

PO Box 31
Katherine
NT 0851

Hon Lou Lieberman MP
Chairman
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

Please find attached my submission to your inquiry into the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I have commented under the six terms of reference as outlined in the material that you have made available.

I am presenting this submission as a private individual with the experience of living for over 50 years in the culturally diverse town of Katherine in the Northern Territory, the last 12 years as Mayor of Katherine Town Council.

If you are taking verbal submissions to this inquiry I would welcome the opportunity to comment further on my written submission.

Yours Sincerely

James Forscutt
13/10/2000

**NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES -
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY**

- 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.**

Aboriginal people are individuals in their own right and there is a need to define clearly what are the "special needs" of indigenous people living in urban areas over and above everyone else living in the urban area.

Having done the above list against each these "special needs" the existing programs and services that are available.

There is a need to recognise that traditional Aboriginal people moving from remote Aboriginal communities to reside in urban areas do have special needs that are quite different to all people who have grown up and live permanently in urban areas.

- 2. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements.**

In Katherine 16.5% of the permanent population is Aboriginal (ABS 1998). At the recent Council election 1 of the 6 Aldermen elected was an Aboriginal person. Katherine Town Council has also had Aboriginal representation on previous Councils. Council also has well developed relationships with Aboriginal organisations in the Town.

Programs to encourage Aboriginal people to participate and nominate should be funded.

- 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).

Programs for all young people in urban areas need to be strengthened. Parenting skills also need to be focussed in an attempt to maintain family structures.

4. The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged.

It is more difficult for Aboriginal people living in urban areas to maintain their culture compared to those living a more traditional lifestyle on remote communities and out stations.

Aboriginal people living in urban areas have made their decision to do so in the full knowledge of the difficulty in maintaining culture and it is therefore difficult to see what further encouragement from outside areas would achieve.

The decision to maintain culture is an individual decision, can only come from within and must be respected.

5. Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas.

The very nature of urban areas which have usually formed because of the availability of work or local economic opportunities means that Aboriginal people living there have access to greater employment and job opportunities. They can individually own property and create business opportunities that provide economic independence as is evident with the Jawoyn Association in Katherine.

This can be compared to remote Aboriginal communities where no property is individually owned to allow private sector business

opportunities to develop. Until this is achieved unemployment can only continue to be 90% plus.

6. Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

In Katherine the wait time for public housing is very short. The need for more housing is obvious on the remote communities where chronic overcrowding is evident.

Aboriginal people living in urban Katherine have access to public housing and do not have to be subject to overcrowding.

Schemes should be introduced to allow ownership of housing and with ownership comes responsibility.