



Inquiry into the needs of...

Urban Dwelling

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples

News flash

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, chaired by the Hon Lou Lieberman MP, at the request of the Minister, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Senator the Hon John Herron, is holding an inquiry into the needs of country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The issues that the Committee will examine are described in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry, which are listed on the right.

The inquiry will assist the Government to continue to further develop and introduce practical measures to help Indigenous people. The Federal Government is now spending a record \$2.3 billion on Indigenous specific programs. The inquiry will encourage Indigenous people to become more involved in decision making at the community level and strengthen partnerships.

The Committee encourages any person, group or organisation with views on the matters in the Terms of Reference to write about them to the Committee ('a submission'). Details on how to make a submission are provided on the last page.

Terms of Reference

The Committee will inquire into and report on the present and ongoing needs of country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Among other matters, the Committee will consider:

1. the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people;
2. ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;
3. the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);
4. the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;
5. opportunities for economic independence in urban areas; and
6. urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban

Urban area needs

The Terms of Reference refer to country and metropolitan urban dwelling Indigenous people. Where this pamphlet mentions 'urban areas' it generally means population centres of more than 1 000 people and includes people living in or near country towns of this size. Since some remote traditional communities are relatively large, the definition could also include people living in traditional ways that are associated

Why have the Inquiry?

The Committee last inquired into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in November 1992. Since then, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has become increasingly urbanised. In 1996 about 73 per cent of Indigenous people were living in urban areas. Because of this, it is important to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas are being addressed in the most effective way. Indigenous people living in urban areas have access to a range of mainstream and indigenous-specific programs and services. It is important that these take account of the characteristics of an urban way of life.

What is the inquiry about?

The Inquiry will examine the situation of urban dwelling Indigenous people. It will consider existing programs and services relevant to urban Indigenous people. It will examine both mainstream and Indigenous-specific programs. Its goal is to ensure that urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in deciding what sort of assistance would be most useful to them.

What programs and services do Indigenous people find most effective in urban areas? Do urban areas have particular characteristics that need to be considered in program delivery? Are urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sufficiently involved in decision-making affecting their local communities? What opportunities do urban areas offer for economic independence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

An important focus is young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas. The Indigenous population has a very young age structure, with a median age of 20 years compared to 34 years for all Australians. About 40 per cent of the Indigenous population is under 15, that is, nearly double the proportion in the total population. What do urban dwelling Indigenous young people need and how can this be achieved?

A further focus of this inquiry is the maintenance of Indigenous culture in urban areas. What are the issues involved in maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas? What kind of support or assistance is appropriate?

Existing Commonwealth programs

A number of Commonwealth agencies deliver programs and services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas. The Federal Government is now spending a record \$2.3 billion on Indigenous specific programmes with a policy emphasis on developing practical measures to help Indigenous people. These include:

- ATSiC (National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS); Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP); community housing and infrastructure; heritage, arts and cultural programs);
- The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (administers Indigenous educational assistance programs including ABSTUDY);
- The Department of Health and Aged Care (administration of primary health care, mental health and substance-abuse prevention, mainly through community-based Aboriginal Medical Services);
- The Department of Family and Community Services (the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program);
- The Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (mainstream labour market policies affecting Indigenous Australians and the Indigenous Employment Program).

The Committee wants to help ensure the successful delivery of the programs and services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in

Possibilities for the future

The Committee has not yet formed views about possible future policy directions and administrative arrangements at the Commonwealth level. However, the Committee is interested in:

- the ways in which existing programs and services, both mainstream and Indigenous-specific, meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas;
- the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas participate in decisions affecting their local communities, including through partnerships with government;
- opportunities for improving the housing situation of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- issues facing young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas; including the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in employment, education and training programs and health and homelessness programs;
- opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas to become economically independent; and
- the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas.

How to make a submission

The Committee welcomes written submissions from all people and organisations interested in the inquiry. Submissions may be of any length.

It will help the Committee if submissions directly discuss some or all of the Terms of Reference.

The Committee is particularly interested to receive submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, groups or organisations.

The Committee usually makes copies of submissions available to anybody who asks for them. If you want a submission to be kept confidential, you should say so clearly at the top of the submission.

Submissions should be sent to the Committee Secretary by Friday 13 October 2000 (This date has been extended to Friday 24 November 2000)

Written submissions should be sent to:

**The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

If possible, please also send a copy of your submission on a computer disk. The Committee can also receive submissions sent in electronic form to the Committee's e-mail address (atsia.reps@aph.gov.au).

About the Committee

The Committee is a permanent Committee of the House of Representatives. The Committee has 10 Members who are all members of the House of Representatives. There are members from the Government and from the Opposition.

Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Chairman

Hon Lou Lieberman MP

Deputy Chairman

Mr Harry Quick MP

Members

Mrs Trish Draper MP

Mr Barry Haase MP

Ms Kelly Hoare MP

Hon Robert Katter MP

Mr Jim Lloyd MP

Mr Daryl Melham MP

Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Mr Barry Wakelin MP

People with questions can contact the Committee Secretary by:
telephone on (02) 6277 4559;
by fax on (02) 6277 2219; or by
E-mail, atsia.reps@aph.gov.au
Web: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/