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Submission No 10

**Submission to the
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on
Community Stores in remote Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Communities.**

Submitted by:

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on behalf of

Mulan Aboriginal Corporation

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INTRODUCTION

Mulan Aboriginal Corporation was incorporated in 1979 with the some of the following objectives:

- to manage and develop our community as a healthy and happy place and provide Community services to our members.
- to develop our economy and support economic development of our members.
- to encourage healthy lifestyle and support the health and well being of our members
- to care and support the elderly and those less able to care for themselves.
- To develop businesses, including but not limited to a Community Store, pastoral lease, tourism and the Arts, that are aimed at improving the well being of the community and members.

This year marks 30years of maintaining these high standards and the community has been guided by the principles set out in the Community Rule Book as:

- Respect for all, for individuals and for our family groups
- Respect for our country and culture
- Fairness and justice
- Honesty in our dealings
- Listening and openness in our communications
- Working for the benefit of all
- Working together with each other and with other people and groups
- Support and helping each other.

Mulan Community Store offers the opportunity of training in all Store operations and delivery of services. The local Store on all ATSI communities are the same as it is in Mulan, they are the heart of the community, the meeting place for the adults, the place where the children know they can score treats from family members and the teenagers congregate to discuss topics of interest to them. The community takes great pride in the presentation, operation and stocking of its Community Store and comparisons to other neighbouring stores is a topic of daily discussion.

The Community Store needs to acknowledge its role in the community and provide the best options in stock which will provide fresh fruit & vegetables, poultry meat & fish together with all the necessities of a regional hardware shop. All this is achieved by the communication between Store Management, community members, Store Committee, Clinic staff and Council Directors and management.

FOOD SUPPLY, QUALITY, COST AND COMPETITION ISSUES:-

- The distance that the produce is forced to travel on the sub-standard dirt of the Tanami Road has a large bearing on the quality of the stock when it arrives at Mulan. Regardless of the efforts of the freight company, massive damage is caused and a large amount of stock is written off each week of delivery.
- Previous Store Managers have determined to freight stock from Perth which is stored at Kununurra to be collected by a freight company which works out of Darwin. This Darwin company collects the goods at Kununurra and further delivers it to Mulan and another invoice is received for holding the stock at Kununurra for collection. This action sees two (2) freight companies adding further costs to the goods prior to the Store adding its mark-up to ensure the costs of operating the store are met. New Managers at Mulan are working with the Directors to alleviate this problem and to source goods from more competitive suppliers.
- Competition at Mulan Store is healthy, with the community members of the neighbouring communities visiting for various reasons and providing feed-back on the local store. This gives the Managers and Directors a balanced view of the stock offered and holding levels required.
- The most beneficial support which could be awarded to the remote stores, is to implement a freight subsidy scheme which would lower the percentage of price increase.
- The next most impacting issue which effects the management of the store would be the restrictions suffered in dealing with only one supplier for the groceries which curtails any competition of supply.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE OUTBACK STORES MODEL AND OTHER PRIVATE, PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY STORE MODELS:-

- Whilst the communities are capable of and are proving their abilities, to work in conjunction with their employed Management teams, they should be given every opportunity and support, to remain independent in all aspects of commercial operations on their communities and in particular, their Community Stores.
- I have no first hand experience with management of "Outback Stores" other than to witness their unprofessional methods of dealing with staff and prospective staff. Other than that I can only be aware of the voiced disappointment, that other community members speak to me of.
- I have worked for other "Store Management" providers and have found that there is a lack of support in training of staff. The regulations of healthy foods policies can be seen to be discriminatory and that the efforts would be better spent in teaching the women how to cook healthy /nutritional meals at a budget price to feed the numbers of people required.

- It has been advised by "Outback Stores" to this community, that it will be impossible to remain independent, because we will not be able to gain access to stock if deliveries are not maintained from Darwin to Mulan via neighbouring stores, should the remaining store switch to "Outback Stores". This would be seen to be "stand-over-tactics" and is not appreciated by the Directors.

THE IMPACT OF THESE FACTORS ON THE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES OF COMMUNITIES:-

- The base rate for a participant working for CDEP on these remote communities is \$249.25 for adults and \$189.70 for youths. From this base rate there are automatic deductions such as:

<u>Rent:</u>	\$30.00 per week (taken from all community members whether on Pension, Centrelink or CDEP.
<u>Funeral Fund:</u>	\$5.00 per week (taken from all the above)
<u>Power:</u>	\$30.00 (which is not compulsory but advisable)

No-one capable of envisaging the hardships involved in living on these wages, can ask what impact this has on the health and economic survival for the community members.

- The inclusion of fresh fruit and vegetables would have the biggest impact on correcting the health problems endured but sadly these are the items deleted from the shopping list due to the high costs of providing these staple items for the families.

Mulan Aboriginal Corporation aspires to providing the opportunities for all members of the community, to reach whatever level in training and career path they choose and hope that in the future the community can receive adequate training to manage their community store themselves. As a necessary conclusion the Directors and Management have resolved to commence horticulture training and an Orchard and Market Garden are being progressed to combat the hardships faced by the mothers in supplementing the family's diet with adequate vitamins.

CONCLUSION:-

Mulan Aboriginal Corporation is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry in an effort of assisting to make the necessary changes.

On behalf of the Mulan community, its Chairperson, Mr Cyril Calyon thanks the Standing Committee for providing this opportunity.

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Cyril Calyon (Chairman)

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Margaret Jacobson (Chief Executive Officer)