



Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts: Inquiry into Forestry and Mining Operations on the Tiwi Islands.

Purpose

This submission is presented from the Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board (TITEB), a Board owned and managed by the Tiwi traditional owners, the same traditional owners who support forestry and mining on their land. The submission strongly supports the continuation of forestry and mining operations on the Tiwi Islands and argues that to do so is assimilating with both Commonwealth and NT policy and directions which have been espoused for generations.

As an example in May 2008 the NT Government released the discussion and issues paper: *“Review of NT Indigenous Economic Development Strategy”*

In the introduction this paper states: *“A number of significant changes have occurred in the three years since the IED Strategy was launched. These include the Australian Government intervention, a new Federal Government, the apology to the stolen generations, revision of CDEP, the Northern Territory Government’s Closing the Gap initiative, the adoption of a bipartisan approach to decrease the gap in life expectancy, improvements in education and local government reform.*

There is also agreement amongst all stakeholders that economic development is a key to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. There have been worthwhile achievements in Indigenous economic participation, but there is a long way to go” It goes on to state: *“The IED Strategy has a clear vision, desired outcome, objective and values. It has an ambitious desired outcome:*

- *To achieve economic parity between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Territorians by 2020.*

The strategy’s objective is:

- *To foster long-term economic growth and prosperity through a significant increase in Indigenous wealth, employment, and business ownership.”*

It further states that:

The strategy identifies opportunities for economic development initiatives within 13 industry sectors:

- *Aquaculture and fisheries*
- *Arts*
- *Community services*
- *Construction*
- *Forestry and agribusiness*

- *Government*
- *Horticulture*
- *Knowledge and culture*
- *Mining and production*
- *Natural resources management*
- *Pastoral*
- *Retail and services*
- *Tourism.*

This submission offers the views that the Tiwi are achieving the above while others are still writing discussion papers and attending economic development meetings! It recognises that the Tiwi are actively involved in economic development in 12 of the identified sectors above and with the abundance of buffalo on Melville Island could easily get involved in the pastoral sector also, should they choose to.

The submission provides the view of the Board on the impact that forestry and mining, and any other industry or enterprise on the Tiwi Islands, has on job creation, training and the subsequent effect this has on, not only economic development but also on social development.

Background

The TITEB is ten years old this year. The Board was established by the Tiwi Islands Land Council in August 1999 after recognising that enterprise development on the Islands could supply real jobs for the Tiwi but only if they were trained. The Board is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), and Group Training Organisation (GTO). Both arms are nationally registered and quality endorsed under the Australian Quality Framework. On average about 350 Tiwi participate in some form of structured, accredited training each year through the RTO. 122 Tiwi apprentices have completed their apprenticeships with the GTO through the group apprenticeship scheme. 81 apprentices are currently in training and 70 new apprentice positions have been identified and will be filled over the next 2 months. See attachment 1.

The Board is managed by the CEO who has worked in TAFE and Higher Education for 25 years, including 10 with TITEB. TITEB has 16 professional staff including 9 Tiwi.

The Vision of the TITEB, as stated in the strategic and operational plans is: *“A prosperous future for all Tiwi people through lifelong learning and skills development.”*

This encapsulates the Tiwi view that training, *learning*, for social development has equal importance in our life as training, *learning* for economic development. Our views recognise that creating jobs will not only stimulate economic development, but also enhance social development. We are aware that while funding for training which lead to jobs is available there is a scarcity of funding to provide training which will enhance social development such as programs delivered through some Adult Community Education (ACE) providers in New South Wales. There is no ACE funding in the NT! The commonwealth programs which we access are all outcomes focused. Outcomes focused means job

creation! Hence there is a need to stimulate enterprise development to create jobs to satisfy commonwealth and NT objectives.

To better understand the view that social development has parity with economic development it is important to reflect on the environment we work in.

The majority of people are illiterate and innumerate. They lack vocational skills and the underpinning knowledge required to commence vocational training. They lack confidence, have no job skills and no work ethic and have limited past achievements to relate to. CDEP is something the kids strive for when leaving school and they finish work at lunch time each day. Social problems abound. Drug and alcohol abuse continue to rise. Domestic violence, mental illness, kidney disease and diabetes are rife. Less than 3% will reach retirement age. Children are malnourished, have hearing and eye problems and are not encouraged to go to school. Incarceration rates are increasing and it would be difficult to find anyone in a community who has not had a relative in jail. And this is Australia.

