



Additional Comments

Coalition members of the Committee appreciate the spirit in which the Chair has conducted the enquiry, are grateful for the effort which so many people have made to provide evidence and wholeheartedly support the objective of increasing and strengthening Indigenous businesses. Still, there are some observations and reservations that we think should be expressed.

A distinction needs to be drawn between businesses or enterprises that are offshoots of community groups, on the one hand, and private, for-profit businesses that are owned or operated by Aboriginal people, on the other. Many Aboriginal business enterprises are not private businesses at all. They're the business arms of local councils or collectives. They're Indigenous versions, so to speak, of the NSW railways rather than, say, Toll Holdings. There's much to be said for community organizations operating such enterprises. Nevertheless, substantial economic advancement requires, in our view, the development of a private sector consciousness among Aboriginal people. This will require an awareness of the need to accumulate capital and to take risks.

There should be no reason why work currently done by private business (especially for Indigenous communities) could not be done by Aboriginal businesses operating on market principles. There is no iron clad law that says Aboriginal business should be not-for-profit, community-owned or government subsidized. Government assistance should aim to enable Aboriginal business to operate in a normal market rather than to operate indefinitely without the need to face ordinary business imperatives.

In that regard, Coalition members think that IBA has done much good work but would like to see more Aboriginal businesses learning to deal with mainstream financial organizations.

Coalition members support the recommendations that will lead to wider awareness of Aboriginal business successes. We particularly support the recommendations that should lead to the creation of more for-profit businesses by Aboriginal people as sole traders, members of partnerships or as individual shareholders (although, in respect of government procurement requirements, we

note the current limited range of Indigenous business). We have reservations, though, about the recommendations which might restrict free negotiations involving Aboriginal people. Running a business should not, primarily, be about going to meetings or securing program grants. It's about seeing an opportunity, developing the skills, taking the risks and reaping the rewards of providing a service to the community.

Mr Andrew Laming MP
Deputy Chair

The Hon. Tony Abbott MP

The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP