

**Submission
No 23**

INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: KC Consultancy Services

Date received: 14/02/2016



KC Consultancy Services

ABN 98934800675

The Director, Standing Committee on State Development

Thank you for the opportunity to submit some thoughts about economic development in Aboriginal communities.

I am a sole trader by legal status; Independent Professional (I-Pro) by business sector, perhaps micro business by Government standards; an owner/operator in my sixth year of trading.

Reflecting on would be most helpful to your Committee I've taken the approach of sharing my business journey and offering some observations from that journey and exposure to the Indigenous business landscape. But first I need to provide some essential cultural context. In effect the **why** not the how

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en

The significance of cultural identity

I think it's important for the Committee to understand my background as one of the first myths to needs busting is that Aboriginal people are a homogenous group. I am a proud Palawa Trowunna woman from the Pyemairrenner nation, Trawlwoolway clan from North East Tasmania. Our tribal elder was the warrior Mannalargenna, who later became part of George Augustus Robinson's experiment on Flinders Island, dying at Wybalenna.

The map in the following link quickly dispels this myth in a very graphic way
<http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aboriginal-australia-map>

However, we do need to go deeper. I have come to understand, particularly as I have engaged more widely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through my work in the past six years, as a result of the post colonisation, our black history encompassing dispossession, genocide, assimilation policies and social engineering, we are all on a journey of identity with our original cultures, lore, lands and language This is a significant, if not integral factor when considering how to engage and promote economic reform in a cultural framework which is not our own.

It is a fundamental pillar to recognise, understand and accept that our people, whether they be descendants (as in my case), traditional owners or custodians our worldview is different to that which most, if not all of you represent. For ease of expression I will use 'dominant culture' simply as a means of differentiation.

Entitlement myth

I want to be completely transparent here as there are many stereotypical myths out there about us, including the one of 'entitlement'. In my case I first entered the workforce as a 16 year old and have worked continuously since then. My work background includes 3 years in State Government Housing; 19 years in the APS with what was then the Department of Social Security. I was a Regional Manager for 6 years in two states. I was the first Aboriginal woman Regional Manager to be appointed in Tasmania at the age of 32. I never worked in a 'designated Aboriginal position' but always identified as Aboriginal whenever the opportunity arose.

I don't have a Social Security number as I've never received any monies from the social security system. (I was unable to have children, so no family payments either). With my long term exposure to social security policy frameworks I am completely opposed to the sanctions currently being imposed on our people groups so I have a personal interest in activating economic reform amongst our people as soon as possible.

The vast majority of my mobs that I have met have stories of strong work ethic; incredible resilience; overcoming disadvantage. Those of our mob in leadership, both within the dominant culture system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island systems have only what I can describe as indomitable spirits.

Relevant experience

What qualifies me to say what I say? Do I have a Degree, Masters or PhD? The answer is 'no'. Do I have and seek to continue to have, an understanding of different perspectives and people groups? The answer would be 'yes'.

Since leaving the public sector I've worked with International students in the Education Export Schools Sector for thirteen years broadening my cross-cultural experience. I then worked as the Aboriginal Facilitator with a Diversity and Inclusion Organisation providing cultural safety/ one day workshop delivered to over 1,000 people across mostly corporate and public sector.

Coles; AFL (NSW & ACT); Kmart; ACCOR; ADHC (NSW); Healing Foundation; Medicare Local (Canberra) St John of God) Winnunga Nimmityah AMS

I have worked with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island organisations.

Menzies Institute/Cancer Council; Lowitja Institute; General Practice Education and Training (GPET) Board Advisory group Canberra; National Aboriginal Community Control Health Organisation Secretariat; Congress of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM); Winnunga Nimmityah AMS

In addition, I am currently a Director on the Mandurah (Hunter) Indigenous Business Chamber and avid advocate for both the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce <https://nswicc.com.au/> and the recently established National peak body for Indigenous Chambers of Commerce – First Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FACCI) <http://facci.org.au/>

What I really think qualifies me to have an opinion that is worthy of listening to is the fulfilment of two roles in my second year of trading. Interim CEO for the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO); National peak body representing 150 ACCH's across the country. Over this five months of interacting and engaging with many Government Agency and NGO heads as well as relevant politicians, seeing and hearing daily the health outcome differential between dominant culture and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders I had an epiphany to spend whatever was left of my working life to seek to influence those outcomes.

