

Submission No 60

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Submission

to

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

**Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander communities.**

Focusing on:

1. food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
2. the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
3. the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.

Submitters: Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. on behalf of our members -
Traditional Owners of the Laynhapuy, Djalkarripyungu and
Miyarkapuyngu regions of North East Arnhem Land

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Section 1

Background of Laynhapuy Homelands Assoc Inc.

History, Members & Legal Basis

Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc, also known as Laynha, is a member based association of the Yolngu from the Laynhapuy, Djalkirripuyngu and Miyarrkapuyngu areas of north east Arnhem Land. The clans that make up this membership include;

| | | | |
|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Gupa Djapu | Wangurri | Wunungmurra | Manggalili |
| Dhudi Djapu | Djambarrpuyngu | Dhalwangu | Marrakulu |
| Riratjingu | Gupa Gumatj | Gumana | Golumala |
| Gupapuyngu | Burarrwanga | Dhalwangu | Marrangu |
| Däti'wuy | Gumatj | Munyuku | |
| Ngaymil | Yarwidi | Djarrwark | |
| Warramiri | Gumatj | Madarrpa | |

In the decades prior to 1970, the Yolngu people in the East Arnhem region had been congregated in various missions, the most easterly of which was Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. In April 1972, partly in response to the establishment of the nearby mining town of Nhulunbuy, senior Aboriginal leaders resolved, with their extended families, to move back to their traditional clan lands and sea country over an extensive area to the south-west.

Starting in the early 1970's and working together with the assistance of a development worker from the Mission, the Yolngu cleared their airstrips mainly by hand, and built their early houses using homeland timber and the residents' own labour under the supervision of qualified builders. In 1985, in order to further their wish to live on their country and develop their homeland communities through the provision of service and infrastructure etc., they established **Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. (LHAI)**.

The Association continues to exist because of the strength and benefit Yolngu of the Homelands gain from working together and speaking with one voice to achieve their common objectives.

There are currently 19 homelands of varying size that are associated with and receive support services from the Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. These homelands have a collective population of up to 800 residents during the dry season and about 600-700 during the wet. The homelands include:

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Barraratjpi | Djarrakpi | Rurrangala |
| Barrkira | Galkila | Wandawuy |
| Bawaka | Gangan | Yangunbi |
| Bukudal | Garrthalala | Yilpara |
| Buymarr | Gurkawuy | Yudu Yudu |
| Dhalinbuy | Gurumuru | |
| Dhuruputjpi | Gutjangan | |

The largest of the homelands has a permanent population of approximately 150 people. Three other homelands have population of 70-100 people.

These homelands are based up to 260km from Yirrkala and are spread across an area of 6,500km² including one off shore island.

In late 2008, LHAI commenced servicing a further eight homelands (Donydji, Raymingirr, Burrum, Yalakun, Balma, Baygurrnji, Mirrngatja, Bunhanura) previously associated with Gapuwiyak community for municipal and essential services and housing. The furthest homeland being approximately 400 km from Yirrkala.

LHAI is incorporated under the *Northern Territory Associations Act*. It is a not for profit organisation and has tax status as a Public Benevolent Institution, is income tax exempt, registered for GST and is a Tax Deductible Gift Recipient.

The Association consists of general members, an annually elected Board of Directors that governs the organization, and staff employed by that Board of Directors.

The Laynhapuy homelands are on Aboriginal land held as inalienable freehold title by the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Lands Trust established under the Commonwealth's *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976*. The Association has no statutory or other powers in relation to land use, planning or services.

Organisation Structure and Business Goals

LHAI is organisationally structured around the vision of its founders and strategic priorities.

