

Shops 5 and 6 Baywood Plaza
Francis Mall Palmerston NT 0830
Telephone(08) 89311455
Facsimile (08) 89310945

Ethos House
Casuarina NT 0810
Telelphone (08) 8922 5546
Facsimile (08) 8922 5544
PO Box 42670 Casuarina NT 0811

j
The Hon L Lieberman MI)
Chairman
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Lieberman

RE: SUBMISSION - NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
PEOPLES - COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENT INQUIRY

Please find enclosed a submission from the Indigenous Housing Association Inc. Unfortunately, due to the limited time factor, our submission is rather succinct, and not as detailed as the Association would have preferred. However, it does give some insight into the perennial housing shortages and problems experienced by indigenous people, especially in the Northern Territory.

One of the continuing problems is funding for long term employment. A classic example is at present, the IHA has organised a repairs and maintenance team of nine young indigenous people, who will be apprentices, through the Corporate CDEP program. As the CDEP funding does not match the 1't year apprentice wage, "top up" funding has been organised via the DEWRSB "Step" program. However, there is no surety that after one year, funding from the Commonwealth Department will be forthcoming. Where does this leave the 9 apprentices that our association has commenced? Also, because these young people will be trainees/apprentices, superannuation also has to be paid, however, once again, there are no available funds to incorporate these overheads. The funding from DEWRS13 is only for the "top up" of wages and, consequently, can't be utilised for superannuation and other staff overheads.

It is rather obvious that CDEP, while encouraging a work ethic and giving Indigenous people an opportunity to experience a work environment, and has to have provisions for programs and training schemes, such as the one that our Association is trying to achieve. This particular scheme has never been done in an urban area before, and it is disheartening to say the least. When most training for apprenticeships is over a three period,

how can we offer young indigenous people continuity of training when funding is only offered for one year?
With the increase of young indigenous people eligible to enter the workforce, who are often totally illiterate and ill-equipped and who have not had a "role model" in a working environment, it is imperative that a holistic approach is offered to LONG term training.

The Chair of the IHA and the undersigned would be delighted to elaborate further, and as we are both at the "coal face", and not beaurocrats pontificating, this could assist in finding practical and long term solutions.

Yours sincerely

Sue Shearer
General Manager - IHA

11th October, 2000

SUBMISSION

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

BACKGROUND:

THE INDIGENOUS HOUSING ASSOCIATION INCORPORATION IS A NEWLY FORMED ASSOCIATION WHOSE CHARTER IS TO ADDRESS THE HOUSING NEEDS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE GREATER DARWIN AREA. ATTACHMENT "A" OUTLINES THE ASSOCIATIONS CHARTER.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

- 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.

WHILE THERE ARE NUMEROUS EXISTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ASSIST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WITH THEIR HOUSING NEEDS, NONE ARE EFFECTIVE OR APPROPRIATE FOR THE DARWIN URBAN AREA. AT PRESENT, THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT, VIA ITHANT, IS THE MAIN PROVIDERS OF HOUSING.

AS THE HOUSING REQUIREMENTS HAVE INCREASED DRAMATICALLY IN THE URBAN AREA DUE TO A MIGRATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE TO THE DARWIN URBAN AREA DUE TO SOCIO/ECONOMIC REASONS. INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WHO PREVIOUSLY LIVED IN THE OUTLYING COMMUNITIES ARE MIGRATING INTO URBAN AREAS FOR HEALTH REASONS - I.E. RENAL DIALYSIS, DIABETIC TREATMENT AND OTHER ASSOCIATED HEALTH PROBLEMS. OBVIOUSLY THERE IMMEDIATE AND EXTENDED FAMILY ALSO WISHES TO ACCOMPANY THEIR FAMILY MEMBER, AND OFTEN THEY THEN SET UP "CAMP" IN, COLLOQUIALLY TERMS, THE LONG GRASS.

DUE TO LIMITED EMPLOYMENT AND SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES, YOUNGER PEOPLE ARE ALSO MIGRATING TO THE GREATER URBAN CENTRES. ONCE AGAIN, THESE YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO ARE LIVING IN RELATIONSHIPS WHICH ARE ACCEPTED IN THEIR TRADITIONAL CULTURE, BUT WHICH ARE NOT RECOGNISED IN WESTERN SOCIETY, FIND IT DIFFICULT TO ACCESS ACCOMMODATION DUE TO LEGISLATIVE HOUSING POLICY REQUIREMENTS.

WHILE COMMONWEALTH FUNDING IS GIVEN TO VARIOUS NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, THE BULK OF THE FUNDS ARE ERODED BY ADMINISTRATION COSTS, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO THE HOUSING AREA.

2. WAYS TO EXTEND THE INVOLVEMENT OF URBAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN DECISION MAKING AFFECTING THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITIES, INCLUDING PARTNERSHIP GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY, IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, WOULD BE TO ELIMINATE THE TIERS OF FUNDING - I.E. DIRECT FUNDING TO THE APPROPRIATE SERVICE PROVIDER. EXAMPLES CAN BE DRAWN FROM THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AND VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES. THEY RECEIVE DIRECT FUNDING FROM THE STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS. IN BOTH STATES, POLITICS HAS BEEN IGNORED, AND THE LONG-TERM FUTURE HOUSING NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE TAKEN PRECEDENCE. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS HAVE BEEN SIGNED BY BOTH PARTIES WHO AGREE THAT THE DELIVERY OF HOUSING NEEDS FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IS BEST SERVED BY ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WHICH IN ITSELF LEADS TO SELF DETERMINATION AND EVENTUALLY ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE.

THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, UNFORTUNATELY, IS LAGGING IN ITS APPROACH TO PROVIDE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS TERRITORIANS. THE PATERNALISTIC APPROACH BY THE GOVERNMENT, COUPLED WITH THE POLITICISING OF INDIGENOUS ISSUES, HAS BEEN THE MAIN CONTRIBUTOR TO THE REASONS WHY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARE STILL DISADVANTAGED AND HAVE THE LOWEST HOME OCCUPATION AND OWNERSHIP IN AUSTRALIA.

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)

IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT, IN ESSENCE, GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN THE LAST 30 YEARS HAVE REMAINED FUNDAMENTALLY ASSIMILATIONIST. THUS, IT HAS BEEN ASSUMED THAT IF SUFFICIENT PUBLIC FUNDS WERE DEVOTED TO INDIGENOUS EDUCATION, HEALTH, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS, THEN THE LIVING STANDARDS WOULD INCREASE, AND THE NEXT GENERATION, THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH OF TODAY, SUPPOSEDLY WOULD BE ABLE TO COMPETE DIRECTLY WITH OTHER AUSTRALIANS IN THE LABOR MARKET. THIS IS AND HAS BEEN A COMPLETE FALLACY. RECENT RESEARCH HAS RAISED THE POSSIBILITY

THAT THERE AS NO AUTOMATIC POSITIVE CORRELATION BETWEEN FUNDING AND IMPROVED ECONOMIC STATUS. FOR EXAMPLE, ALTMAN AND SANDERS (1995) SUGGESTED THAT THE RELATIVELY RECENT INCLUSION OF MANY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE WELFARE STATE MIGHT INCREASE THE RISK OF LONGER-TERM ENTRAPMENT, UNFORTUNATELY, THIS HAS PROVED THE CASE. YOUNG INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HAVE NOW BECOME THE 2ND GENERATION OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN WILL NOW BECOME THE 3RD GENERATION OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS.

SOME OF THE SOLUTIONS COULD BE FOUND IN SENATOR BOB COLLINS REPORT ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION - THE SOLUTION FOR HOMELESSNESS COULD BE FOUND IN THE BUILDING OF CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HOUSING. THE CONFORMITY OF BUILDING A THREE BEDROOM DWELLING, AS DOES THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT, WHEN THREE GENERATIONS OF FAMILY ARE REQUIRED TO LIVE IN THE SAME DWELLING, IS NO LONGER APPROPRIATE. CURRENT NT HOUSING RENTAL POLICY IS THAT ONE OR TWO PEOPLE CANNOT RESIDE IN A THREE BEDROOM PROPERTY, THEREFORE THE PROPERTY MUST BE VACATED. THIS IS PROBABLY APPROPRIATE FOR EUROPEAN SOCIETY, HOWEVER, IN INDIGENOUS CULTURE, WHICH IS ALSO HIGHLY TRANSIENT, THE CHILDREN/GRANDCHILDREN VISIT BETWEEN FAMILIES AND IS NOT CONSIDERED "PERMANENT TENANTS". AS IN EUROPEAN CULTURE, WHERE EACH GENERATION IS EXPECTED TO FIND THERE OWN ACCOMMODATION, INDIGENOUS SOCIETY EXPECTS, AND EVEN DEMANDS, THAT FAMILY AS PROVIDED SHELTER INDEFINITELY. THIS POLICY ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO THE HOMELESSNESS OF YOUNG INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, AS THEY ARE OFTEN NOT ALLOWED TO RESIDE WITH, WHAT IS CONSIDERED THEIR FAMILY.

DIRECT FUNDING TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIGENOUS HOUSING PROVIDERS WOULD ASSIST IN ELIMINATING THE HOMELESSNESS AMONG THE INDIGENOUS YOUTH.

4. THE MAINTENANCE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURE IN URBAN AREAS, INCLUDING, WHERE APPROPRIATE, WAYS IN WHICH SUCH MAINTENANCE CAN BE ENCOURAGED.

THIS WOULD BE ADDRESSED BY OFFERING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE APPROPRIATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING. AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, INDIGENOUS HOUSING NEEDS VARY AND DIFFER GREATLY FROM EUROPEAN NEEDS. AS INDIGENOUS FAMILIES ARE TRADITIONALLY BIGGER AND INCORPORATE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, THE TRADITIONAL "THREE BEDROOM" EUROPEAN DWELLING AS ENTIRELY INAPPROPRIATE AND DOES NOT ENCOURAGE TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS FAMILY CULTURE.

5. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE IN URBAN AREAS

THIS ISSUE WILL BE ADDRESSED IN THE YILLI RREUNG REGIONAL COUNCIL SUBMISSION.

6. URBAN HOUSING NEEDS AND THE PARTICULAR PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH URBAN AREAS.

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, WITH THE MIGRATION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FROM REMOTE COMMUNITIES INTO THE URBAN AREA OF DARWIN, APPROPRIATE HOUSING FOR INDIGENOUS NEEDS TO BE URGENTLY ADDRESSED.

AT PRESENT, THE NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT HAS COMMISSIONED A STUDY INTO THE "ITINERANT" PROBLEM OF DARWIN. UNFORTUNATELY, THIS STUDY WILL PROBABLY GATHER DUST AS MOST STUDIES HAVE DONE AND WILL NOT OFFER PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS OR ALTERNATIVES INTO THE HOUSING SHORTAGE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, WHO ARE CLASSIFIED AS ITINERANTS".

ONCE AGAIN, DIRECT FUNDING TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIGENOUS HOUSING PROVIDER WOULD ASSIST IN ELIMINATING WASTAGE AND DUPLICATION OF SERVICES, AND RATHER THAN BUILDING EMPIRES AND PAYING ADMINISTRATION EXORBITANT COSTS, THE MONEY WOULD BE SPENT WHERE IT IS NEEDED MOST, ON HOUSING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE.