Deanna Davey states:

“Improving food security among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia also requires addressing inequities in social status; focusing on issues related to employment, income, welfare, and education; improving access to adequate housing; and improving public transportation in remote communities.”¹

There is strong evidence that locally based solutions, where communities have identified their needs and designed a response, are more successful than top-down, government-controlled approaches.² As such, Aboriginal peoples and communities should be engaged in meaningful consultation so that any development of food security plans or production of traditional foods will best fulfill outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Below are additional comments. Should you require further information, please contact the NSWALC Strategy and Policy Unit on 02 - 9689 4444 or via e-mail: [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Yuseph Deen
A/Chief Executive Officer
NSW Aboriginal Land Council

25 February 2022

¹ Davy D. (2016). Australia's Efforts to Improve Food Security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. *Health and human rights*, 18(2), 209–218

² Morley, S. R. (2015). *What works in effective Indigenous community-managed programs and organisations*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies



NSW Aboriginal Land Council

Submission to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning Inquiry into food production and supply in NSW

February 2022

Introduction

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (**NSWALC**) is the peak body representing Aboriginal peoples across NSW and with over 23,000 members, is the largest Aboriginal member-based organisation in Australia.

NSWALC is a member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO).

This submission responds to the terms of reference of the inquiry, specifically:

1. Improving food security and equitable access to food.
2. Consideration of workforce challenges and skills development.
3. Consideration of Indigenous food and land management practices

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to highlight and exacerbate pre-existing disadvantage faced by Aboriginal peoples in Australia. In this submission we reiterate the points made by our 2020 Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities.

Food Security

Food security is a fundamental human right, recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and protected by regional treaties and national constitutions.³ However, many Aboriginal peoples in Australia, especially those living in rural and remote areas, do not have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs.⁴

In its simplest terms, food insecurity is: 'not knowing where your next meal is coming from.'⁵ There are three main components to food security:

- **Food availability** – the supply of food within a community, including the location of food outlets, the availability of food within stores, and the price, quality and variety of available food, including consistent availability during seasonal or cyclical events
- **Food access** – the ability of consumers to acquire food, which is safe, nutritious, affordable,

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>

⁴ Good Food Systems: Good Food for All Project. Annual Face to Face Workshop. Menzies School of Health Research. Darwin; 2010.

⁵ New South Wales Parliament Legislative Council (2018) Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance. Fresh food pricing / Portfolio Committee No. 1 – Premier and Finance, Sydney, N.S.W.

⁸ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/lcdocs/inquiries/2487/Final%20report%20-%20Fresh%20food%20pricing.pdf>

competitively priced and culturally acceptable - the expropriation of lands, territories, waterways and resources from Indigenous peoples has meant many pre-colonial diets are no longer possible for Indigenous peoples.

- **Food use** – the appropriate use of food based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care and the availability of health infrastructure, such as sufficient storage and preparation facilities.⁶

There are numerous barriers to reliable access to affordable and healthy food, however two significant barriers for Aboriginal peoples in remote NSW is the availability of stores and the high price of groceries in the few stores that are operating.

The lack of food stores in many remote towns in NSW is a principal barrier to food security for many remote Aboriginal residents, with 25 towns across NSW without any stores at all. The lack of stores in remote towns reduces competition and enables stores to raise prices (or provide inferior products and/or poor service) without a reduction in demand. The additional costs of groceries further compounds disadvantage within these communities.⁷ The cost of food that is available is reported to be 15-20 per cent higher in remote areas in comparison to major cities, having been significantly impacted by distance, lack of competition and the lack of locally sourced perishable produce.⁸ This is particularly detrimental to Aboriginal households, whose typically larger size impacts the amount of food and essential supplies needed by each household. In July 2020, at the Committee Hearing for the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs, NSWALC described the hardships faced by Aboriginal households travelling hours to reach food stores only to find stores out of stock, or with purchasing limits. Limited stock or purchasing limits (COVID related or normal limits such as for baby formula) particularly impact Aboriginal households in regional towns, which may have a larger number of people living in them and may reside hours away from the nearest stores.

COVID-19: In 2021, the impacts of COVID led to the heightened price of oil, with automotive fuel globally reaching record high prices in the September 2021 quarter.⁹ Costs of travel impacted the accessibility and affordability of food throughout NSW, and COVID restrictions and increasing infection rates further impacted supply chains and food insecurity in rural communities. Aboriginal households which already are forced to travel long distances to reach food stores were particularly impacted by the costs of travel as stores ran out of stock. The closure and restrictions surrounding state borders has also meant that some residents have been unable to travel to their nearest supermarket to purchase food. The Delta outbreak in 2021 further heightened these issues, with remote Aboriginal communities like Wilcannia, unable to access food due to isolation.¹⁰ At this time the NSW Government funded the delivery of food and emergency relief boxes, of which 5,596 were delivered by NSWALC across the state.

Despite these efforts, supplies of emergency food relief can only be temporary measures, and do not address the systemic issues underpinning food insecurity in these towns. Longer-term food security solutions need to be developed that take into account structural inequities throughout NSW.

⁶ Ibid and House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, (2009) Everybody's Business: Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stores, Canberra https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Committees_Exposed/atsia/communitystores/report page 95.

