



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination

Ms Joanne Towner
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 73
Date Received 24-5-05

RECEIVED
24 MAY 2005

BY: ATSI/A

Dear Ms Towner

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry on Indigenous employment.

I understand that a number of Australian Government agencies will be making submission to this inquiry outlining their role in improving employment opportunities for Indigenous people. With the implementation of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements in July 2004, Indigenous employment programs are now located within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). DEWR's submission to this inquiry will provide an outline of these programs and the contribution they can make to increasing Indigenous employment levels.

While under the new arrangements the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), in Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, does not administer any employment programs, it does play a role in contributing to Indigenous peoples' employment opportunities through the negotiation of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). Therefore, OIPC's submission will give an overview of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements and we would be happy to discuss some practical examples of SRAs that provide employment opportunities when OIPC meets with the Committee.

Yours sincerely

WAYNE GIBBONS
Associate Secretary

May 2005

**Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
Submission to
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Inquiry into Indigenous employment**

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
New Indigenous affairs arrangements	3
Working with States and Territories.....	6
OIPC's role in improving employment opportunities	6
Whole-of-government	6
Working with Indigenous communities	7

Introduction

Indigenous Australians experience greater levels of social and economic disadvantage in comparison with non-Indigenous Australians. For a number of reasons, including issues such as remoteness or family history, Indigenous people have poor outcomes in the key areas of areas of health, education and employment.

The Australian Government is committed to addressing this disadvantage and providing Indigenous people with the same opportunities as other Australians. While considerable progress has been made in a number of key areas, there is more to be done. To achieve this goal the Australian Government made a number of changes to the way it works with Indigenous people, including changes to the machinery of government and moving Indigenous programs into mainstream departments. These changes have resulted in all Australian Government Indigenous employment programs being moved to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

One of the key aspects of the Australian Government's new Indigenous affairs arrangements is the imperative to work directly with Indigenous people on the ground. The Office of Indigenous Policy (OIPC) will be doing this through Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs). While the new Indigenous affairs arrangements are relatively new, there are already examples of where ICCs have worked with Indigenous communities to create employment opportunities.

On that basis, and the fact that DEWR's submission to this inquiry will focus on the Australian Government's employment programs, this submission will concentrate on providing an overview of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements and how the Australian Government is working through ICCs to improve employment outcomes on the ground.

New Indigenous affairs arrangements

Previous inquiries completed by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (HORSCATSIA) have suggested that to improve outcomes for Indigenous people, a significant change is required to the approach of the Australian Government to the delivery of services to Indigenous people:

It involves a revision of approaches by government and a move away from conventional methods of service delivery which reinforce dependency to the pursuit of real partnerships with Indigenous organisations and communities.¹

HORSCATSIA reports such as *Many ways forward*² and *We can do it!*³, have also recommended improved cooperation within and between levels of government, a

¹ HORSCATSIA, 2004 *Many Ways forward: report of the inquiry into capacity building and service delivery in indigenous communities* Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. p251

² Ibid

whole-of-government approach to service delivery, flexible funding arrangements and improved outcomes for Indigenous people from mainstream programs and services. The new Indigenous affairs arrangements, which were established in July 2004, are consistent with these recommendations.

With the commencement of the new Indigenous affairs arrangements in July 2004, the great majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission programs and services were transferred to mainstream departments. The Government's Indigenous-specific programs are now administered by mainstream agencies, using a whole-of-government approach. Communication and collaboration between and across portfolios and levels of government will enable agencies to improve outcomes from both mainstream and Indigenous-specific programs and services.

The new arrangements are predicated on five principles:

- collaboration – Australian Government agencies are required to work together in a coordinated way;
- regional need – the Government will work to ensure that local needs and priorities are understood and addressed;
- flexibility – new mechanisms will be developed to enable Government resources to be used to support good local strategies and whole-of-government objectives;
- accountability – improved accountability and performance monitoring mechanisms are being implemented; and
- leadership – relevant Ministers and departmental heads will take responsibility, individually and collectively, at a national level for implementing the new arrangements.

A key element of the new arrangements will be to listen to local people regarding their concerns and priorities. This includes working directly with Indigenous people to develop a 20–30 year vision for their community and working to simplify government processes by bring programs together and cutting red tape.

