

**Submission
No 75**

**INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS
DISADVANTAGE**

Name: Ms Hayley Smith

Standing Committee on Social Issues
The N.S.W Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

Date: 30th April 2008

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into closing the gap- Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage

Attached is a submission addressing policy and program issues raised within closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. It has been written on behalf of the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Cooperative LTD.

This submission attempts to answer some of the terms of reference relating to solutions to some inadequate policy and program measures and acknowledges some adequate measures being implemented in New South Wales, particularly parts of programs such as CDEP, some Indigenous housing programs and policies and an alcohol abuse program being implemented in N.S.W.

Yours Sincerely,

Hayley Smith

**Assessing the effectiveness of relevant policies
and programs being implemented in N.S.W aimed
at closing the life expectancy gap between
Indigenous and non-Indigenous people**

**Closing the Gap – Overcoming Indigenous
Disadvantage**

30th April 2008

By Hayley Smith

**On behalf of Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal
Cooperative**

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1.1 Recommendations

1. That the Australian Government work in close partnership with Indigenous Communities and leaders in the decisions to be made about their respective life time expectancy gap.
2. That the Australian Government acknowledge the exact remote communities that are in great need at present and be provided new houses with a room allocated to each individual in the house, completely fitted with relevant safety measures and clean running water.
3. That the Australian Government research thoroughly, the importance of a *culturally sensitive* approach to working with Indigenous communities *at all times, particularly to do with recognising alcohol abuse contributing factors*.
4. That the Australian Government formulate an Indigenous Government which is represented in parliament along with other political parties in order to properly represent the needs of their people.

1.2 Executive Summary

In the time since colonisation, Indigenous people have endured relentless trials and anxieties concerning contributing factors to their life expectancy rate despite the intervention from government since the 1700's.

The target for the current Federal/ State and Territory Governments is to extend all possible measures to innovate and find new ways of governing, by including Indigenous people in their own governance and cultural management to a very large extent through education of ministers of parliament about the culture, by relevant leaders, and to begin to match other countries such as New Zealand and North America in the successful policy processes and programs for their Indigenous people.

The issues which have taken hold of a nation in its concern about closing the 17 year gap (sometimes more in some communities like Brewurrina, N.S.W, some die at age 40), need to be addressed in not only a whole-of-government way but also in a whole-of-Indigenous government way, a working partnership that isn't just spoken about.

The importance of review and report of implemented policies and programs aimed at closing the gap by Indigenous Land Council representatives or the AH&MRC (for example) is vital if the current government is to feel the 'pulse' of Indigenous values and to respect their human rights, in turn, facilitating health outcomes.

1.3 Introduction

'At 30 June 2006, the Indigenous estimated resident population of Australia was 517,200 or 2.5% of the total population. This Indigenous population estimate was 14% higher than the 2006 unadjusted Census count' (455,028)' (ABS, 2006).

The Commonwealth of Australia had and to some extent (has) an ideology of 'assimilation' of Indigenous people, this has been the approach since the 1700's in and through various government's. The 'rise of rationing' , according to Research fellow Tim Rowse of the Department of Administration and Government at the University of Sydney,happened for a series of reasons...

"Colonists rationed for a diversity of reasons, with a variety of expectations about the mentality and behaviour of recipients. The practice of 'assimilation' in Central Australia incorporated preserving certain features of the rationing regimes which, by the Second World

War, had evolved on missions, pastoral properties and government ration depots. The assimilation intention- to *induce* Indigenous people to adopt the same way of life as the colonists-required some reworking [sic] and eventually phased out, as cash was substituted for rationed goods. The recipients were conceived as becoming entitled to cash to the extent that they cast off their traditional and acquired behaviours and beliefs – to adopt ‘better’ ways”(Rowse, 1998 p3).

Although this example illustrates government activity and policy way back in the days of settlement and the 1970s, not a lot has changed in terms of the ideology of ‘rationing’, there seems to be a distrust on the part of the Australian government and police to hand over Indigenous affairs almost wholly, to the Indigenous people, all the while, assisting them in the process of governing their own people and culture with the input of government; instead of the opposite.

1.4 New South Wales assessment of employment policies and programs

'The Aboriginal Community Programs (ACP) unit of the NSW Department of Education and Training administers a range of funding programs which assist Aboriginal people gain employment and establish small business.

The unit provides advice to the Minister for Education and Training and other NSW Government agencies on issues relating to Aboriginal employment, education and training, and economic development.

The Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program

The Program works through five separate elements:

- **Permanent Employment Element**

Aims to get Aboriginal people into permanent careers in the public service and local government. It does this by offering a one-year 65% salary subsidy for each Aboriginal person employed under the Program. Extra funds are available to encourage the employment of Aboriginal people with disabilities.

- **Temporary Placement Element**

Aims to improve career development for Aboriginal employees in the

public service and local government. It does this by offering subsidies for special temporary positions for Aboriginal employees.

- **Career Development Element**

Offers funds to make it easier for public service departments and local councils to give Aboriginal employees training or other career development experiences such as attendance at conferences.