⁷ Vinson, T., Rawsthorne, M., Beavis, A., & Ericson, M. (2015). Dropping off the edge 2015. Persistent communal disadvantage in Australia. Jesuit Social Services/Catholic Social Services Australia, page 51

⁸ [nrha-factsheet-povertynov2017.pdf](https://www.nrha-factsheet-povertynov2017.pdf) (ruralhealth.org.au)

⁹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/selected-living-cost-indexes-australia/latest-release>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-58380827>

Locally based solutions to food insecurity:

There is strong evidence that locally based solutions, where communities have identified their needs and designed a response, are more successful than top-down, government-controlled approaches.¹¹ As the Sefa submission to the 2020 inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities points out:

“Successful programs are co-designed with communities, tackle financing as well as access and availability constraints, and are locally led.”¹²

Community ownership is important because it provides a mixture of autonomy and accountability and helps to ensure commitment and buy-in from community members, as well as contributing to community capacity so that communities can address their own needs.¹³

Some remote communities throughout Australia have developed their own community stores, such as the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA), which has been successfully operating for over 40 years and whose range, pricing and operational standards have been reported as the blueprint for the Outback Stores model.¹⁴ A focus on the employment and training of local Aboriginal people and the fact that the majority of net profits go into improving store infrastructure and services has been integral to the success of this model.¹⁵ This type of partnership model presents a potential way forward for remote Aboriginal communities.

In small and remote communities, it may not be economically viable to open a community store, and in these situations, government should, as part of its human rights obligations, provide support in partnership with Aboriginal people.

Additionally, governments can assist Aboriginal people’s food sovereignty and access to traditional foods by returning land to Aboriginal peoples and recognising customary rights. For example, the NSW Government could support Aboriginal people’s cultural fishing by:

- commencing Section 21AA of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*,
- removing restrictions on Aboriginal cultural fishers and cultural fishing activity, including for example regulations relating to size, gear, method and closure,
- placing a moratorium on prosecuting Aboriginal cultural fishers, and
- adequately and appropriately protecting Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in NSW.

Traditional foods

Growth opportunities in Aboriginal-led business ventures such as bushfood operations require the inclusion of legislative and policy reform to recognise, respect and protect legal rights to Country and knowledge. The bush food market is currently valued at \$20 million annually, but it is estimated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up only 1-2% of the market.¹⁶ Symposiums and

¹¹ Morley, S. R. (2015). What works in effective Indigenous community-managed programs and organisations. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies

¹² Sefa Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) submission cited in Hudson, S (2010). Healthy stores, healthy communities: the impact of outback stores on remote Indigenous Australians. St Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ <http://www.firsthandsolutions.org/bushfood-symposium>

consultations held in NSW have explored how to bring traditional foods into a contemporary industry while protecting Aboriginal intellectual property and cultural knowledge. A successful example is the Northern Australia Aboriginal Kakadu Plum Alliance (NAAKPA), which is funded by the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation and has grown to be the largest Traditional Owner-led bush food supply chain in Australia.¹⁷

Sydney University has conducted research investigating the economic, environmental and social features of Aboriginal grain food systems in the NSW Gomeroi region. This research has concluded that specific traditional food production systems have the potential to provide a valuable way of using the environment in a productive and balanced way if Gomeroi people are given the necessary resources (land, equipment, skills and market connections) to participate in the industry as it grows.¹⁸ Government support of these traditional food markets will provide socio-economically sustainable means for Aboriginal peoples to further engage with culture, enhance food security and potentially improve environmental outcomes.

Availability of locally produced food

The lack of locally produced food in remote areas in Australia has been recognised for years but attempts to address this situation have not been particularly successful.¹⁹ Initiatives to establish market gardens often rely on volunteers and may lack technical support.²⁰ The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing used to fund market gardens in remote communities but ceased doing so because 'there was no evidence of long-term systematic change in terms of public health care.'²¹ Assuming that a market garden will improve public health outcomes in the short to immediate term is not reasonable. With long term support and funding there are examples of successful market gardens and locally produced food, such as the Murrawarri Local Aboriginal Land Council in NSW which has developed a bush food garden initiative. This is a positive example of how locally-led solutions can be supported to build local community food resilience.²²

Workforce challenges and skills development

In considering options for addressing food security the government needs to consider the interrelatedness of key human rights issues across multiple sectors, including health, housing, transportation, education, employment and training, as well as food. Engaging with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations such as Yarpa Indigenous Business and Employment Hub and Yilabara Solutions Employment and Training when beginning projects has shown to improve workforce retainment and skills development of Aboriginal employees through culturally supportive methods. Any new projects seeking to improve food security in these regions should seek to build cross-sector collaborations and genuine and meaningful partnerships between Aboriginal peoples and governments.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ University of Sydney (2020), Native grains from paddock to plate : Study of the economic, environmental and social sustainability of an ancient system in a modern context

¹⁹ Hudson, S (2010). Healthy stores, healthy communities: the impact of outback stores on remote Indigenous Australians. St Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies.

²⁰ Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture Ltd, Submission 15 cited in Hudson, S (2010). Healthy stores, healthy communities: the impact of outback stores on remote Indigenous Australians. St Leonards: Centre for Independent Studies

²¹ Lesley Podesta, First Assistant Secretary, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, Department of Health and Ageing, Committee HANSARD (Canberra: 28 May 2009), 22

²² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-15/native-bush-food-helping-remote-nsw-community-thrive/9870698>

Conclusion

In June of 2020, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs led an inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities. Submissions made at this time remain relevant and greater depth into current issues and solutions to food security in remote Aboriginal communities in NSW is given in our previous submission. As mentioned above, NSWALC also presented at a Committee Hearing at the Inquiry, and greater detail and examples are given in the transcript. While the terms of reference of the two inquiries are different, many of the issues identified in the 2020 report are relevant to this inquiry. In developing the recommendations for this inquiry, the Committee should review what (if any) recommendations from the 2020 inquiry have been implemented, and if not, why this might be the case.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. We would be happy to provide further information to the Committee. Please contact NSWALC on 02 9689 4444 or [REDACTED].