



# **Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Remote Engagement Program) Bill 2021**

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Board of Directors of The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) and in consultation with ALPA's directors, staff and cultural leadership from the Yolŋu communities in which we deliver services.

## Who is ALPA?

The Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation (ALPA) was formed in 1972 as a collective of seven community controlled stores. ALPA's initial member communities were Ajurumu, Gapuwiyak, Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi, Minjilang, Ramingining and Yirrkala. ALPA is financially independent, owned by our Yolŋu members and governed by a Yolŋu Board of Directors.

In the 1970s ALPA began to realise the importance of training and development for its staff, and with support from the Queensland Retail Training Institute, began a program of in-house training. The Training School at Galiwin'ku was built to support these efforts. During this period ALPA also started its community support programs, using the modest surplus funds generated from store operations to benefit the community. Financial assistance for ceremonies, education, medical escorts and community events could be obtained through these programs, which have now been expanded to involve capital investment in business partnerships and business support for independent social enterprise development.

ALPA became a Registered Training Organisation in 1992 and is committed to staff training. Over 1,500 of ALPA's remote Indigenous staff have completed apprenticeships or qualifications through ALPA. This dedication to quality training outcomes saw ALPA recognised as the NT Large Employer of the Year at the NT Training Awards in both 2015 and 2016 and placing in the top three in the same category at the following two National Awards.

In 2013 the Board of Directors made the decision that it was time for ALPA to diversify from retail and work with the Government and industry partners to increase the economic opportunities for our Yolŋu members. ALPA commenced by taking on the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) in the region encompassing our member communities of Ramingining and Milingimbi. ALPA's Board quickly recognised the ability to support positive change in our communities through these programs and over the last eight years our community services footprint has grown to four Community Development Program (CDP) regions, five Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) teams, a self-funded community engagement team, business incubators and programs engaging with young people and families.

By 2014 ALPA had saturated the existing local labour markets so started working in partnership with local families and traditional landowners to develop new enterprises, create further employment pathways and to strengthen the economies of our communities. To date this has seen the creation of four new Indigenous owned businesses delivering services across a variety of sectors including construction, landscaping, furniture manufacturing, automotive repair, Homelands services, hospitality, tourism, agriculture and cleaning.

In 2021 ALPA operates in 26 communities across a 1.2 million square kilometre footprint. ALPA has over 1,200 employees, 84% of whom are local Indigenous people, and last year we returned over \$38 million to our member communities in the form of wages for local Indigenous staff, community governed support programs and community infrastructure.

## Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill

The Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill highlights an exciting opportunity for the future of employment service programs in remote communities. ALPA is very supportive of the Commonwealth Government's intentions to co-design a new Remote Engagement Program with remote Indigenous communities, and we believe that the proposed amendment to the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, represents a good first step in the reform of the current Community Development Program model. It showcases the opportunity for the new Remote Jobs Program to support some significant change in remote communities and provide a clear pathway for Yolŋu people into employment.

In principle we support the provision of incentive payments that encourage jobseekers to engage in activities and placements as part of their pathway to more sustainable, long-term employment. We are conscious that this incentive should not replace real employment opportunities in remote communities and particular care should be paid when implementing the payment. The appropriate safeguards will be important to ensure that organisations are using the payments appropriately and Indigenous Australians are supported to engage with them. We do believe that should a participant of the program undertake this opportunity, that it be with the ambition to transition into permanent employment.

We do believe there is also an opportunity to consider further, for this payment to be equivalent to, when combined with the recipient's existing income support, that of the payment of a permanent employee doing similar work, including benefits such as superannuation and entitlements for when someone may not be able to attend the activity/placement.

As recognised by the NIAA in its Discussion Paper on the new remote engagement program, *"in some of the most remote parts of Australia, there are not enough jobs available for all the people who want to work."* Furthermore, there are many barriers to employment for some people in remote communities such as language literacy and numeracy requirements, lack of available and relevant training options, chronic health issues and cultural requirements, meaning many people not in work will be long-term recipients of government welfare payments. In this context we believe it is important to recognise that transitioning into market-based, full-time work may not be an option for many people, and there is a need to provide future-focused safety nets to these long-term unemployed, such as equivalent-pay activities/placements and working conditions like superannuation and paid leave.

ALPA is supportive of the provision 7 in the Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill, which stipulates the Government will take the time to work with and listen to communities in the pilot sites to determine how the additional payment will best be designed for each community, and to assess the success of the payment in practice. We believe that this will provide exciting opportunities to build a fit-for-purpose program that will benefit the communities.

We also support provision 48, which details that participants will not be required to make a separate claim for this remote engagement program payment, as it will be included within the participant's existing income support arrangement. This increase in income into the homes of Indigenous Australians in remote communities is vital to the ongoing growth and development of communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the government on this co-design process for the new remote jobs program. ALPA provides tailored services to participants in the Arnhem Land region and have a strong history of community engagement, economic and business development, employment creation and training and upskilling of Yolŋu people.