The Old People's Vision for the Yolngu of the Homelands:

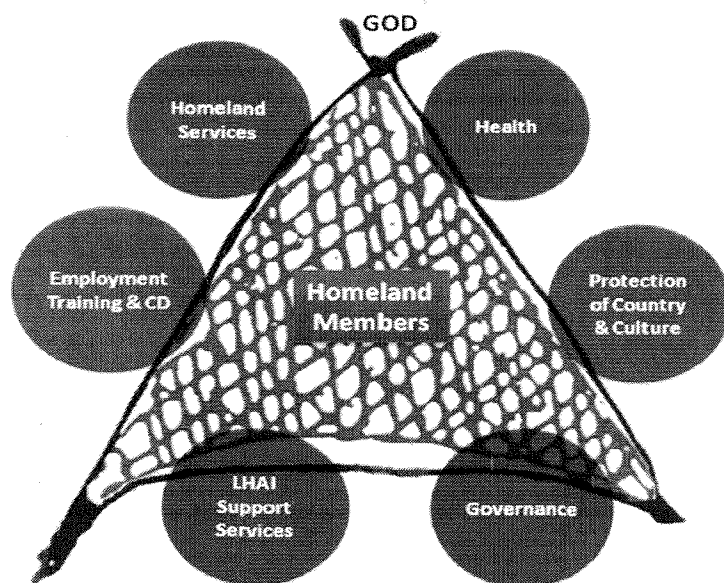
To determine our own future, to manage our own affairs, to become self sufficient so the homeland mala can continue to live in peace and harmony

The old people have charged Laynhapuy Homelands Association Incorporated (LHAI) with the responsibility to provide the structure and support for the development of homeland facilities and service, to maintain the land, the culture and the wanga (homeland centre) for future generations of homeland mala and support them in the achievement of self sufficiency in the management and determination of our future. And to do this by recruiting highly skilled employees with commitment and respect or Yolngu culture who are willing to train and assist Homeland mala to achieve the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to bring about their vision.

Purpose & Mission:

1. To support the Yolngu members of the Homeland communities serviced by the Association through programs that deliver:
 - Maintenance and protection of country and culture
 - Employment, training and economic development opportunities
 - Good standards of communications and infrastructure in homelands; and
 - Good health, social welfare, community development and educational outcomes.
2. To promote, in all of its work, the common good and benefit of its members

LHAI Core Business



LHAI is structured to provide services to support members in the following areas:

1. Protection of Country & Culture
2. Health
3. Homeland Services
4. Employment, Training & Community Development

Governance and Corporate Services support the organization.

Services

The Association has a Resource Centre which administers a range of services to the Homeland communities. The Resource Centre is based at Yirrkala, 20 km by sealed road from the regional centre of Nhulunbuy, and 7 km from Gove Airport.

Some of the services provided by LHAI include the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and training coordination, community and Age & Disability Care Service, Laynhapuy Health Service, essential services maintenance, housing management, Indigenous natural resource management, and development support for homelands.

There are fifteen airstrips, 96 houses, as well as bores, tanks and power supply systems that are maintained. There are also five homeland offices, and 9 homeland clinics or clinic rooms. The Association is also responsible for 540km of minor roads connecting homelands to the major regional road, the Central Arnhem Road. LHAI has a building construction and maintenance and civil works section and mechanical workshop to support its operations.

Since early 2004, five of the Homelands have conducted their day to day business from Community Offices situated in the homelands. These offices are supported by satellite connections and generators and have access to modern communications (phone, fax, internet) and to computer and information technology. Homeland Community Offices have been established in a further three homelands in 2008.

Primary school education is delivered to 5 homelands by the NT Education Department through the Yirrkala Homelands Schools headquartered in Yirrkala. Secondary School Education is carried out at one homeland (Garrthalala) for all Homeland secondary school students. Junior and senior secondary students board at the school alternate weeks. The construction of both the secondary classroom and the boarding facilities were funded by the community/parents from their Isolated Student's Allowance, with Rotary volunteers managing the construction project.

In late 2007 a small Training facility and Visiting Officers Quarters was established at Yilpara Homeland (with Rotary assistance). A further two Training facilities are planned at Gangan and Wandawuy Homelands are planned for 2009.

