



**Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara  
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)**

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Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee,  
Parliament of Australia

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council  
(Aboriginal Corporation) ICN 2043 (NPYWC)

Dear Committee Secretary,

Please find following NPY Women's Council response to your request for submissions to the Committee's Inquiry into the Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012. We hope that this is of assistance to the Committee.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information.

Yours faithfully,

**Andrea Mason  
Co-ordinator,  
on behalf of  
NPY Women's Council**

**16/7/12**

## Introduction

The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC/ NPY Women's Council) represents women in the remote tri-State area of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The region covers 350,000 square kilometres. There is an overall population of around 6,000. Anangu and Yarnangu (Aboriginal people) living on the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara lands (Western Desert language region) who share strong cultural and family affiliations.

NPYWC was formed in 1980. The push for a separate women's forum emerged through the South Australian Pitjantjatjara Land Rights struggle of the late 1970s. Many women felt that their views were ignored during consultations over land rights, so they established their own organisation. Advocacy and information dissemination were the main foci for NPYWC during the 1980s and early 1990s. NPYWC is now a major provider of human services, working to address the identified unmet needs of Anangu and Yarnangu women and their families.

## Introduction

*"These petrol sniffers are our own flesh and blood, yet we have lost them all to petrol... Of course we know that some petrol sniffers cannot be helped. They will live their lives in wheelchairs with acquired brain injuries. But for the new recruits...well we are hoping that with Opal there will be no new recruits to petrol sniffing."* Janet Inyika, NPY Women's Council, launching Opal fuel<sup>i</sup> with then Health Minister Tony Abbott, February 2005<sup>ii</sup>.

Almost from the organisation's beginnings thirty years ago, NPYWC's members sought external help to combat this destructive habit, which seemed most of the time to be beyond the control of families. Members became increasingly desperate to stop a practice that was killing or disabling their children and grandchildren. For some of those children their sniffing has removed their ability to lead independent lives as adult, resulting in lifelong support through NPYWC's Tri-state disability project. At present NPYWC provides case management support to 34 adults from the NPY Lands with acquired brain injury caused through sniffing petrol. This loss of future potential is one of the biggest factors for NPYWC continuing to advocate for the mandating of Opal fuel by all retailers across the extended opal coverage area.

For a number of years NPYWC has argued for the use of Opal to be mandated across and near the borders of the extended opal coverage area to provide total coverage and by doing so to negate the requirement to supply regular unleaded petrol. There have been many retailers that have taken up the opportunity to sell Opal fuel across the region, however there are still some retailers who are resisting this change and whose actions are undermining the strategy. In the APY Lands the health service collects statistics on petrol sniffers. In the financial year ending June 2011 there are only a few isolated incidences of sniffing, less than 10.

Over recent months there have been persistent periods of sniffing on the western side of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and reports are pointing to Kalgoorlie as the location of supply,

a regional centre outside of the extended Opal area. Since the implementation of Opal fuel in Laverton and the phasing out of sniffable unleaded fuel, petrol sniffing has decreased significantly in the area of Warburton, which is where NPY Women's Council are currently focusing their advocacy efforts. This advocacy was started in response to community raising concerns about the ongoing use of petrol sniffing among young people up to the ages of 25.

These incidences in the APY Lands, and Ngaanyatjarra Lands and in other areas in Central Australia underlines the need for vigilance and for more certainty in limiting access to sniffable fuel that could be brought into the NPY Lands.

There are a range of reasons that explain why young people sniff petrol, including boredom, family breakdown, peer pressure and experimentation. Whatever the trigger, it is the availability of sniffable fuel that provides the opportunity and vulnerability in the extended Opal coverage area, **therefore NPY Women's Council offers its support to this bill as it provides an avenue to ban sniffable unleaded fuel from declared zones after a period of consultation with effected communities.**

NPY Women's Council notes that in the response to the last Senate inquiry the government said that rather than mandate Opal fuel it would direct significant funding towards marketing the benefits of Opal fuel to retailers in an effort to persuade those retailers that have historically resisted supplying Opal fuel. As mentioned above this strategy has worked for some but not for all, and so NPY Women's Council suggests that the time has come to take the next step and that of more formal legislation to ensure the coverage of Opal fuel across the extended opal coverage area.