A Ministerial Taskforce, which is chaired by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, provides whole-of-government leadership on directions and priorities for Australian Government policy and expenditure. The Taskforce receives advice from a range of sources, including the National Indigenous Council (NIC) and the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs. The Ministerial Taskforce has decided to on three areas for priority attention, these being;

- early childhood intervention, a key focus of which will be improved mental and physical health, and in particular primary health, and early educational outcomes;
- safer communities, which includes issues of authority, law and order, but necessarily also focuses on dealing with issues of governance to ensure that communities are functional and effective; and
- building Indigenous wealth, employment and entrepreneurial culture, as these are integral to boosting economic development and reducing poverty and dependence on passive welfare.

³ HORSCATSIA 2001, *We can do it! The needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

The three Ministerial Taskforce priorities are complementary. By undertaking simultaneous action in these priority areas, the positive outcomes achieved from one area will support and contribute to outcomes achieved in the other priority areas. Action in relation to these priority areas is both short and long term. The Government is working with Indigenous people to tackle the urgent issues facing communities today, while at the same time working towards the Ministerial Taskforce's long-term year vision for Indigenous affairs:

Indigenous Australians, wherever they live, should have the same opportunities as other Australians to make informed choices about their lives, realise their full potential in whatever they choose to do and to take responsibility for managing their own affairs.

Consideration of Indigenous expenditure across government is guided by the Ministerial Taskforce. The Ministerial Taskforce provides high level, whole-of-government leadership on directions and priorities for policy and expenditure related to Indigenous Australians. The Ministerial Taskforce then advises the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) on appropriate priorities and funding allocations in the Budget context. The Ministerial Taskforce also provides advice to ERC on how mainstream programs can be made more accessible and relevant to Indigenous Australians. The government is provided with more flexibility by considering all proposals for Indigenous expenditure at the one time against the background of the performance of existing programs and services gives.

The Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs supports the Ministerial Taskforce by providing advice on the coordination of Indigenous policy and service delivery, the performance of Government programs in improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and on resource allocation across the Australian Government for Indigenous-specific programs. The Secretaries' Group includes all Secretaries with responsibility for Indigenous-specific programs and services, and is chaired by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It also prepares a public annual report on the performance of the Australian Government's Indigenous-specific programs.

The NIC provides advice to the government, through the Ministerial Taskforce, on policy and service delivery affecting Indigenous Australians. Members are appointed by the government on the basis of their skills and experience. The Council is a group of experts, rather than a representative body. The Council will advise on the appropriateness and effectiveness of programs across government, and promote constructive dialogue and engagement between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations. The NIC will also provide input and advice to the government on the three priority areas identified by the Ministerial Taskforce.

The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) was established in July 2004 and has a key role in developing and supporting the new arrangements. OIPC advises the Minister on Indigenous issues, coordinates whole-of-government policy development, monitors the performance of government programs and services and develops relations with State and Territory governments on Indigenous issues. OIPC

also oversees Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) and the negotiation of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) which are discussed in more detail below.

Working with States and Territories

A cooperative working relationship with States and Territories is critical to improving employment outcomes given their important role in providing services to Indigenous Australians. All jurisdictions, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), have committed to achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians by improving the delivery of services, building greater opportunities and helping Indigenous families and individuals to become self-sufficient. To this end COAG agreed to a National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians. These principles are designed to assist Governments to achieve better outcomes for Indigenous Australians, primarily through more flexible and tailored responses and building stronger partnerships. The principles are:

- sharing responsibility,
- harnessing the mainstream,
- streamlining service delivery,
- establishing transparency and accountability,
- developing a learning framework, and
- focussing on priority areas.

OIPC and other relevant agencies are working with State and Territory Governments to implement the COAG service delivery principles through bilateral agreements. The first of these agreements was signed in April 2005 between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. Economic development, including creating new jobs, is a priority area for joint action identified in this agreement. The Australian Government is also discussing economic development and employment issues as a priority area for joint action in bilateral agreements with other States and Territories.

The Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) is also implementing the principles for the delivery of services through its work. In addition, the Prime Minister, as Chair of COAG, agreed to the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) pursuing three priority areas in Indigenous affairs. One of these priority areas is promoting economic development.

OIPC's role in improving employment opportunities

While the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) does not administer any Indigenous employment programs, it does play a significant role in contributing the Australian Government's Indigenous employment outcomes. OIPC does this both at the policy and program level by, working with other Australian Government agencies to implement the whole-of-government approach, and at the community level, by working directly with Indigenous people on the ground.