In 1987 Laynhapuy Aviation Pty Ltd was established, and the Association began providing logistical support and passenger transport by air to our homelands with a helicopter service. This was followed by the commencement of a fixed wing aircraft operation in 1989. It is now a major provider of air charter services to remote communities and homelands throughout the East Arnhem region and is currently operating eight fixed wing aircraft.

A very important development in the Association's work was the auspicing of the Indigenous Protected Area project in 2001 and the subsequent establishment, in 2003, of the Yirrkala Ranger program in response to traditional owners desire to manage their country and to deal with threats to cultural and environmental values. The Laynhapuy IPA Stage 1 was formally declared in September 2006, and the first Ranger Station at Yilpara was completed in 2007. A further Ranger's Station (office only) was established at Gangan in 2008 and a third Ranger Station will be established at Dhalinbuy in 2009.

The map over the page shows the Laynhapuy Homelands Assoc Inc region and the location of the nineteen Laynhapuy Homelands and the boundaries of the Laynhapuy Indigenous Protected Area.

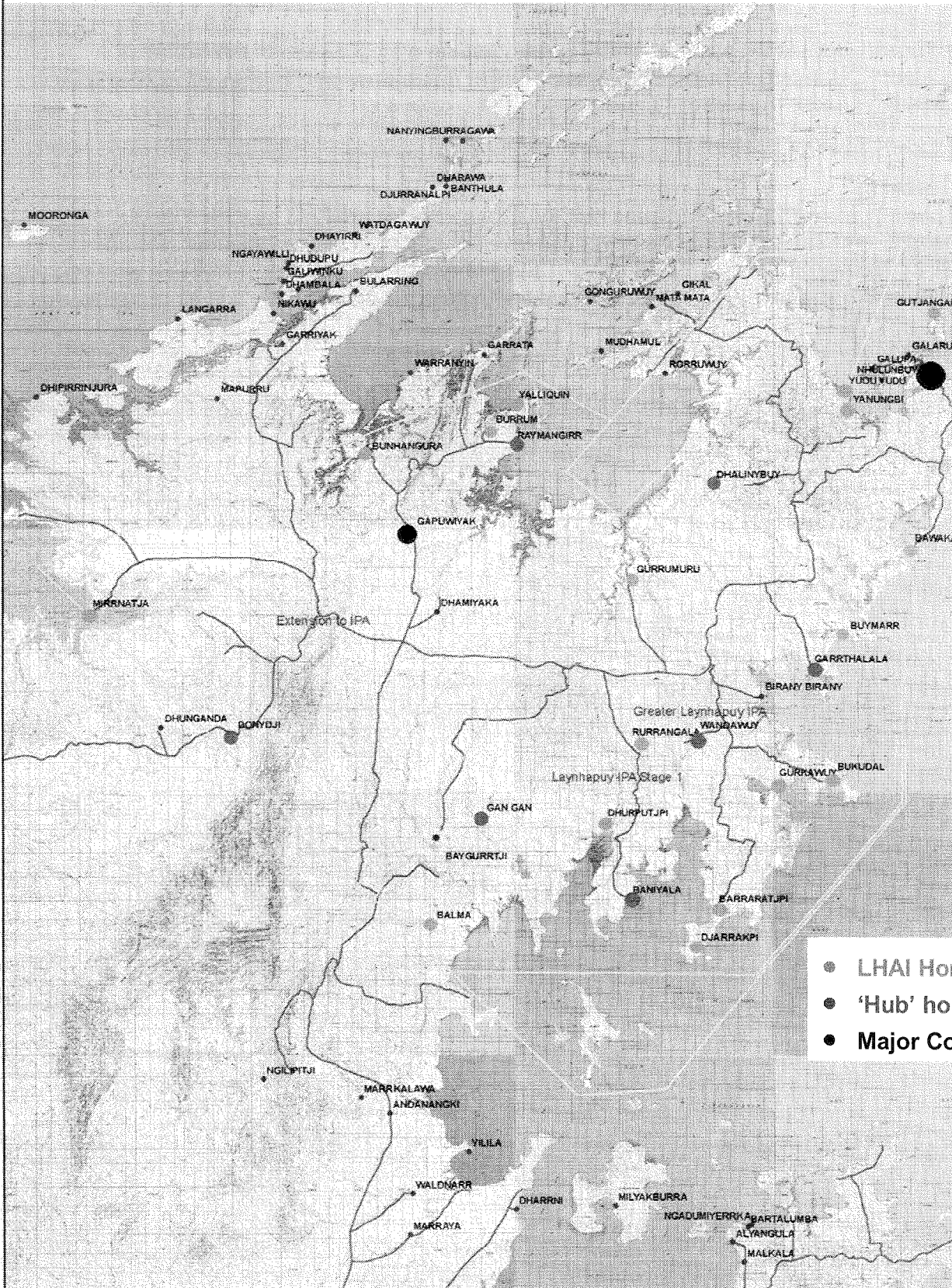
In recent years LHAI has proactively been pursuing a 'hub' model of development – building up the larger homelands where smaller homelands can access services which cannot be made available in smaller more isolated locations.

