

**Discussion
paper
response -
Submission
No 47**

**INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN
ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

Organisation: Professor Paul Martin

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To: The Director
Standing Committee on State Development

Dear Director

Thank you for extending the period for this submission. It will be brief.

Across Australia Aboriginal people have secured tenure or other governance interests in rural land (including co-management and Indigenous Protected Areas). Statistics suggest that around 40% of the Australian landmass is under some form of Aboriginal governance or co-governance. That is of course very welcome in terms of social justice.

However, the maps of where these lands are demonstrate that the majority of the estate under the management of Aboriginal people are areas which are relatively unproductive economically, and often in areas where climatic conditions are hostile. It is also notable that whilst there is a great deal of rhetoric about Aboriginal ownership of water, in reality water allocations have generally not been granted to aboriginal people as a class (for example under the Murray Darling Basin Plan).

Even a cursory examination of the available statistics on the economic and human capacity of Aboriginal people (particularly of those in rural areas) demonstrates that many of these citizens are severely disadvantaged.

Taken together these factors suggest that Aboriginal people are securing a very large areas of land but they have negligible financial or other capacity to secure sufficient wealth from that stewardship to be able to exercise the type of good stewardship that they and the broader Australian society would wish to see applied to those lands. This statement is not intended to suggest that Aboriginal landholders are in anyway less committed to good environmental stewardship than any other class of Australians, but an ethical commitment is not sufficient to ensure sustainable land management. Good land stewardship requires resources as well as commitment.

The research which I and my colleagues have done suggests that unless the granting of land or land management rights is accompanied by a plan to ensure that the land steward has sufficient resources to do what is required of them the outcome is likely to be both environmentally and socially counterproductive.

I believe that is also inequitable to aboriginal people to continue to increase lands over which they nominally have control without providing commensurate resources to ensure a good living from that land, or from its governance.

Therefore, my submission is that an economic development strategy is needed which is commensurate with scale of the land management challenge facing aboriginal people. Since it is unlikely that sufficient funds can be secured from the land itself, this will inevitably involve some forms of wealth transfer. There are many ways in which this might be pursued, but the first step (which I hope it will be achieved through your inquiry) it is to recognise that there is a major strategic problem in unfunded aboriginal land stewardship expectations.

If required I could provide further details of the underlying challenge.

Yours truly

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