



# Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

## Chairman, Mr Bob Charles, MP

CANBERRA

25 March 2004

### NEW INQUIRY: INDIGENOUS LAW AND JUSTICE

Federal Parliament's Public Accounts and Audit Committee is to conduct an inquiry reviewing the provision of legal aid services to Indigenous Australians.

The Committee is reviewing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service's Law and Justice Program including its four components of Legal Aid; Law and Justice Advocacy; Family Violence Prevention; and Prevention, Diversion and Rehabilitation—to inquire and report on issues including:

- a) the distribution of the resources of Indigenous legal aid services between criminal, family and civil cases;
- b) the coordination of Indigenous legal aid services with Legal Aid Commissions through measures such as memoranda of understanding;
- c) the access for Indigenous women to Indigenous-specific legal services; and
- d) the ability of Law and Justice program components to recruit and retain expert staff.

The Committee will take into account the 2004 tender for Indigenous legal aid services.

The inquiry grew out of the Committee's statutory responsibility to examine reports from the Auditor-General, in this case *Audit Report No. 13, 2003-2004, ATSI Law and Justice Program*. That audit report is available at [www.anao.gov.au](http://www.anao.gov.au).

Announcing the review, Public Accounts and Audit Committee Chairman, Mr Bob Charles MP, said:

“The Committee regards the provision of legal aid to Indigenous Australians as a very important Commonwealth responsibility.

“The Committee is particularly interested in determining whether Indigenous women have adequate access to legal aid. Also, the Committee intends to determine what impact the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Indigenous Affairs' recent announcement of the tendering of Indigenous legal aid services will have on the provision of legal aid, particularly in remote areas.

“The Committee seeks to offer all Australians interested in the provision of Indigenous legal aid the opportunity to suggest ways this important service can be improved.

“The Committee will be soliciting submissions from all interested parties, including Indigenous legal aid providers as well as community-level groups around Australia.

“In order to listen directly to Indigenous communities, the Committee envisages a program of public hearings in metropolitan centres, rural centres and remote areas.”

The Committee invites public submissions addressing the terms of reference of the inquiry. Information on making a submission is available on the Committee's website. The Committee will consider all submissions and may then invite individuals and organisations to discuss issues directly with Members.

**For media comment, contact Mr Bob Charles, MP on telephone (02) 6277 4775**

For **more information**, contact the inquiry secretary on telephone (02) 6277 4615 or visit the Committee's website at [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/index.htm)

Media Release