Staffing

Approximately 75% of all salaried staff positions at LHAI are held by local Yolngu people. Yolngu hold positions at various levels throughout the organisation, including CEO. Yolngu are employed as apprentices in the construction area, as health workers, plant and truck drivers, as administrative staff, project and field staff, and as rangers.

Additionally LHAI manages a further 285 CDEP participants.

Laynhapuy IPA with Proposed Extension



NHULUNBUY
● Yirrkala

- LHAI Homelands
- 'Hub' homelands
- Major Community

Understanding the Homeland Context

Firstly, the Laynhapuy Homelands Association speaks only for the Yolngu of our affiliated homelands. Although our Association's Resource Centre is based in the major community of Yirrkala, we do not speak for that community.

It needs to be understood that the homeland social, cultural economic and service context is very different to many of the major communities.

- Laynhapuy homelands have always been alcohol free.
- Alcohol related violence and anti-social behaviour is virtually non-existent.
- Gambling is not a significant problem in the homelands.
- Substance abuse is not a significant problem in the homelands
- Child abuse and sexual abuse incidents appear to be very rare based on health and police reports.
- Reported crime rates and need for police call outs (other than Access Permit breaches by non-indigenous people) are very low.
- School attendance is better than in larger communities
- Overall health status is better than in large communities.
- CDEP has functioned effectively to keep homeland resident actively engaged in work activities that benefit the welfare of their communities.
- Additionally, most individuals are actively engaged in economic activity through traditional hunting and food collecting activities, and many in the production of traditional arts and crafts.
- Traditional kinship relations, including the care of children, are the foundation of the homeland communities - but these necessarily look different to anglo-centric family relationships of care and support.

In effect, the Laynhapuy homelands are extended traditional kinship communities with well defined social and authority structures. They are comprised of members of related clan groups living on their traditional clan estates, where Yolngu law still provides the basis for understanding social and property relations, interests and responsibilities.

Yolngu speak their own languages first and foremost and English is usually a 3rd or 4th language. English literacy, numeracy and oracy is very variable.

The majority of Yolngu from the homelands do not wish to be 'assimilated' or 'mainstreamed'. They strongly value their culture and law and links to country, and do not regard the fact of their physical/locational or cultural separateness from the mainstream as equating to being 'disadvantaged'. They are however, very frustrated, at the failure of government to respect this choice, and to appropriately support their aspirations efforts over the past 30 years for separate development and self-management through the provision of appropriate infrastructure and services to develop local capacity.

