



**INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES
COORDINATION TASKFORCE**

CAPACITY BUILDING INQUIRY Submission No 40

Barry Wakelin, MP
Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Wakelin,

I am writing to advise you of the activities of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT) and apologise for not being able to meet your earlier closing date.

The ICCT has been established as part of Commonwealth's approach to a new Council of Australian Government's initiative in Indigenous affairs to improve the coordination of government services and policy making that impacts upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The attached submission provides more detail.

This new approach is founded on a shared responsibility between government and communities that is designed to support the restoration of responsibility to the people in those communities. An important part of the process will be that government and Indigenous communities will clearly identify their expectations and the outcomes they are seeking and how they will measure progress towards these outcomes.

In particular, an integral part of the process is the recognition that as people assume responsibility for managing their own affairs they may need to build their capacity and the capacity of their community. Government assistance can play a crucial role in this regard providing if it can support the identified needs of a community. Equally, there is recognition of the necessity to build the capacity of Commonwealth and State government agencies to work in a more coordinated way to improve policy-making, program development and service delivery in conjunction with communities.

Feedback between government and community on issues that need attention and actions taken to address them will be central to the success of this approach. Any activity undertaken as part of this initiative will only occur subject to the willingness of a community to be involved.

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES COORDINATION TASKFORCE
PO Box 25 Belconnen ACT 2616 ph 026264 4940

At the Commonwealth level a number of mechanisms have been put in place to ensure progress with this new way of working. I look forward to updating the Committee about the work of the Taskforce and to provide details of the communities participating in this initiative once agreement has been reached with them and with relevant State and Territory governments. Should you require further information please telephone me on 6264 4941 or Michelle Patterson on 6264 4942.

Yours sincerely



for

Dianne Hawgood
Executive Director
Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce
24 September 2002.

Submission of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs:

Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities

1. INTRODUCTION

This purpose of this submission is to inform the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and its current Inquiry into *Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities* of the Commonwealth's involvement in a new approach - with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Commonwealth Government has agreed to work closely with State and Territory Governments in a number of Indigenous communities and regions to provide programmes and services in a more coordinated and flexible way based on priorities agreed with communities.

The initiative is part of the Government's aim of improving the way all governments work with Indigenous communities.

The core element of the new approach is based around shared responsibility: that is the responsibility of governments to sensibly and effectively meet the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities and the responsibility of Indigenous communities to identify needs and sustain activities funded to meet those needs.

The origins of this initiative follow from the April 2002 decision by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to identify up to ten Indigenous communities to participate in a whole of government approach to improve service delivery, subject to the willingness of communities to participate.

Since then, the Commonwealth and State and Territories have been meeting to develop the initiative and to identify the communities for initial focus. The criteria for identifying communities or regions for the shared responsibility initiative are:

- community readiness and willingness to engage;
- existing Commonwealth and State/Territory involvement and support;
- assurance that any new or different arrangements introduced in working with government will not place undue demands on a community; and
- likely sustainability of the initiative.

These discussions are quite advanced and formal sign-off at the COAG level and with communities is anticipated to begin one jurisdiction at a time, from late September.

Details of the communities to be involved in the new approach will be announced shortly.

A focus on Capacity Building

While capacity building in Indigenous communities is an integral component and priority issue for this initiative, it is not an objective - for its own sake. Every step of the way, the capacity of Indigenous people and communities to engage with governments and their representatives is critical to the success of this new approach. As is the capacity of individuals and communities to sustain an activity once it is agreed and funded. Where capacity is needed, building capacity will be a parallel focus of the new approach.

Importantly the capacity of governments to work together and to deliver programmes and services innovatively and flexibly is a capacity building issue for us. This will also be addressed in parallel with developing the new approach.

This submission

This submission outlines Commonwealth activity and the role of the ICCT in this initiative. The major Commonwealth elements of this initiative include:

- a Commonwealth Ministers Group on Indigenous Issues;
- a Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues;
- the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce; and
- a concept of lead-Secretaries and lead Commonwealth agencies.

2. COMMONWEALTH 'WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT' INVOLVEMENT

Ministers Group on Indigenous Issues

Commonwealth Ministers with responsibility for Indigenous policy and/or program issues meet regularly to discuss matters of common interest. Ensuring better coordinated government support for Indigenous people is a primary focus for this group. The Chairman of ATSIC attends the Minister's meetings when available.

Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues

A number of Departmental Secretaries, the ATSIC CEO and a Deputy Secretary from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet participate in a Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues that meets monthly. Members of the Group are:

Bill Farmer, Secretary DIMIA (Chair)
Peter Shergold, Secretary DEST
Jane Halton, Secretary Health and Ageing
Mark Sullivan, Secretary DFACS
Peter Boxall, Secretary DEWR
Ken Matthews, Secretary DOTARS
Roger Beale, Secretary EA
Wayne Gibbons, CEO ATSIC
Jeff Whalan, Deputy Secretary PMC

The role of the Secretaries Group is to oversee progress of the new approach. The specific terms of reference for the Group are:

- oversee the development of whole of government activity across Commonwealth agencies, and the Commonwealth response to the COAG agreement to trial a whole of government approach;
- promote coordination between Commonwealth agencies in addressing Indigenous issues;
- oversee development of linkages between Commonwealth and State and Territory programs that improve service delivery to Indigenous communities; and
- foster cross-portfolio partnerships to develop and deliver targeted initiatives to address Indigenous disadvantage.

