

**Kempsey KOORI ARTISTS ABORIGINAL
CORPORATION** **16 Gordon Nixon Ave
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House of Representatives
Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Affairs,

Dear Sir,

While I appreciate that this "submission", is out of time [this being due to the fact that we operate under limited resources and have recently conducted two relatively successful exhibitions], I hope that this letter in lieu of a submission may be at least worthy of your attention.

As the Chairperson of an aboriginal Corporation that has attempted to do what is almost impossible, with a modicum of success, I feel that I AT LEAST AM ENTITLED TO A VOICE IN THE DECISIONS MADE BY GOVERNMENT WITH RESPECT TO OUR PEOPLE.

Kempsey, as you may or may not be aware has the largest aboriginal population in NSW. We are statistically close to representing a quarter of the population. These statistics have been taken mainly from health and CDEP. Figures, as census figures are notoriously unreliable for aboriginal people They can be verified through the Macleay Development Trust on 65623313.

As such we also have the dubious reputation of having the highest youth suicide rate in NSW. , The highest youth unemployment, at %99, we had twenty-two deaths in three months last year, we have the largest operating CDEP. Program [destroying the myth that we don't work because we don't want to].

We also are the town that voted no to giving aboriginal people citizenship; we have no aboriginal person employed in our CBD. and up until 1970 we could not swim in the local swimming pool.

We have %70 [rough estimate] stolen generation between 1930-1970, most of whom have returned to Kempsey.

We are also the town with the greatest number of massacre sights, in NSW. And the last place to conduct initiations. The policy of dispersal twice dispossessed the people here and we are the first town in NSW. To have the council give a formal apology for the stolen generation.

We have roughly thirty-seven aboriginal corporations here as well as the Dhungutti Elders Council, and the Regional and Local Lands Council.

We are proud of Durri Medical Center, possibly one of the most efficient AMS's. On the east coast that has not lost its compassion for the people and has recently had to open its doors to large numbers of disadvantaged non- aboriginal people due to the local medical Center ceasing to Bulk Bill.

If I had any contributing thought to the Senate inquiry it would be one continuing ones, which I have voiced repeatedly. And it is this. In a town which basically represents the future of Aboriginal Australia in NSW. , [%48 of our population is under 15 and the average age here is 15 years], how is it that in terms of aboriginal dollars we get such a small slice of the pie.

Being aware that ATSIC funds are allocated at the conferences where proposals are voted on supposedly according to their merits, we are strictly disadvantaged as we have only two representatives as opposed to places like Newcastle which has six.

The fault is not that we are too disinterested to vote, en contraire, the problem is that we field too many candidates, which scatters the vote.

However in truth were the dollar going where it was most needed, even this should not disadvantage us.

It is my opinion that there has been room made in the structure of ATSIC for unscrupulous men to build kingdoms on the backs of the people. Meanwhile our youth programs go unfunded, our employment strategies cannot get off the ground and as I see it the only dollar that gets into this town ensures that we remain at the bottom of the economic ladder, always training for jobs that will never exist.

Forgive my cynicism, however it is easy to assume that a lot of government programs are simply political exercises rather than a real

attempts at enabling aboriginal Australia to attain at least some degree of self determination.

A case in point is that as the Chairperson and co-ordinator of an aboriginal Arts Corporation, I have discovered that even though many of the artists who sell through the corporation, have done Arts and Culture courses at the local Djigay Center, the aboriginal wing of the TAFE. none have any grasp of business skills, or arts law.

Therefore we have a situation where they are easily exploited, they have little grasp on their copy write rights and have through the very same center been paying %75 commission to the Djigay through the Arts Corporation Gooragen which also holds their copy writes as long as they belong to the corporation. As none of them are actually likely to make a decent living under this arrangement, they will probably continue to go to TAFE. Live on Abstudy and as previously stated stay at the bottom of the social and economic ladder.

While education is a key, there should be someone monitoring as to just how useful this education is and whether it is likely in the long run to lead to employment.

As far as I am aware a sewing class started five years ago, intended to develop a cottage industry within a year is still running and no industry has developed. The emphasis once again has been on the skill of the art form and no business skills have been developed.

Existing business courses in the non-aboriginal TAFE are innapropriate and culturally incorrect, tending to cross the culture through ignorance.

Two students who attempted this course only to abandon it were told to maintain eye contact at all times during business discussions . This is totally inappropriate in aboriginal culture and actually causes offence.

