

# BARKLY SHIRE COUNCIL



## **Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012**

The Barkly Shire Council is the elected Local Government Body for the Barkly Region. We provide local government and municipal services to a population exceeding 8000 people across eight townships in Central Australia. These towns include Tennant Creek, Ampilatwatja, Ali Curung, Alpurrurulam, Arlparra, Elliott, Tennant Creek and Wutunugurra.

The Barkly Shire places a special importance on the wellbeing of young people in our region. While our capacity and services are limited, we continually work to improve the options and opportunities available to our youth. We have some direct government funding for Youth Sport and Rec Services and we also work in partnership with agencies such as the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) to source additional resources and implement programs for youth.

### **Volatile Substance Misuse in the Shire**

There is ongoing low-level volatile substance misuse across much of our shire region. Many of our remote communities use Opal fuel and this has proven to be an effective way of reducing prevalence. The Opal roll-out however has not been comprehensive in our region, Opal has yet to be introduced in Tennant Creek, Wyclyffe Well Roadhouse near Ali Curung nor in a number of pastoral stations that sell fuel to people from nearby communities. Urandangi roadhouse near Alpurrurulam also does not stock Opal and fuel from this outlet is thought to be linked to ongoing sniffing in this community. In recent months there has been sniffing in Ali Curing, Lake Nash, Wutunugurra and Tennant Creek in the shire region.

Sniffing causes enormous worry to families, it ties up police, medical and night patrol services, it hurts the individuals involved and is linked to violence and crime in our region.

### **The need for Opal Mandating Legislation**

We feel that retailers should be encouraged to stock Opal voluntarily and given every opportunity to do so. Where this isn't happening and where this is linked to nearby sniffing we think it is reasonable and necessary to legislate to force retailers to stock Opal.

We cannot comment on the technicalities of the proposed bill other than to say that in our region this law is necessary. We hope that it could be used to cut off supply of standard unleaded from Urandangi as it is now many years that this site has been refusing to stock Opal. We also expect that the negotiations to bring Opal into Tennant creek and other sites in the region could go more smoothly in future if the Commonwealth ultimately has the power to compel retailers to stock the fuel.

### **The need to engage young people**

While use of Opal fuel can lead to great outcomes, this also needs to be complimented with policies and programs that improve the opportunities and alternatives that are available to young people as a way of dealing with the underlying causes of sniffing. While the Barkly Shire is constantly working with government agencies and community partners to improve the opportunities available to young people, it is worth noting that youth in our service region are largely missing out on basic services.

Our region is often overlooked when it comes to allocating program resources, a pertinent example of this is that no community in our service area receives funding through the FAHCSIA Youth In Communities (YIC) Measure. There are no RSD sites in the Barkly and as due to this we were initially excluded from applying for YIC funding. This was eventually amended but no Barkly site was funded. The YIC measure has recently been continued with 10 years funding for existing programs, none of which are in our shire region. Does this mean the 4000+ youth in our region will miss out on properly resourced youth services for the next 10 years?

In the absence of dedicated youth service funding we work with other agencies to bring together patchy funding and deliver what are ultimately patchy services. While such services are better than nothing, they are not sufficient if we are seriously aiming to help out youth break with sniffing and other substance misuse and build meaningful and rewarding lives.

### **Conclusion**

As stated the Barkly Shire places a particular importance on the health and wellbeing of young people in our region. As such we would like to see Opal Mandating Legislation implemented, either through this bill or through an amended and strengthened bill developed through the committee process. We

would also like to see a renewed focus on extending complementary measures such as properly funded youth programs to the Barkly region.