- **Partnership Project Element**

Funds special projects to create jobs for Aboriginal people. Any incorporated organisation is eligible to apply for funds under this element, subject to the conditions in the Guidelines.

- **Graduate Work Experience Element**

Encourages employers to give new Aboriginal graduates a start in the workforce by subsidising a work experience placement (maximum 12 weeks) in the person's field of training. Any employer is eligible to apply, subject to the conditions in the Guidelines' (DET, 2008).

This notion of subsidy of Indigenous workers by the government can have the effect of taking away the independence and dignity of personal achievement in obtaining employment by one's own efforts and not the government's. Cultural change in Australia is needed amongst non-indigenous business owners not just incentive and subsidy so that they will hire Indigenous people.

The reason why many of these programs aimed at improving indigenous employment will not and do not work effectively is because the root of the issue of employment was brought about *by* colonisation. The Indigenous people of Australia have already and will continue to find it very difficult to 'assimilate' to employment training programs in western thought and action, beliefs and values. The facts show this.

The root cause of their plight is not concentrated on one thing; it is a multitude of pains, anxieties, dispossession, a raped spirituality and way of life, which continues because of misunderstandings about their needs by government.

A media release was issued by Hon Kevin Andrews MP on 1 July 2006 praising the CDEP programme (Red watch, 2007).

On 6th November 2006 he announced that CDEP in urban areas would be would be ended.

"Kevin Andrews, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, today announced that there would be 212 organisations providing the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) programme for 2006-07.

"264 applications for CDEP funding were received and of these, 212 organisations have been offered funding following a competitive process that focussed on their capacity to provide services that lead to increasing Indigenous economic independence," said Minister Andrews" (Red watch, 2007).

The CDEP Scheme was reviewed by the centre for Aboriginal economic policy research headed by Will Sanders where he said...

“The CDEP scheme was transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on July 1, 2004 and so a new era for CDEP is now just beginning. I will boldly predict that CDEP will not sit as comfortably and centrally in the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) as it did in ATSIC. This is partly, and inevitably, because DEWR is a much larger organization with general as well as Indigenous specific policy concerns. But it is also because DEWR has a strong employment and labour market focus and could lose patience and interest in the community development and income support aspects of CDEP” (Sanders, 1985). This creates a problem, there is not enough cultural sensitivity and autonomy granted to Indigenous people to make their own decisions about the future.

“First light here is the cue to turn loose the community goats, locked up overnight to protect them from dingoes.

The goats are not yet a money-making business, but herding them is a paid job under the Federal Government's Community Development Employment Program (CDEP)” (McLaughlin, 2007).

In contrast to this idea but also in complete agreement, CDEP has little in the way of gaining the skills needed to gain permanent and adequate employment. This measure perpetuates the cycle of dependency and ‘rationing’ and ‘assimilation’. It keeps Indigenous communities mind’s

occupied for a time but doesn't help them to change their lifestyle dramatically and to increase their socio-economic and health status from disadvantaged to prosperous like much of Australia, because the approach is western in thought.

Some important considerations have been made through the OIPC Evaluation Plan for 2006-09 and show the issue of improvement in the policy and program process in the area of Indigenous Affairs.

"The changes made from 1 July 2004 to the Australian Government's administration of Indigenous affairs idealised a significant shift from previous arrangements. It was clear that the previous arrangements were not working well. New governance and advisory structures were created, together with an increased emphasis on working in a whole-of-government manner and on improving accountability. Greater importance was also placed on governments and Indigenous people working in partnership and sharing responsibility to achieve better outcomes. Sustained progress requires change in the behaviour and mindsets within both government agencies and Indigenous communities. Such changes take considerable time to come to fruition and have their full impact" (FaHCSIA, 2008).

A report of review and evaluations of the major post-1985 labour market assistance measures for Indigenous Australians, with a view to helping shape future policy in addressing Indigenous disadvantage showed the following:

In terms of achieving short-term employment outcomes, Australia's major Indigenous-specific programs appear to have been highly successful. A mix of on-the-job work experience, achieved through wage subsidies or brokered placements, combined with other appropriate support, such as mentoring, offers a successful approach. Involvement of Indigenous people in the provision of assistance can also improve program effectiveness.

However, despite considerable public investment in labour market programs and other forms of assistance for economic development, Indigenous Australians remain significantly worse off on all major measures of economic and social wellbeing, relative to non-Indigenous Australians.

From the 1980s, government policy towards Indigenous economic development, as embodied in the Community Development Employment Projects scheme and the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, stressed the importance of self-determination and cultural preservation in promoting Indigenous wellbeing.

Indigenous employment policies and programs are products of specific political philosophies, and policy and program objectives are shaped by those philosophies. At evaluation stage, objectives such as self-determination and choice have been ignored or have been replaced

by more easily quantifiable objectives, such as increased numbers of Indigenous people in mainstream jobs. *Policy-makers need to pay greater attention to how programs are evaluated.*

The primary objectives of the main labour market programs now accessed by Indigenous Australians, encompassing the Indigenous Employment Policy and the Job Network, are the achievement of mainstream employment outcomes and for many Indigenous Australians this is consistent with their own aspirations. Our view is that it is also likely to result in a more rapid pace of social and cultural assimilation” (Dockery & Milsom, 2007).

