



The Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

13<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Dear Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi Islands**

I wish to make a submission to the current inquiry into forestry operations on the Tiwi Islands and in respect of the following term of reference:

e. an examination of **the prospects for alternative economic development opportunities and impediments** for the Tiwi Islands including sale and promotion of cultural products, **community development activities**, land and sea management, and opportunities for involvement in future carbon trading and emissions offsets schemes; and

There is no doubt that there are wonderful future opportunities for developments on the Tiwi Islands. However, these, and the existing economic development activities, must be done with a firm commitment to improving the social capital in the communities on the islands where the 2,500 people live. It is one thing to have economic development but another to ensure that this makes a contribution to social development and an improvement to the well being of the population.

In an article posted to my Blog in October 2006 I pointed out that economic development does not necessarily lead to a better life for the people who own the land. In fact for the Tiwi the past 30 years of economic activity has only seen the critical indicators of a healthy life deteriorate to a greater extent than other remote Aboriginal communities. The Tiwi hold the "prize" for renal failure, suicides and unemployment. The question has to be asked how this could be in a supposedly successful economic environment.

My article can be read at the following link and I attach it to this submission.

<http://remoteaboriginals.blogspot.com/search/label/Economic%20development%20-%20Social%20development%20should%20flow%20from%20economic%20development>

I call upon the Committee to question where the money has gone to during this period and why there has been so little put into improved social circumstances for the people. With high suicide rates, alcohol and drug abuse it is evident that the Tiwi people suffer from the welfare dependent morays that all remote Aboriginal communities experience despite the successful industrial activities through forestry, tourism and aquaculture. Education standards are bad; employment opportunities minimal; poverty at a disastrous level; and, the dollar value spent on unhealthy products far beyond the level it should be when compared to mainstream spending.

The governance structure which has presided over this devastation needs to be carefully examined with respect to the dispersal of money over the past 30 years. I trust that measures will be recommended that will see a start to a prosperous life for all Tiwi people, the real owners of the land on which these developments have taken place.

I will appreciate an opportunity to appear before a public hearing should one be held in Darwin.

Yours sincerely

ROLLO MANNING  
Principal

Feature

**GET THE BALANCE RIGHT**

**Social development as part of economic development**

**By Rollo Manning**

To be posted on <http://remoteaboriginals.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.rollomanning.com/>

**Tiwi suicide exposed - "Land of the dead" - UK Guardian newspaper**

Having the highest suicide rate "in the world" came as a surprise and shock to close observers of the plight of the Tiwi people<sup>1</sup>.

Special  
report  
Australia

## The land of the dead

How did two tiny islands off Australia's north coast come to have the highest suicide rate in the world? Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy investigate

**Saturday June 24, 2006**  
**[The Guardian](#)**

This small community of 2,500 people on the two islands, Melville and Bathurst Islands, had already won the award for the highest rate of kidney disease in Australia (Professor Wendy Hoy The Health Report: 2 June 1997 - Kidney Disease in Aboriginal Communities).

# The Health Report

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**Mondays at 8.30am, repeated at 8.00pm**

**Kidney Disease in Aboriginal Communities**

**2 June 1997**

**print-friendly**

A Darwin-based specialist in kidney disease is claiming that some Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory have the highest rates of kidney failure in the world.

Bathurst/Melville Islands were rated the most disadvantaged in Australia by a report in *The Weekend Australian* on 22 April 2006.

While these statements, statistics and reports do nothing for the morale of the Tiwi people their plight is a sad reflection of many remote Aboriginal communities across the North of Australia. These normally happy, friendly and fun loving people who produce brilliant Australian Rules footballers, welcome tourists to their islands with great pride. Politicians use the islands for getting a picture opportunity and grabbing a headline for what is another government program claimed to be going to change the way they live.



Nothing has worked. It is getting worse.

The sooner government policy makers can come to terms with the fact that the problems start at the ground level and cannot be solved by pouring in money through government sponsored programs the better everyone will be.

The way to fix the disastrous situation is through social development - the rebuilding of the social capital that has been desecrated over the past 30 years by previous policy approaches that have failed to take account of the views of the people themselves.

In 1979 when noted publicist/entrepreneur John Singleton travelled the north of Australia he observed **"...the do-gooders insist the Aboriginal people live exactly like us whites. It is obviously ludicrous."** And further **"...every time I look at one of those bearded university-trained southern do-gooders, I wonder if they will ever realise that they can never solve the Aboriginal problem because they are the problem"**.

The question that has to be asked is why an Aboriginal community of people with one of the best developed economic resources through forestry, fish breeding, tourism, art and mineral mining should still be so socially disadvantaged.

Could it be that the money accruing to the Tiwi Islanders is not getting down to the real causes of social malaise?

Maybe it is time for the government to do something useful and look into why the social problems are getting worse in the face of more money coming in through private enterprise economic development. Could it be that the people who govern the enterprises are profiting to an extent that needs changing for the sake of the majority. This was pointed to in a paper by former Tiwi Island Local Government CEO John Cleary in a paper done for the Centre for Independent Studies in April 2005.

It is an example that must be explored for the common belief is that improve the economy and lifestyle will improve. This is not the case with the Tiwi.

The motto should be:

**"Gain economic strength through social development - build social capital and build a healthy community."**

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