

Submission
No 36

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
IN CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: NSW Aboriginal Land Council

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1 September 2011

The Director
Standing Committee on State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Inquiry into economic and social development in central western NSW

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is the state's peak Aboriginal representative organisation, representing the interests of the 119 Local Aboriginal Land Councils and their 20,000 members across the state. The NSW Aboriginal Land Council has a function under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* to provide advice on matters relating to Aboriginal land rights, and provides the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development with the following information, advice and recommendations for the *Inquiry into economic and social development in central western NSW*.

In announcing this inquiry, the Committee Chairperson commented that "population decline in many small country towns has been a long standing problem", and that "in remote and rural communities many young people have to leave for education, training or employment opportunities and unfortunately they don't come back"ⁱ.

The Committee must however understand that these statements are not necessarily true for Aboriginal communities in regional NSW. These communities tend to see a population return from metropolitan areas in later years, following the youthful out-migration experienced. As a result the Aboriginal population of these regions is increasing and increasing relative to that of the non-Aboriginal population. This is a demographic trend that is expected to continue along with the differential migration patterns that underpin itⁱⁱ.

However, the increasingly significant Aboriginal population continues to be overlooked when it comes to the consideration of the economic and social development of regional NSW. This must change.

Harnessing the relatively untapped economic and social potential of the Aboriginal communities of regional NSW however, continues to be hampered by the poor educational and health outcomes experienced Aboriginal peoples. This too must change; particularly in regional NSW where it is expected that there will be increasing competition for increasingly strained services.

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The Committee must also appreciate that the Local Aboriginal Land Councils of central western NSW have been established under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* to improve, protect and foster the best interests of the Aboriginal peoples of the communities they represent. They play a central role in these communities, and with a function to facilitate business enterprises are uniquely positioned to provide community based economic development across that region.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils already play a key role in many communities in terms of providing employment and facilitating business enterprises. This is particularly true in regional NSW, including the central west. In addition, Local Aboriginal Land Councils are holders of significant freehold land and other assets that may be further utilised for this purpose.

Amendments to the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* have more recently instituted governance structures in Local Aboriginal Land Councils that are akin to those of corporate Australia; allowing for the responsive and transparent decision making required for business enterprises. The same amendments also require Local Aboriginal Land Councils to develop Community Land and Business Plans to strategically maximise the use of their assets. These business plans include objectives and strategies for the carrying out of business enterprise and the investment of assets.

The Committee must recognise that with these structures in place to provide good governance and strategic planning, the Local Aboriginal Land Councils of central western NSW are positioned to deliver further economic and social outcomes to their communities and by extension the broader communities of that region. However, additional government resourcing is required to fully realise this potential too.

The Committee's report must address the social and economic potential of the Aboriginal land Councils of central western NSW and that of the communities they represent, and must recommend that the Government initiate and fund initiatives to harness that potential for the benefit of those communities and that of the broader community of that region.

Regards

Geoff Scott
Chief Executive Officer

¹ NSW Parliament Legislative Council Standing Committee on State Development; Media Release 8 July 2011.

² Aboriginal Affairs; *Two Ways Together: Report on Indicators 2009*, at p25

