



House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Aboriginal  
and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

## Inquiry into Indigenous Businesses

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, chaired by the Hon Lou Lieberman MP, is holding an inquiry into the existing Commonwealth government help for small and medium sized indigenous businesses and joint ventures. The Committee is also looking at possible new ways in which the Commonwealth government can encourage and support these businesses and joint ventures.

The issues that the Committee will examine are described in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry. The Terms of Reference are listed on the right.

The Committee encourages any person, group or organisation with views on the matters in the Terms of Reference to write about them to the Committee ('a submission'). Details on how to make a submission are detailed on the last page.

### Terms of Reference

**'The Committee shall inquire and report on the existing opportunities and arrangements for encouraging sound Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic initiatives at the small and medium business level. In particular, the Committee will focus on:**

- **the success of existing Commonwealth programs that help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including those in joint ventures with non indigenous people) to acquire, control, and develop sustainable commercial opportunities;**
- **possible future policy directions and administrative arrangements at the Commonwealth level to encourage indigenous commercial initiatives;**
- **any barriers to the establishment, acquisition or development of indigenous controlled businesses or businesses in which indigenous people are joint venture partners; and**
- **means of raising the profile of indigenous controlled businesses or businesses in which indigenous people are joint venture partners.**

**The Committee shall also consider State, Territory, corporate and international examples of good practice in encouraging sound indigenous economic initiatives at the small and medium business level. '**

## **Businesses and Joint Ventures**

The Terms of Reference refer to indigenous businesses. Where this pamphlet mentions 'indigenous businesses' it means indigenous controlled businesses and also businesses in which indigenous people are in joint ventures with non indigenous people.

### **Why Have the Inquiry?**

Indigenous economic development is one of the key ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders can reduce their dependence on government funding, increase incomes and gain greater control over the events that affect their lives.

One way of doing this is for indigenous people, groups and organisations to develop businesses. Indigenous people must drive this business activity. However, governments are keen to assist indigenous people in the processes.

### **What is the Inquiry About?**

The inquiry is about providing government assistance, at the Commonwealth level. It is also about making government assistance, as efficient and successful as possible. The goal is to make it easier for indigenous people to start and maintain successful businesses.

The Committee has not made up its mind yet on what any of the major issues will be. The submissions and meetings with people will identify what is important. However, here is a very brief idea of the Committee's early interests in the Terms of Reference.

## **Existing Commonwealth Programs**

There are a number of Commonwealth agencies that have programs to help indigenous people in business. The agencies include:

- ATSIIC (the Business Funding Scheme & the Indigenous Business Incentives Program);
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation; and
- the Indigenous Land Corporation (to a limited extent).

The Committee wants to know how successful the programs are, how well the programs work together, and how they can be made better.

There are also a number of assistance programs for 'mainstream' small and medium businesses. An example is the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme run by DEETYA. Indigenous people and organisations have access to these programs too. The Committee wants to know whether indigenous people have easy access to these 'mainstream' programs.

### **Possibilities for the Future**

The Committee has not yet formed views about possible future policy directions and administrative arrangements at the Commonwealth level. However, the Committee is interested in policies and administrative arrangements that will best help:

- promote the establishment and commercial success of indigenous businesses and joint ventures;

- increase the business skills of indigenous people;
- improve the access of indigenous people to 'mainstream' finance and business services;
- encourage non indigenous businesses to support indigenous businesses;
- maximise the return to indigenous individuals and communities from their involvement in businesses; and
- the accumulation of assets by indigenous people and communities that can be used to create business opportunities.

### **Difficulties for Indigenous Businesses**

The Committee wants to identify any barriers to indigenous involvement in businesses. The Committee is also most interested to find ways of overcoming any difficulties.

The Committee also wants to hear about the experiences of people (indigenous and non indigenous) that have been unsuccessful in establishing or helping to establish indigenous businesses or joint ventures. The experiences of these people will also be important in judging the success of the Commonwealth's programs.

### **Learning from Successful Indigenous Businesses**

The Committee is looking for examples of successful indigenous businesses.

The Committee is particularly interested in the 'lessons learnt' by these businesses. The lessons can be passed on to others.

### **State, Territory, Corporate and International Good Practice**

The Committee will be considering State, Territory, corporate and international examples of good practice in encouraging sound indigenous businesses.

The Committee is particularly keen to hear of the experiences of private sector organisations in encouraging indigenous businesses and establishing joint venture arrangements with indigenous groups.

The Committee also wants to see if indigenous business support schemes from other countries (particularly, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) could be adapted to work successfully in Australia.

### **The Inquiry Timetable**

The Committee would like to receive all submissions by Friday 27 February 1998.

Members of the Committee will visit different areas of Australia to find out first hand about the problems faced by indigenous businesses. The Committee will do this between March and June 1998.

The Committee will then write a report on what it has found. The report will contain recommendations to the Government and will be presented to Parliament. The Committee expects to present its report to Parliament in August 1998.

## How to Make a Submission

The Committee welcomes written submissions from all people and organisations interested in the inquiry. Submissions may be of any length.

It will help the Committee if submissions directly discuss some or all of the Terms of Reference.

The Committee is particularly interested to receive submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, groups or organisations.

The Committee also wants to hear from non indigenous people and businesses that are in or entering joint ventures with indigenous organisations.

The Committee usually makes copies of submissions available to anybody who asks for them. If you want a submission to be kept confidential, you should say so clearly at the top of the submission.

Submissions should be sent to the Committee Secretary before Friday 27 February 1998.

Written submissions should be sent to:

**The Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on  
Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Affairs  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

If possible, please also send a copy of your submission on a computer disk. The Committee can also receive submissions sent in electronic form to the Committee's e-mail address ([atsia.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:atsia.reps@aph.gov.au)).

## About the Committee

The Committee is a permanent Committee of the House of Representatives. The Committee has 14 Members who are all members of the House of Representatives. There are members from the Government and from the Opposition.

### **Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

#### **Chairman**

Hon Lou Lieberman MP

#### **Deputy Chairman**

Daryl Melham MP

#### **Members**

Anthony Albanese MP  
Graeme Campbell MP  
Hon Nick Dondas MP  
Warren Entsch MP  
Hon Clyde Holding MP  
Hon Bob Katter MP  
Jim Lloyd MP  
Hon Peter McGauran MP  
Dr Brendan Nelson MP  
Harry Quick MP  
Tony Smith MP  
Sharman Stone MP

People with questions can contact the Committee Secretary by:  
telephone on (02) 6277 4559;  
by fax on (02) 6277 2219; or by  
e-mail.