Until 2009 there were no non-indigenous people living permanently in any Laynhapuy homelands. From 2009 two Dept. Education teachers will be housed permanently at the largest homeland, Yilpara, in response to community demands to improve education access.

With respect the issue of stores and food security, the situation is simple. **There are no stores or food service within the homelands, and accessing food and other goods requires significant and very expensive travel for the 800 or so homeland residents.**

Homelands and the NTNER (The Intervention)

Although Laynhapuy Homelands Association's 'resource centre' is based at Yirrkala, a major community targeted by the 'Northern Territory National Emergency Response' (NTNER) legislation, its services are directed at Yolngu people living on the homelands.

The Laynhapuy homelands themselves are within the 'prescribed area' under the NTNER legislation with respect to the:

- Alcohol measures
- Restricted publications measures
- Publicly funded computer measures and control of restricted publications/materials.
- Income management measures
- Community store licensing measures

However, the homelands are outside the 'prescribed communities' and are therefore not subject to:

- 5 year community leases
- Direct oversight/involvement by Government Business Manager.

Of major concern to Homeland communities is the *The MOU between the Australian Government the Northern Territory Government on Indigenous Housing, Accommodation and Related Services, September 2007*. forced through in the wake of the Intervention announcement which essentially prevents homeland communities from benefiting from any of the Australian and Northern Territory Government investment in new indigenous housing and infrastructure.

With the passing of responsibility for homelands to the Territory Government from 1 July 2008, the homelands are basically outside the scope of the Australian Government's investment programs in housing, infrastructure, services, etc. that will be occurring in the major communities.

In this regard it should be remembered that homelands constitute a very significant proportion of the regional population. There are more Yolngu living on the Laynhapuy homelands than in any of the three 'major communities' within LHAI's area of responsibility (ei. Yirrkala, Gunyanggara/Ski Beach, or Gapuwiyak). Across the Northern Territory it is estimated that approximately 10,000 people are resident on remote homelands.

In short, homelands are subjected to many of the more controlling measures under the NTNER, but are unlikely to benefit from any increased Australian Government investment.

Homelands have historically been the responsibility of the Australian Government, and the needs of homeland communities have been clearly identified in funding reports year after year and through the national CHINS survey, NATSIS survey, etc. There currently appears to be no willingness on the part of the Australian Government to accept responsibility for the backlog of infrastructure and housing needs that emerged under its stewardship.

Section 2

LHAI Response to the Terms of the Inquiry.

Most Laynhapuy homelands have small gardens that provide some minimal amount of fruit and/or vegetables, and there continues to be a fair amount of traditional hunting, fishing and food gathering activity. However the supply of healthy and affordable staple foods and other daily household essentials, including fuel, has been a major concern of our members for many years.

There are no 'local' stores serving the population of 800 homeland residents. There is a Woolworths and IGA in Nhulunbuy, an IGA branch in Yirrkala, and an ALPA store in Gapuwiyak. Most homeland residents have to travel well in excess of 100km and up to 260km on unsealed roads, or by light aircraft, to access any of these stores – at very considerable expense.

A return 'shopping trip' by either charter plane or 'bush taxi' can cost up to \$1,400. For people surviving on either welfare payments or low wage employment such as CDEP, on fortnightly incomes of around \$480 or \$12,480 per year, these shopping travel costs significantly add to their financial impoverishment, especially when overlaid by the significantly higher food and fuel costs even in the regional centre of Nhulunbuy. For example, a one way trip from Gangan homeland to Nhulunbuy during the dry is at least 3 hours, and it is inaccessible during the wet. This community of 80 permanent residents has been isolated for 3-4 months of the year, for three decades because of one creek crossing and they are forced to rely on air travel during this period. An appropriate culvert crossing could be installed for under \$200,000 to eliminate this problem.

Historically there has been complete 'market failure' in terms of private sector provision of commercial services into the homelands, and therefore issues of local 'competition', 'quality', 'price' of existing supply, and 'competitive neutrality' of any future alternative supply, etc. are not relevant considerations.