Given this environment it should come as no surprise that social development is high on our list of priorities.

We also recognise that when considering how best to improve our situation it is not possible to improve things by treating one symptom on its own. One has to take a holistic approach. The links between education, health, training and employment are inextricable. To treat one in isolation of the others is a recipe for failure. That is why we have our own Health Board, Training and Employment Board and Education Board. But the one element which all these boards are strongly focused on is real jobs with real wages which come with real industries on the Islands. We recognise that the majority of the social problems are caused by the lack of education, training and jobs and the reliance on welfare. We know that the road ahead is economic development through industries such as Mining, Aquaculture and Forestry. Most Indigenous communities in Australia are still looking for the road sign!

Training

Given the environment we work in, it becomes quite obvious that we cannot transform this situation overnight. In fact a concerted whole of government approach may take a generation before improvements are witnessed.

However we have become impatient of waiting for the magical whole of government concept to emerge and recognise the failure of the Indigenous Coordinating Centres to deliver any visible outcomes. We decided to become proactive in attracting industries and enterprises on the Tiwi Islands and establishing a Training Board to work with these organisations to establish pools of skilled Tiwi labour. See attachment 1 for the numbers of Tiwi who are in apprenticeships, the current vacancies we will be filling over the next 2 months and the numbers who have completed. We have been negotiating for funding assistance through the Indigenous Employment Program for over 3 years with the Commonwealth to employ these 70 new apprentices and this was finally agreed to on the 2nd of March. Eighteen new apprentices are included in the package for our forestry operation, eight in forestry operations and 10 in environmental land management.

Nine Tiwi have finished their Certificate III in Forestry and Forest Products (Forest Growing and Management) and 8 have completed a Certificate II in Environmental Land Management thus keeping a balance in the workforce between the environmental aspects of forestry and the forestry establishment. Most of these people have come together and have now established their own company called it Tiwi Enterprises. This company is well progressed towards being the main supplier of labour to the forestry project.

Employment

There is a wide held belief that there are no jobs in remote area communities. This is not the case. There are stores, garages, power stations, water supplies, schools, building teams, road crews, local government offices and functions related to local government, health centres, art centres, clubs etc. All of these have job opportunities.

However in the majority of these areas there is little room for expansion of the labour force as the size of the organisations is driven by demand. For example only a substantial increase in the population will result in a need for larger stores or health clinics so the work force is finite. There are Tiwi working in all these areas on the Tiwi Islands and opportunities have been identified for some extra positions as outlined in appendix 1. When these positions are filled the employment market will be saturated and new jobs will only come with attrition or new enterprises.

The Board recognises that the only way to expand the numbers of Tiwi in jobs is to create new enterprises including forestry, mining and aquaculture. We need to create enterprises which can expand as the demand for the products they produce expands. And this we are doing!

It is reliably forecast that by 2012 there will be contracting opportunities in forestry alone for Tiwi Enterprises worth up to \$38M. This is only 3 years away so we are training now, getting ready for these contracts to maximise Tiwi Participation in the work force.

The forestry project is sustainable. The trees have been planted in lots over the past 6 years so that in 2012 the first lot will be harvested and replanted. The following year we will move onto the next lot and do the same. In 7 years we will be back to the first lot and the rotation starts again! The land we have set aside for this project represents less than 5% of our total land mass.

At present the forestry workforce of about 40 Tiwi is involved in managing the growth of the forests and monitoring the environment. By 2012, without any expansion in land mass, the project will have a workforce of about 200 Tiwi. Jobs will be created for truck and machinery operators and haulers in the forests. In the port we will have new jobs in stevedoring. In the camp we will have jobs in hospitality, grounds maintenance, nursery workers, cleaning, laundering, vehicle maintenance, office procedures, business administration, bookkeeping, information technology, payroll and finances, purchasing officers, maintenance carpenters, plumbers, painters, electricians, welders and many more. There will be jobs in road construction and maintenance for qualified plant operators. There will be jobs in the chip mill which we haven't even identified yet.

While the majority of Indigenous communities in Australia are struggling to find the sign post, we have not only found the road, we are well on the way to the crossroads where the sign says: “**This way to welfare independence**” We know the way! We found it ourselves! We know we can realise our dreams and ambitions by making the best use of this small piece of land we have set aside for countless generations who will follow us. It would be a sad day indeed if we were forced to tell our children – sorry kids - we were on the wrong road!

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Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board
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