The second, was working in a large urban Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service relieving the CEO.

My observations from both the experiences are important to your Committees perspective and thinking:

Firstly: Competent and inspirational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is available and ready to go.

They need to be at the decision-making table – front end – not middle or back end – nor what has become that dastardly word 'consultation'.

Secondly: The burden on a comparatively small number of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander leaders is not just an overburden for the exceptional individuals involved but, in my opinion, unethical. Their opinions (which in effect is ours and their intellectual property) are always being sought without proper or sometimes any remuneration; proper recognition and acknowledgement.

*There are systems, structures, community projects, elder groups and businesses across a full spectrum that are **living examples of success need to be heeded, empowered and replicated (where appropriate)***

Thirdly: Lack of co-ordinated; long term and a-political investment. This is probably the most damaging of all. Inconsistency, constantly going around the mountain because a Minister or Government has changed, lack of accountability for where policy reform has occurred etc etc causes unmitigated damage. Workforce

planning, attraction and retention is almost impossible because of funding precariousness. I am continually astounded that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are able to recover from this, year after year, after year. This is no exaggeration – As a current and direct example to this review I trust that the Chair of the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, Deb Barwick will give her example of having run this chamber for 10 years with no Government funding. Funding has been on the table at least once then there's been a change of Minister and it's gone and back to square one.

All levels of Government of all perspectives need to have a long term bi-partisan approach to policy and any associated funding.

Indigenous Chambers of Commerce, are to the Business Sector what Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are to the Health Sector - Invaluable member based, community-centred resources

Finally, my business journey

In 2012 I was fortunate to meet Deb Barwick at Mandurah Indigenous Business Chamber on my way to an OCHRE consultation in Newcastle. Deb introduced me to the aims of the Chamber, I subsequently became a member and then a Board member in 2014.

In my initial meetings with Deb Barwick she explained what support was available to Indigenous businesses and introduced me to both Supply Nation and Indigenous Business Australia as well as what the Chamber had to offer in building my capacity as a business owner and achieving my aspirations. This has been an invaluable connection for me.

I became a member of Supply Nation in March 2013, attending their Connect event in 2013 and 2014 but resigned my membership in 2015 when it became evident that the organisations mandate was not an appropriate fit for my business aspirations.

My experience with Indigenous Business Australia was chequered. In the instance of financing attendance to two key events it was good but on the ground in supporting building my business capacity it was frustrating to put it mildly. I know this is a Federally funded organisation but there are lessons to be learnt:

- I am an Indigenous business expecting to have input from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander consultant. Twice I was offered a selection of 3 – none of whom met my request.

Why is this important? Because as a fellow Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander they will have a worldview more aligned to my own and those I'm likely to be engaging with or employing. They will understand my challenges and aspirations.

Anecdote: I once had the head of a Business Enterprise Centre say “I don't know what it is about you fellas having your own Chamber - don't you think we get it?” Frankly – no they don't.

Economic driver: *As an Indigenous business we retain any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees for significantly longer periods than dominant culture organisations.*

- In addition to the above - the consultant list was treated as an administrative matching exercise not relational i.e. a number of the consultants weren't within driving distance of less than 2 hours

Why is this important? Because the consultant needs to understand your business landscape and the group/communities you are targeting

Economic driver: Greater potential for more effective economic returns

Existing framework supporting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in their aspirational level

The NSWICC should be engaged to partner (full remunerated) in the considerations and analysis of this review. The Chamber already has the 'runs on the board' with 10 years' experience and navigating this landscape with great entrepreneurial skill. The skills of the Board members are very significant with an eminent researcher in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Business and Entrepreneurial Sector and numerous other high profile people.

The NSW Indigenous Chambers of Commerce has the ability, purpose and member investment at the core of their modus operandi.

I hope you will find the above information of assistance in your deliberations and strategies for economic reform.

Kate Kelleher

**Owner/Operator
KC Consultancy Services**