## **Youth Services**

NPY Women's Council's effort to provide positive pathways for our young people has been through the provision of youth services. The NPY Women's Council Youth Program have provided diversionary activities for young people throughout the NPY Lands, offered AOD and Volatile Substance misuse educational workshops as well as provide general healthy living workshops. The Youth Program offers case management support to families and young people which can include referrals to treatment services, one to one work with young people and group work with families so that everyone is educated about the issues around substance misuse activities and can support those young people of concern to make healthier life choices. The program also offers immediate interagency responses to volatile substance misuse as well as a developmental approach to targeting the issues i.e. supporting community to speak out and take action about sniffable products entering their communities. In addition, the NPY Women's Council Youth program will respond to issues raised by communities around volatile substance misuse and other drug and alcohol related issues and seek to provide support and advocacy to address these issues.

NPYWC received funds from arrange of funding sources to deliver programs for young people. Certainly our biggest coverage is in the four southern communities. With funding provided through Youth in Communities (FaHCSIA), Youth Diversion Program, (NT

Department for Health), young people receive a significant service including case management support and communities have available treatment options. However in SA and WA our coverage is less and youth programs provided by other organisations are directed towards diversionary activities and less towards case management. There are also less treatment options in WA, though in South Australia the Drug and Alcohol Services of SA provide an outreach service in the APY Lands and options for treatment in Alice Springs.

**NPY Women's Council offers its support to this proposed legislation as it provides powers to the Minister to take action and ban standard unleaded fuel from a region following consultation and seeking advice.**

Without legislation providing a framework for controlling the storage and sale of premium fuel, retailers are left to develop their own practices which may or may not be effective. There was a successful voluntary scheme implemented by the previous owners of General Property Trust and Voyagers Hotels at the Ayers Rock and Kings Canyon Resorts, where the premium bowser was locked and customers had to register and demonstrate that their vehicle requires premium, and where premium is not sold in containers. The resort in 2011 was purchased by the Indigenous Land Corporation and it is understood that this practice is no longer in place.

NPY Women's Council also notes that in the March 2009 'Grasping the opportunity of Opal: Assessing the impact of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy' report the government acknowledged that in terms of cost-benefit of mandating the roll out of Opal fuel that the community benefits exceeded the costs both in the short and the long term. At that time the government placed a significant weight to the fact that the conclusions were based on limited data on the prevalence of petrol sniffing and that fuel storage and distribution issues needed to be addressed to enable a full roll out of Opal fuel in northern Australia.

## **Summary**

Since 2006 there has been much progress in the effort to reduce petrol sniffing across Central Australia. The voluntary roll Opal fuel, has played a substantial role in this reduction, however the opportunity for some retailers to remain outside of the regime only undermines the effort as a whole. NPY Women's Council urges the all parties to support this legislation as it will enable tighter control on sniffable fuel in the Opal fuel roll-out area in Central Australia.

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<sup>i</sup> Opal is a low octane, low aromatic fuel developed by BP for the Department of Health and Ageing and introduced in 2005. Opal has very low levels of compounds such as benzene, toluene and xylene, which associated with the narcotic effects of sniffing petrol. See: [www.bp.com/faq.do?categoryId=9012370&contentId=7024234&currentPage=1](http://www.bp.com/faq.do?categoryId=9012370&contentId=7024234&currentPage=1)

<sup>ii</sup> Janet Inyika is currently an elected Director (2010) and former staff member of NPYWC, and a long-time campaigner against sniffing. . Translated by Linda Rive for NPYWC.