Providing access to goods and services is an issue which LHAI has been working on over the past few years to address in a strategic way. The distances, wet season access, and community size pose particularly difficult logistical and economic challenges that can not be met by either conventional community store or 'bush orders' model. While telephone, fax or on-line ordering are technically possible as most homelands have access to these communications, the barriers relate to language, payment systems, transport/freight from Gove/Nhulunbuy, price of goods, and income poverty. Additionally, there are issues with refrigerated food storage for homeland residents because of either no power in homelands or very expensive power.

During 2008 LHAI undertook a formal feasibility study and has prepared a business plan for a hybrid 'stores and distribution service' which it believes would be financially sustainable provided the hurdle of the initial establishment costs can be overcome. However, the lack of any clear process, and the constantly changing Government policy/program environment, for accessing Government assistance to implement a solution has made it a challenge to progress the project with the limited personnel and resources available.

The Feasibility Study and Business Plan are attached for the Committee's consideration, but it is requested that they be treated as 'Commercial in Confidence', and not be made available in any form to anyone outside the Committee. The Committee may find these documents useful in better understanding the challenges and potential for servicing homelands. LHAI believes these documents outline a commercially viable way forward.

A Short History of Stores in the Laynhapuy Homelands

At various times in the past, a number of homelands have tried to operate very small independent 'stores' run on an essentially voluntary basis by homeland residents. These 'stores' simply resold goods bought in Nhulunbuy at retail prices. They invariably failed because of a combination of factors including:

- lack of retailing and financial skill/knowledge
- cultural pressures
- bookup & cashflow problems
- extremely limited stock
- logistical problems and cost of freight from Nhulunbuy
- lack of access to wholesalers and no buying power
- lack of power, refrigeration, and secure storage.

These operators would have also been unaware of any regulatory or tax compliance requirements.

For a period of about three years one homeland operated a private partnership with a non-indigenous person who lived in their homeland and 'managed' a very small store. Again the store ran into financial difficulties and the 'manager' disappeared with all the store records.

In recent years members have increasingly understood the costs to community stability and functioning, individual health and financial wellbeing of not having access to a functioning a stores service. They have also developed a better understanding of the very real difficulties in sustaining small independent homeland-based initiatives. Consequently there have been stronger demands for LHAI to develop a more strategic solution and develop a centrally run stores business.

In mid 2005, LHAI commenced discussions with the local Indigenous Coordination Centre about Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRA). Stores quickly became the number one community concern. Staffing issues at the ICC resulted in no further action for about 12 months, after which time a consultant was engaged in mid 2006 to put together a formal SRA proposal on behalf of the ICC, because there were not sufficient local ICC staff to progress it. . ICC staffing issues delayed consideration of the Consultant's proposal for another 7 months or so.

Eventually in March 2007 LHAI was advised that SRA funding could not be considered without a formal feasibility assessment being undertaken. So LHAI dutifully applied under the Indigenous S Business Fund (ISBF) program for funding for a feasibility study and business plan. Again several months passed before we were advised of funding. It then took several months before LHAI was able to recruit a suitable consultant, but eventually in early 2008 (3 years after commencement of negotiations with the ICC) the Feasibility Study was commenced followed by the Business Plan.

In the period since commencing this project in 2005 however, there have been five changes in ICC Managers, Outback Stores was established with very significant Govt backing, the NTNER Intervention took place, Shared Responsibility Agreements have been abolished, and the Australian Government's support for homeland development has become more uncertain. Additionally the Australian Government's banning of kava on 24 June 2007, removed virtually all LHAI's discretionary income overnight, and hence our capacity to self-finance such a venture.

In the face of these Government policy and program changes it is now very unclear what if any assistance could be available to LHAI to develop a community controlled stores/food security venture than does not necessarily fit with the Government's preferred model ie. Outback Stores.