Research was conducted in 2005-2006 as a part of the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation program, managed by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training on behalf of the Australian Government.

A major review of Indigenous employment and training programs delivered in 1985 (the Miller Report) challenged the assumption underlying early programs—that integration with the mainstream or market economy was the best strategy for Indigenous people. Programs that followed contained an uneasy mismatch between the *objective of respecting Indigenous choice and self-determination on the one hand, and pursuing equality as measured by mainstream indicators of labour*

market achievement on the other. The most enduring program embodying the concept of Self-determination is the Community Development Employment Projects scheme, first established in 1977. The second major Indigenous-specific program has been the Training for Aboriginals Program. A range of other programs have been implemented under the 'umbrella' policies of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy and the Indigenous Employment Policy' (Dockery & Milsom, 2007).

It is hard to see how wonderful CDEP has been in securing self-determination when workers are only receiving their basic welfare and not enough capital to move forward into the business community and fund their own towns, shops and workers because it is all run by non-indigenous people.

1.5 New South Wales Housing Programs assessed

The National indigenous Housing Guide is a main resource for government in implementing housing programs. It comprehensively outlines the issues of poor housing and its relationship to disease and poor environmental health. The missing part in this situation is that the right information is being provided to governments but not the right resources and not enough of them are going to enough communities, despite the extensive publications of many pages promising change and a new direction, the action is what is lacking.

In the ten year statement of new directions for Indigenous housing, *Building a better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010*. Ministers agreed that considerable progress has been made since they last met on Indigenous housing issues in 1997, but acknowledged that further effort is required. This was reinforced by a visit to the Ntaria community, where there is a need for more houses and repairs, and upgrades to existing houses (AHO, 2008).

A program being implemented in N.S.W currently is the *Housing for Health program*, a part of the Aboriginal Communities Development Program, it is an assessment and maintenance program to improve the safety and condition of houses and make them healthier environments to live. It is being delivered in partnership with the Department of Health.

The concern here is that only 24 communities have been able to access this program since its inception in 1997 (DAA, 2008).

“Housing in remote Indigenous communities is in a state of crisis.

Overcrowding has reached third world levels, the cost of building new houses is skyrocketing, asset life spans are short, and organisational capacity within Indigenous Community Housing Organisations is weak, leading to poor maintenance, poor tenancy management and severely misdirected incentive structures for community residents. This state of affairs directly contributes to poor educational and health outcomes and the ongoing loss of social cohesion in many remote communities across the nation.

The importance of finding the right solutions is magnified by the fact that implementing them will take at least a decade, and it may take even longer for the changes to result in improved social well being. And of course, any policy mistakes will condemn remote community residents to many years of continued disadvantage and poverty, hinder the implementation of effective programs across other areas of interest to governments, and ultimately impact on Australia’s national reputation.

Dillon explains how reliance on Indigenous Community Housing Organisations to deliver extensive proportions of the program, and to own and manage the resulting assets has been *a huge cause of inadequate service delivery to remote communities*. He agrees with the review’s recommendation of transfer of existing community housing to

public housing agencies where possible and that all new housing funded by the Australian government be vested in those agencies (Dillon, 2007).

1.6 Assessment of Alcohol/Drug abuse policies and programs in New South Wales

In 2003, The NSW Government hosted the NSW summit on Alcohol Abuse. Prior to the summit, a one day forum called *Talking about Grog* was held to give aboriginal people an opportunity to discuss certain issues relating to aboriginal people and alcohol and to identify strategies which were taken to the Summit.

The final Summit communiqué identified several strategies to meet the needs of Aboriginal communities including:

- supporting Aboriginal communities in reclaiming kinship and culture to unify communities and families
- engaging Aboriginal community leaders to convey a range of messages on alcohol use, other options and interventions to their communities
- supporting locally based and determined approaches
- Allocating resources for peer support programs for Aboriginal communities (AH&MRC, 2008).

Government may find program implementation simpler if they were to collaborate properly and extensively with Indigenous cultural leaders

building the long spoken about trust that doesn't seem to surface even now.

“Increasing *Indigenous leadership of research* is critical to maximising the health gains from Indigenous health research. However, there remain significant challenges to achieving this, given the recognised shortage of trained Indigenous researchers. Addressing this issue will require long-term strategies to improve Indigenous educational attainment. In the meantime, there is a need to ensure that research continues to be undertaken to meet the immediate priorities of Indigenous people. This will require further development of the existing, largely non-Indigenous research workforce in Indigenous health, to ensure research practices are acceptable and responsive to community needs” (Baylie, Hiller & Rumbold, 2008 p12).

1.7 Conclusion

Ultimately, the solutions to inadequate policy and program measures is through the integration of indigenous cultural leadership on a full-time basis, the Indigenous population need to feel included in Australian society on *every front* for them to 'assimilate' to western ways of economic development and to match the rest of Australia, North and South America, Canada and New Zealand in the rehabilitation of dispossession.

Words- 2720

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