



Report tabled on Indigenous legal services

The federal parliament's Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit tabled *Report 403: Access of Indigenous Australians to Legal Services* in Parliament House today (22 June).

The 113-page report makes 17 recommendations on the provision of legal services for Indigenous Australians. It completes an eight-month inquiry that commenced last year during the previous parliament.

Some of the recommendations include the federal government:

- extending the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services program for Indigenous men, women and children throughout regional and metropolitan Australia;
- setting clear targets for the type and level of service required from legal service providers in regards to their family, civil and criminal case loadings;
- improving levels of coordination and cooperation between Indigenous specific and mainstream providers of legal services;
- implementing strategies to combat poor levels of staff retention in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILSs) across Australia; and
- guaranteeing future providers of Indigenous-specific legal services respond to the needs of the communities they service by continuing to maintain the current numbers of community paralegal workers already established by ATSILSs in these communities.

Committee Chair, Bob Baldwin, said the Committee was "concerned to ensure that Indigenous Australians, particularly those people at risk of family violence, have the best access to legal services within available resources".

"To this end, the Committee applauds the Government's expansion of the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service program and has called for the program to be further extended into urban areas," Mr Baldwin said

"The Committee received considerable evidence on the current tendering of ATSILSs. We have recommended that all successful tenderers have governance mechanisms that will allow representation of the communities they service and that they continue to operate the networks of Aboriginal Liaison Officers that have developed under the current ATSILSs framework."

The Committee took evidence from public hearings across Australia in Canberra, Sydney, Darwin, Alice Springs, Adelaide, Dubbo and Perth.

The Committee also travelled to the remote community of Yuendumu in the Northern Territory to see first hand some of the conditions in which community-based preventative and diversionary initiatives are being implemented.

The inquiry received 44 submissions and 51 exhibits, as well as other correspondence.

For media comment: please contact **Committee Chair Bob Baldwin** (Member for Paterson, NSW) on telephone **(02) 6277 4200** (parliament), **(02) 4983 1330** (electorate office) (from 5:30am for radio interviews).

For **more information**, contact the inquiry secretary on telephone (02) 6277 4615 or access the report on the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/atsis/