The Committee should note that early on in the development of the LHAI 'stores and distribution model' (ie. prior to the Intervention) written advice was received from Outback Stores that servicing homelands was outside their mandate geographically and because there was no existing stores infrastructure to acquire. Consequently we have to date not pursued any possible partnership arrangement with Outback Stores.

It is important that the Committee understand that our members and their homeland communities are fiercely independent, and certainly with respect to any activity that could give an employment or financial benefit to their people, they strongly desire to manage this themselves locally if they can. The next best alternative is for LHAI to manage the activity on their behalf.

To bring in an outside group such as Outback Stores to manage their affairs would be perceived as a loss of independence and contrary to their self-management objectives. This does not necessarily preclude the possibility of genuine partnerships between LHAI and Outback Stores.

It is also important that the Committee note that independent community owned and operated store ventures can be well run and commercially successful. A case in point is the store and 'tucker run' to homelands which is operated by the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) at Maningrida. Like LHAI, the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation is primarily a Homelands Resource Centre. The bulk store BAC established to support the homelands 'tucker run' has now out grown and out competes the more traditional Maningrida 'community store', with significant proceeds being put back into projects to support the homeland members, and significant employment and training opportunities being generated.

How the Lack of Access to Stores/Food Service Impacts on Homelands.

Poverty

Homeland residents have to spend a disproportionate amount of their income on shopping related travel. More money is often spent on travel than on the goods purchased. For people already below the poverty line, this simply further impoverishes them and further disadvantages them in relation to most other life choices that require having discretionary income (eg. housing, vehicles, recreation, material comforts, etc.).

Because both air charters and 'bush taxis' based in Gove must cover the costs of a 'return to base' trip, shoppers usually have to bear the cost of two return trips. A return trip to collect them from their homeland, and a return trip at the end of the day to return them to their homeland. For the more distant homelands this can be up to \$1,400 dollars.

Nutrition & Health

Because so much income is used on travel, much less is available for the purchase of foods.

The modes of travel (small aircraft and bush taxi) also constrain what goods are easily transported. Weight restrictions can limit shopping for air charters, and travel time and rough roads impact on how well perishables, frozen and chilled goods travel by road if packed only in shopping bags.

It may surprise the Committee, but no Laynhapuy homelands had reticulated 240v power prior to 2005 when the first homeland was serviced. Communities of 70 to 150 permanent residents have lived 'on country' for the past 30 years with no electricity. In 2008 two further homelands were serviced with reticulated power. The Committee should note that these are LHAJ owned and operated power systems, and residents do not benefit from any of the subsidy and price equalisation arrangements through the Power and Water Authority available to residents or urban and regional centres or the major communities. Consequently the cost-recovery prices for power are in the order of four times higher per kilowatt hour than available to other Territorians – further adding to the financial burden on homeland residents.

As a consequence of the above, the use of refrigeration for domestic food storage in homelands is relatively new, and still uncommon. This again limits the sorts of foods that can be purchased during a fortnightly shopping trip. It might also be noted that the same freight/transport issues and costs relate to purchase of white goods such as refrigerators.

LHAJ has operated the Laynhapuy Health Service for many years and there are now 6 purpose built clinics on homelands and a further 3 'clinic rooms' in homeland offices.

The Laynhapuy Health Service budget is now well in excess of \$1m per year through OATSIH, but is focussed on primary health care. Nutrition, however, continues to be a major concern of health staff, to the point where they are considering using discretionary medicare revenue to purchase 'emergency food supplies' of non-perishables that they can take to homelands on their regular clinic visits

The Child Health Checks under the NTNER Intervention simply confirmed what was already known. The overriding factors affecting the health of homeland residents include:

- Lack of affordable access to food supply to support nutrition
- Overcrowded housing
- Lack of reliable and affordable electricity supply to enable refrigeration, facilitate food preparation, enable use of washing machines for clothes and bedding.
- Reliable water supply (a problem in only 4 homelands due to age of bores and cost of drilling new bores)
- Lack of ongoing 'living-skills' support programs
- Domestic sanitation (ie. homelands are primarily on pit toilets)

Relevant statistics from the Child Health Checks for the Homelands area for children 0-15 years are:

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Stunting | 4% |
| Underweight | 11% |
| Oral health problem | 83% |

The assessment of our Laynhapuy Health staff is that significantly improved health will only come about when the above issues are addressed, in particular affordable access to nutritious food.