A number of Secretaries on the Group will sponsor, or champion, one of the Indigenous communities or regions participating in the new approach - Secretaries are personally involved in ensuring progress in their relevant communities and across this initiative.

Secretaries from other Departments may be asked to join the Group from time to time.

Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce

A small Taskforce has been established by the Secretaries Group to lead joint activity across Commonwealth agencies and to work with the Indigenous communities that have agreed to participate in this initiative, together with State and Territory Governments.

Members of the Taskforce are drawn from the participating agencies. The Taskforce reports directly to the Secretaries Group. On a day to day basis the head of the Taskforce reports to the Chair of the Secretaries Group.

Specifically, the Taskforce is responsible for:

- identifying the Indigenous communities or regions that will be invited to participate in the new approach, in conjunction with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and State and Territory Government representatives;
- jointly with State/Territory Government representatives, approaching the communities to determine willingness to participate in the initiative;
- establishing a data base with a detailed profile of each community involved;
- leading the initial Commonwealth involvement at community level;
- supporting the Secretaries Group generally and supporting the Secretaries in their sponsorship roles;
- drawing in lead agencies for each community/region that will take over the lead role in coordinating activity in those communities/regions;
- monitoring Commonwealth involvement at community level when the lead agencies take up their coordination roles; and
- developing a performance measurement and evaluation framework in conjunction with communities and including a direct and regular feedback mechanism between community and government.

The Taskforce began operation in May 2002 with two staff. Eight staff are now (recently) on-board.

The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OATSIA) provides general support across all activity.

4. RELATIONSHIPS WITH STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENTS

Commonwealth and State and Territory Government officials are working together at all levels under this new approach to ensure as coordinated an approach as possible for the Indigenous communities involved.

In some States the Commonwealth has been invited to sit on Chief Executive Officer forums to enhance cooperation and effectiveness. Where the invitation has been extended the sponsor Secretary in that State will be the Commonwealth member and will attend meetings when possible. Alternatively, a senior member of the Taskforce will attend.

Senior Taskforce representatives meet regularly with senior State and Territory Government officials, predominantly with representatives from Departments of Premiers/Chief Ministers and Aboriginal Affairs portfolios, but also with a wider range of officials as appropriate.

5. PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Sustainable improvements in the circumstances of many people in Indigenous communities will not occur overnight and the Commonwealth is committed to a long term approach. Indeed, government and communities will want to measure outcomes along the way and be able to quickly make changes and respond differently where necessary.

The performance measurement and evaluation of this initiative will be an integral part of the consultative and then planning phases with prospective communities, partners and joint venturers. The collaborative approach underscoring this initiative requires that performance measurement does not impose an extra burden or barrier to outcomes on communities and that outcomes are mutually agreed with communities.

The Taskforce is developing a framework to performance measurement and evaluation that will provide a guide to communities, Commonwealth and State government agencies on the Commonwealth's expectations under this initiative.

The measure of impacts and progress in communities will be developed with communities and be captured in local agreements with communities. These will depend on the issues confronting the community and be based on the outcomes that people in the community wish to achieve. An important part of the process will involve both government and the community clearly articulating their expectations of each other at the start and ensuring regular feedback throughout.

There will also be a set of indicators to measure the performance of Commonwealth agencies. This will include identifying factors that assist better coordination between Commonwealth agencies and between Commonwealth and State/Territory Government agencies, specifically in relation to breaking down barriers and silos and affecting cultural change at all levels of Commonwealth agencies where work has a particular impact on Indigenous Australians.

6. VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS AND THE CORPORATE SECTOR

Volunteer Organisations are already working on the ground in a number of Indigenous communities. Some have offered their assistance in supporting capacity building activity in communities.

Commonwealth Ministers have indicated their interest in involving the volunteer sector in appropriate ways, subject to community views.

The Taskforce has already organised a forum for volunteer organisations that was held on 28 August to discuss possibilities for their involvement, obtain their views and feedback about this initiative, ideas about what assistance they could provide and how their involvement might best be coordinated.

Contact is also being made with key corporate organisations that are already active in the area of Indigenous affairs to brief them about this initiative.

7. Shared responsibility and capacity building

The new approach is based on a shared responsibility between government and communities, which supports the restoration of responsibility to the people in those communities.

The Government is committed to working with communities in a way that shares responsibility between all parties for improving the circumstances of people in those communities. The Government is responding to feedback from communities that lasting change will only occur if government and communities work together in equal partnerships and in ways that restore responsibility to Indigenous people in Indigenous communities.

The work is building on the many positive things that are already happening in Indigenous communities where people have assumed responsibility for managing their own affairs and where government has been able to respond in a way that supports what the community has set out to do. The Government is keen to build on those successes.

An important part of the process is that government and Indigenous communities will clearly identify their expectations and the outcomes they are seeking from working together and how they will measure progress towards these outcomes.

Equally important is the recognition that before people can assume responsibility for managing their own affairs they may need to build capacity within their community - and be empowered to do so.

Regular feedback between government and community on issues that need attention and actions taken to address them will be integral to the success of the new approach.

Initial feedback from communities, non-government agencies and government agencies confirms that a priority under this initiative is to build the capacity and coordination between government agencies and streamline the whole-of-government responses and engagement with communities. Considerable care is being taken to build the linkages not only between the communities and government but also between government agencies and the different spheres of government.

As we move into the community consultation phase of this approach we anticipate learning more about the kinds of community capacity building that will most be needed shared responsibility to work. Of course this is likely to be different in every community and our approach will be tailored and long term.

We would be pleased to continue to brief the Committee in relation to this initiative and our work if the Committee would find that useful.