

## **INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE**

**Organisation:** Hornsby Area Residents for Reconciliation

**Name:** Mr Robert White

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P O Box 41  
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The Director  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Legislative Council of NSW  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Ms Pymm

Please find attached a submission from Hornsby Area Residents for Reconciliation (HARR) to the Committee's inquiry into overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

HARR understands the closing date for submissions to the inquiry has been extended until 30 April 2008.

Yours sincerely

Bob White

for HARR

**HORNSBY AREA RESIDENTS FOR RECONCILIATION**  
**SUBMISSION TO THE NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES**  
**INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE**

**Summary**

Hornsby Area Residents for Reconciliation believes policies and programs to close the gap between life expectancy of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people [see term of reference 1(a)] will be more likely to succeed if they are based on strengthened cultural resilience, cultural identity, economic development and self determination in Aboriginal communities [see term of reference 1 (e)].

Our submission argues that the NSW Government should:

- Give Aboriginal communities and services the greatest possible opportunities for self determination and management
- Commit to sustained, consistent and evidence based funding of services for Aboriginal people which meet needs identified by the communities they serve
- In particular, provide adequate, focused and ongoing funding to implement the recommendations of the Breaking the Silence report and thus set in train an effective response to child sexual assault in NSW Aboriginal communities
- Set measurable goals for implementation in this state of the commitments made at the COAG meeting of December 2007
- Adopt and publish a costed and measurable action plan for achieving the goals
- Guarantee that the necessary, real and additional funds are provided to meet the goals.

**Introduction**

Hornsby Area Residents for Reconciliation (HARR) is part of the People's Movement for Reconciliation and is affiliated with the NSW Reconciliation Council and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation NSW (ANTaR NSW). Our objects include advocacy for social justice for Indigenous residents.

HARR therefore has a fundamental interest in the Inquiry by the Social Issues Committee of the NSW Legislative Council into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage.

We welcome the interest of the Committee in identifying strategies to address the lifetime expectancy gap between Aboriginal and non – Aboriginal residents of

NSW and is pleased to have the opportunity to address, in particular, the Inquiry's Terms of Reference 1(a) and 1(e).

### **Time to make a serious effort**

At the 20 December 2007 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting all Australian governments adopted a resolution to work towards closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non – indigenous Australians within a generation and setting measurable goals for achievement within a decade, including action to address social determinants of health such as housing, education and self – determination.

The governments are to be congratulated on this resolution. HARR looks to the NSW Government to ensure that goals are set and progress is measured for implementation of the commitments in NSW. The NSW Government should adopt and publish a costed and measurable action plan for achieving the goals.

The Government should also guarantee that the necessary, real and additional funds are provided to meet the goals. The impetus of the COAG commitment must not be eroded through being starved of funds in the way the implementation of the Breaking the Silence report into child sexual abuse in NSW Aboriginal communities initiatives was.

The Committee will be aware that the Breaking the Silence report investigated the problems of child sexual abuse with a focus on ensuring that government responses to child sexual assault are effective. The report's recommendations were comprehensive. They proposed measures by which access to relevant programs and services could be improved and barriers to their effectiveness removed, for example by a holistic response across government levels and agencies; actively recruiting Aboriginal service providers across the board; and providing appropriate cultural training for staff working with local Aboriginal communities.

The Government's five year interagency plan in response to that report has not been funded through the allocation of additional resources. This cannot be taken as a serious attempt to address the problems of child sexual abuse and disadvantage revealed by the report.

### **Learning from success elsewhere**

HARR is pleased to note that 1 (a) of the Committee's Terms of Reference includes the assessment of policies and programs in other countries, including North America. We also note that under Term of Reference 1 (e) the Inquiry is looking for opportunities to strengthen cultural resilience, economic development and self determination to help address Indigenous disadvantage.

The Committee will be aware through ANTaR and perhaps through other sources and its own research, of the North American evidence identifying the strong association of improved health outcomes among Indigenous Americans with self-determination. A 20 year Harvard study on American Indian Economic Development has revealed that the factors contributing to sustained, self-determined social and economic development among American Indian nations include

- Sovereignty (making their own decisions about development, resource management, health care and social services)
- Culturally based institutions of governance
- Leadership by legitimate and acknowledged and accepted individuals.

The North American evidence suggests that indicators such as youth suicide are lower in communities with higher degrees of control over culture, land and decision making.

We understand that research work by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health has identified a similar link between health outcomes and control over health service provision, community management and land title in central Australia.

HARR believes that Indigenous communities and services should be given the greatest possible opportunities for self determination and management.

### **Programs need to be relevant, sustained and long term**

Models of service provision determined by distant bureaucrats or based on ideologies which do not reflect the priorities of the Aboriginal community often do not meet the needs of the clients and are bound to fail.

HARR has observed that even when education, health and other social programs in Aboriginal communities or for Aboriginal clients are well accepted, they frequently tend to suffer from chronic underfunding and uncertainty. Too many programs are funded by one or more levels of government on a short – term, ad hoc basis.

This means that even when some success looks likely, programs are interrupted or terminated or the hours of key workers are reduced. Workers are often exploited by working beyond the part – time funding provided for their positions and they or other resource people are expected to contribute on a voluntary basis.

The explanation for the “failure” of many programs is their underfunding or the ephemeral nature of their funding.

In HARR's own local area, for example, the Department of Community Services has funded an Aboriginal community facilitator for northern Sydney who has been based at Hornsby for the past three years. This officer has nurtured a number of social initiatives among local Aboriginal people which are aimed at improving their social networks and consequent health and educational status.

As a result, local Indigenous residents are now finding their own voice and seeking incorporation with the hope of establishing a meeting place and cultural resource centre, organising a homework club and youth activities. The DOCS funding of the community facilitator position is on an annual basis and its renewal is uncertain. Most of the progress achieved during the three years will be in jeopardy if funding of the position stops at this stage.

The NSW Government should commit to sustained, consistent and evidence based funding of services for Aboriginal people which meet needs identified by the communities they serve and operate with the maximum degree of Indigenous input.

## **Conclusion**

Hornsby Area Residents for Reconciliation urges the Standing Committee to recommend that the NSW Government:

- Give Aboriginal communities and services the greatest possible opportunities for self determination and management
- Commit to sustained, consistent and evidence based funding of services for Aboriginal people which meet needs identified by the communities they serve
- In particular, provide adequate, focused and ongoing funding to implement the recommendations of the Breaking the Silence report and thus set in train an effective response to child sexual assault in NSW Aboriginal communities
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