

Re: Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry New Inquiry - Rural Skills Training and Research

I work as Director of Education Transformations and am working with the Tiwi Land Council to realise their dream of a secondary residential College for Tiwi young people on the islands. Planning is well advanced for a College that will start in February 2006 and be educating and training some 180 students by 2008.

A key motivation for the Tiwi elders to take this bold step is the increasing economic activity on the islands and the lack of participation of Tiwi youth. Tiwi young people have not had opportunity to complete their education for over a generation. The Tiwi understand that without the participation of Tiwi young people in training and employment any income from these new projects will end up as just another form of welfare.

The College needs a strong training programme that focuses on the forestry and aquaculture (areas of acute skill shortage on the islands) as well as the other areas of vital need – health, education, administration and management. Tiwi College is being designed to 'join up' all the elements to provide pathways for Tiwi young people to participate in the wealth generated by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry projects on the islands.

At present a whole-of-government approach is being attempted to assemble the capital needs of the College – and they are considerable. On the Tiwi islands there are some 2200 people with some 350 young people of secondary age that have been denied a secondary education for over 30 years. Savings to government have been considerable (in the order of \$7m per annum currently). The recurrent money that automatically follows the enrolment of students has not been flowing to Tiwi young people. Capital funds are needed to build the classrooms, housing and other infrastructure before young people can be engaged in schooling.

The sustainability of the Tiwi ventures in primary industry depends on the provision of quality trained local people. Yet when we come to seek funds for infrastructure, including facilities for training, we are confronted by programmes that provide a small proportion of the funds required to start up something where there, to date, has been nothing. The Tiwi islands represent a large resource for the Tiwi people and for the nation as a whole. Pathways to a successful future, for Tiwi young people, will depend on the wise use of the land and the resources it can yield. They need the wholehearted support of the Australian government and parliament to ensure the participation of Tiwi people in the economic life of the nation.

Remote Indigenous communities are among the most marginal rural communities in Australia. The Tiwi represent a test case for the nation. Tiwi are committed to the survival of their culture and heritage. They believe education and training are their most vital issues and that they have just ten years to turn things around before they lose this opportunity for good. I am not sure how your inquiry can help or how relevant this issue is to your agenda. The machinations of government are baffling to us up here and we strike seemingly insurmountable barriers at every turn. We are hoping that the New Arrangements in Indigenous Affairs will help break down departmental barriers. We need access to substantial 'start-up' infrastructure funds to train and accommodate these young people.

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Project Officer  
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