Whole-of-government

OIPC contributes to Indigenous employment outcomes by coordinating Australian Government-wide innovative policy development and service delivery. As discussed,

a key priority identified by the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs is building Indigenous wealth, employment and entrepreneurial culture. A cross-portfolio working group, coordinated by OIPC, has been established to develop comprehensive and strategic advice to the Ministerial Taskforce on ways to improve economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

A key task of the working group is to develop an Indigenous Economic Independence Strategy. This strategy will provide overarching direction for government policy and inform the development of further practical measures in this area. Improving the opportunities for Indigenous Australians to gain sustainable employment will be a key focus of the strategy.

Working with Indigenous communities

OIPC also works directly with Indigenous communities to improve employment outcomes. Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) have been established at 30 sites in metropolitan and regional Australia to undertake this work. Staff in ICCs come from a range of Australian Government agencies that administer government programs and services to Indigenous people. Staff in these ICCs coordinate the delivery of Indigenous-specific programs and assist in developing innovative responses to the local needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities.

ICCs will play a significant role in implementing the Australian Government's Indigenous Economic Independence Strategy and improving employment levels in Indigenous communities. In particular, in remote areas of Australia, ICCs will be progressively;

- mapping the existing and potential jobs in the area (eg police, teachers, nurses, shop assistants, community councils, land management, border protection quarantine, tourism, pastoral);
- developing a 5–10 year Local Jobs for Local People plan which recognises that people may travel away from home for seasonal or weekday work whilst still maintaining strong links with country; and
- identifying where local people can quickly fill jobs outside the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program and developing a longer-term training plan, supported to develop people into the jobs, drawing on existing employment services.

ICCs will also work with Indigenous communities to implement a shared responsibility approach, which is a key feature of the Government's new Indigenous affairs arrangements. The shift to shared responsibility reflects a realisation that traditional government models of intervention based around 'servicing' Indigenous people have often reinforced passivity rather than created a sustainable basis for self-reliance. Shared responsibility is about changing the way governments and Indigenous communities work together and it requires a long-term commitment by all parties. The Government's investment will be linked to the preparedness of individuals, families and communities to agree to share responsibility for improving outcomes.

The commitment to sharing responsibility is formalised in Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs). SRAs are agreements that spell out what all partners (communities, governments and others), will contribute to help bring about long-term

change within the community. These agreements are negotiated at the local level and provide a vehicle for drawing together government interventions. SRAs can be thematic, for example focus on a healthy lifestyle, or cover the full spectrum of government interventions and community, family and individual commitments for that location. Business, non-government and philanthropic organisations can also be engaged as partners to SRAs. SRAs set out:

- agreed priorities;
- measures that provide benefits that can be built on in future agreements;
- community investments, such as resources and commitments, including activities to lift overall participation levels of individuals, consistent with SRA outcomes;
- government investments and commitments, including coordinated services, funding for community capacity-building;
- investments and commitments from other partners;
- baseline data;
- agreed outcomes, including milestones and performance indicators; and
- agreed two-way feedback mechanisms.

Over 50 SRAs have been signed with more than 40 different communities. Most of the initial SRAs in the COAG trial sites (signed before December 2004) tend to be focussed on specific community activities—including the well-being of families, children and young people—with cross agency or State Government investment in all of them. Others have been signed in COAG trial sites since the beginning of 2005, for example Mulan, Billiluna, Balgo and Ringer's Soak in WA and Enggonia and Murdi Paaki in NSW.

Approximately 19 signed SRAs have a focus on economic development. However, there are opportunities for other SRAs that focus on issues such as school retention, crime reduction or health and well-being to contribute to employment outcomes within the Indigenous community. Examples of how SRAs can be used to improve the employment opportunities for communities include:

- a community making CDEP places available for use in a specific project, providing the participants with useful skills;
- funding to develop a new business enterprise that will provide jobs for members of the community; and
- providing training for community members to improve their job opportunities.

Over time SRAs will play a major role in supporting higher employment outcomes for Indigenous communities by working directly with Indigenous people to identify their aspirations and by addressing the location-specific barriers to employment and economic development. For example, with the recently announced reforms to CDEP, the role of SRAs in achieving employment outcomes will be significantly strengthened as activities undertaken through CDEP will be directly linked to the priorities identified by a community under a SRA.

In determining the priorities to be addressed under SRAs, different communities will focus on different issues. Some communities have identified that they need to address a range of issues, such as substance abuse, law and order, or getting children to go to school, before they can work to improve employment and economic development. Over time, SRAs will develop into more comprehensive agreements addressing a

range of community needs, including developing sustainable employment opportunities.

Other communities are already seriously considering how to improve their employment opportunities and, in so doing, ensure improved economic prosperity for their families and individuals.