O n the other hand when my corporation approached the Djigay and Kempsey TAFE. To get their assistance in placing two workers in business and arts courses, the TAFE was totally unco-operative, telling one of my young workers that they knew he only wanted to go to TAFE to get his money. Mind you money has to come from somewhere and with so little opportunity for true employment in Kempsey , many people do just study to keep the money rolling in. However if any of these courses truly prepared them for the work

force or enabled them to set up tourist based industry people would not continue to study endlessly.

My husband is the most highly qualified aboriginal welder in town, taking out the North Coast Institute of TAFE.'s National Engineering Award and the Student of the Year for Kempsey TAFE. and the combination of prejudice, economic depression and given that some employers are now saying that he is overqualified, the whole exercise seems to have been a waste of time.

He now works three nights on a CDEP BASED JOB RUNNING A SECURITY PATROL ON THE STREETS. One of these nights is voluntary.

I could be forgiven for thinking that his talent scares prospective employers who are afraid that if they employ him he may rise above them and they may find themselves working for a black boss. Maybe there are those who are enlightened enough in parliament to handle this situation but not in Kempsey NSW where the red neck and the Klan are alive and well.

Therefore in summation I see the answer is in education and in financing Aboriginal businesses seeking to be established on the free enterprise market. Everything that has gone before has simply been a half hearted attempt at satisfying consciences but falls short of actually empowering aboriginal people to take control of their own affairs. Culturally appropriate education is a key, however culturally based does not have to mean over simplified or second rate.

Aboriginal people have different needs when learning because two hundred years is not long enough to eradicate or change our ways. Our ability to commit volumes of facts to memory is evidenced in the oral tradition, which has kept the history of the nations through repetition and remembering. These are not simple memories; they are sometimes exceedingly complex and have to be recounted word for word. We learn through doing, not through being told. Memory is used to record facts and history.

In terms of actually conveying knowledge to aboriginal people the system of respect is of optimum importance. In the old days and even today, no one taught the foolish. That is that those who do know respect never get taught anything of value. All the early years of childhood the main teaching is respect, respect for the elders, respect for the land, respect for each other, how to have a

conversation, to know when to speak, and how to have an open hand. Also we are taught not to think too highly of ourselves [not to big note], and to esteem one another greater than ourselves. Very biblical principles actually.

Thereby we set the stage for true learning, which only comes, as the child becomes a man or women.

Non indigenous education systems are so foreign in emphasis and practice that often our young people get left behind simply because they dont understand the way they are being taught, not the content. Also we never talk down to our children or pull rank on them, as they are our greatest inheritance now that the land is gone. This myth that aboriginal people are somehow primitive in their thinking and therefore have to have concepts simplified for them is an obvious conclusion drawn from the non co-operation of aboriginal students through the years mostly because THEY have considered their teachers ignorant. By the time they attain adulthood and go to TAFE apparently this misinformation has led to courses that are practical rather than academic and unless one is willing to be self taught or is highly motivated enough to pursue excellence whatever the cost, aboriginal Australia has been trained to be eternally dependant on it's white counterparts.

It is hard to believe that any real attempts at empowerment and self-determination are being made. As far as I know I represent the only aboriginal corporation that has an aboriginal financial manager which means that in general we are not even handling our own money in business. Most of the adults I know work without pay many hours in this community to establish programs and incentives for our youth and employment opportunities, attend countless public meetings and invest their own meager resources as very little government funding is forth coming. My own corporation has established itself, run two exhibitions and cut a deal with Novatel Australia to exhibit aboriginal artwork in the foyers of it's hotels without receiving one cent of government funding. The futures of our children rest in employment for their parents and as this seems to be only possible if we make a way for ourselves we have committed ourselves to what would be impossible without GOD. We have made submissions to ATSIC. But as previously stated for a Kempsey based industry this is a dead end street.

I hope these thoughts albeit out of time may be of some assistance to the committee if they are genuinely interested in enabling aboriginal Australia to make the types of contributions to the affairs, future and economics of this country that it is capable of making. As the future of Australia must depend to some extent on our art, our culture, our tradition and our heritage, it would seem false economy not to enable and empower us to make the contribution we are capable of making.

Yours for a new dreaming

Sharon L. Livermore

Chairperson

Kempsey Koori Artists Aboriginal Corporation

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