

Dear Dr Perren,

Submission to Food Security Enquiry

I am a private citizen living in Alice Springs and am concerned about the food prices and food security in the surrounding remote communities. The issues experienced by residents living in these communities has been highlighted and compounded by the COVID-19 biosecurity restrictions and panic buying in major centers.

This submission mainly addresses point 5 of the Terms of Reference: *Barriers facing residents in Remote Communities from having reliable access to affordable fresh and healthy food, groceries and other essential supplies.*

In my experience, there are two main barriers to access, these being cost and availability (ie the products being on the shelf in store).

The Northern Territory Government has regularly produced Market Basket Surveys¹ comparing price, availability and quality of food across urban and remote stores, which has consistently shown considerably higher prices in remote locations. While access and prices have improved over time, there is still extreme inequality in pricing, as is shown in anecdotal² and formal reports³.

While I live in Alice Springs I have travelled remotely as part of a previous job. When doing bush trips, I would always take my own food for the week, knowing that the stocks in the stores were not reliable and expensive. This is common practice among remote workers, however people living in these communities do not have any other option but to buy from the local store.

Reports from friends living in the communities is that when the delivery truck arrives, there would be limited amounts of poor quality fresh fruit and vegetables, which would all sell out quickly, so then there was no fresh food until the next weeks delivery.

During the recent COVID-19 lockdowns food security issues have increased as there were more people living in the communities, they were unable to travel to town to do a big shop up, and the stores had difficulties obtaining supplies as the large supermarket chains were increasing their purchasing in response to panic buying.

This was reported in a series of interviews by ABC Alice Springs journalist Alex Barwick. In these she interviewed residents of Mutijulu and Yulara, who reported that when the delivery truck arrived, all food sold out within the first day leaving nothing for the rest of the week. This was reported at both the local store in Mutijulu, as well as the IGA supermarket in Yulara. Unfortunately, the recordings of these interviews are no longer available on the ABC website.

I recently heard an anecdotal story of a worker in Ti-Tree (195km north of Alice Springs) who was unable to come to Alice for her regular shop due to the bio-security restrictions. She asked the local store to

¹ https://digitallibrary.health.nt.gov.au/prodjsui/simple-search?query=%28%28title%3Amarket+title%3Abasket%29%29&sort_by=score&order=desc&rpp=10&etal=0&filtername=dateIssued&filterquery=%5B2010+TO+2020%5D&filtertype>equals

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-02/nt-food-prices-prompt-illegal-border-crossings-amid-coronavirus/12114194>

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/1753-6405.12370>

order in a box of 12 bottles of soda water, which usually retail for \$0.75/bottle in the supermarkets in Alice Springs. On delivery she was charged \$70 for the box. Even accounting for freight and increased wholesale costs for a small store compared to a major supermarket, this is unacceptable.

I believe this enquiry into food prices and food security to be a positive step to improve what are known issues for those living in or near remote communities. Better access and availability can only help improve health and nutrition of those living in remote communities, and I urge the government to consider all possible ways of ensuring equitable food availability to all Australians.

Regards

Sophie Boland

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