



Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Chairman, Mr Bob Charles, MP

CANBERRA

3 June 2004

PUBLIC HEARINGS: INDIGENOUS LAW AND JUSTICE

Federal Parliament's Public Accounts and Audit Committee will begin public hearings next week to gather evidence for its review of the provision of legal services to Indigenous Australians.

The Committee is reviewing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service's Law and Justice Program 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 Committee has scheduled the following dates and venues for an initial round of public hearings:

- **Wednesday, 9 June, Committee Room 1R1, Parliament House, Canberra**
- **Tuesday 13 July, South Sydney Civic Centre, Redfern, Sydney**
- **Wednesday 21 July, Litchfield Room, Parliament House, Darwin**
- **Thursday 22 July, Council Chamber Room, Alice Springs Town Council, Alice Springs**

The Chairman, Mr Charles, said the Committee regarded 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," Mr Charles said.

"Also, we intend examining the service levels to Indigenous Australians 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.

"We are receiving 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 is undertaking 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

Media Release