The most chronic health issue identified was oral health disease – closely related to nutrition issues.

Health and Community Services staff at LHAI are involved in 'nutrition' education when resources permit. Thanks to one-off community benefit funding of \$20,000 from Coles, LHAI delivered a nutrition program in conjunction with the NT Dept Health and Community Services nutritionist during 2008. Little long term benefit can be achieved from such activities, unless the issue of affordable supply is addressed.

School, Training & Work attendance

Poor nutrition, consequent ill health and lethargy adversely impact on community participation in education, training and employment directly, but also through community and family disruption resulting from hospital confinements and specialist appointments which take individuals and their 'escorts' out of the community, and the seemingly endless 'sorry business' resulting from premature death from preventable illnesses.

Poor nutrition is also generally understood to interfere with childhood development and learning and attention, thus having generational impacts.

Travel for shopping takes people away from their homelands for a day or more at a time, often interfering in school, training or work attendance.

Social Stability and Exposure to Dysfunction.

The travel required for shopping generally impacts negatively on the stability of homeland communities as it interferes with other responsibilities.

It is also not uncommon for individuals or families to get 'stranded' in the major communities when on shopping trips because either return transport is not available and/or they run out of money and have to wait until next pay or pension day.

This has quite adverse consequences. It contributes to overcrowded housing in major communities, it exposes homeland residents to alcohol and other dysfunction in the major community or regional centre, and results in missed school and work attendance.

The Committee should note that for those on welfare (ie. not CDEP wages) the imposition of Income Management has further complicated matters for homeland residents. Pooling of money for travel and shopping is more difficult to organise because of income quarantining, and access to cards or resolving problems with Income Management requires travelling to Nhulunbuy during Centrelink work hours.

Business Development Potential

LHAI is actively pursuing economic development opportunities with our homelands and in 2009 have used our own funds to employ a 'business development officer' to work with homeland members to develop their micro-business ideas. Government funding for such positions is not available.

The problems with access to food also apply to most other goods as well. So apart from the nutrition and health impacts on people's ability to engage in economic development, there are very real practical issues associated with accessing the goods necessary to support any business activity - largely because of the freight/distribution issue.

The stores and distribution model developed by LHAI would have capacity to address these needs in addition to the issue of food and daily essentials supply through developing the appropriate synergies.

Conclusion

Laynhapuy Homelands Association hopes the above information will assist the Committee to better understand the situation and needs of homelands in relation to this important issue of food supply.

LHAI neither has direct experience of 'community stores', private models, or the Outback Stores model.

The issue of food supply and stores is however very important to our members. But it is not just about food, nutrition and health – as critical as these are. Stores are seen as an expression of self-management, and an opportunity for business development, employment, training and empowerment by our members.

It is not clear that the Outback Stores model could be modified to accommodate the challenges posed by the homeland context (distance and access, economies of scale, lack of store infrastructure, etc), or whether LHAI's members would be willing to give up their aspirations of self-management and economic development and hand this responsibility over to Outback Stores.

What is apparent is that the needs of our homeland members for reliable and affordable supplies of quality food must be addressed, but there is also no clear or quick way to get assistance from Government to progress a solution.

The private sector has not met the challenge in the past 30 years, and there is no reason to think that situation will change in the future.

A community owned stores and distribution operation, professionally managed on a viable commercial basis, still looks to be the best way forward.