

## Introduction

- 1.1 Across Australia there are approximately 1 112 discrete remote or very remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Of these, 947 communities have a population of less than 100. At the time of the 2006 census, there were around 175 stores operating in remote Indigenous communities in Australia.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2 Often a community store is the primary source of food and other goods. Food is transported across great distances and in extreme temperatures which adds to the complexity and cost of delivery, in particular for perishable foods.
- 1.3 Over the last few decades lifestyle conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease and obesity, have become more prevalent in remote Indigenous communities. In addition Indigenous children up to the age of four are 30 times more likely to suffer from nutritional anaemia or malnutrition than non-Indigenous children.
- 1.4 The local store has the potential to play a pivotal role in improving the social, economic and health outcomes of remote Indigenous communities. While community stores represent an opportunity to lead change and there are positive examples of stores that provide a wealth of services, training and health benefits, these successes are scattered. Given the importance of the local community store, more can and must be done to ensure these stores meet the needs of the communities they serve.
- 1.5 It is the Government's role to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people along with non-Indigenous Australians living in remote areas of Australia have access to a secure food supply and services that are adequate to support their health and well-being.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), *Submission 62*, p. 12.

- 1.6 The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) noted in its submission the following definition for food security:

...when all Indigenous people in remote communities, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.<sup>2</sup>

- 1.7 The Department of Health and Ageing coordinates the promotion of nutrition and healthy eating initiatives and has recognised that good health for Indigenous Australians is more than simply a matter of access to nutritional foods:

Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is not just about improving the physical wellbeing of an individual; it is about working towards the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.8 Fred Hollows Foundation provided insight into the cultural and economic importance of the store for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

Those communities were historically ration places and now they are stations. They fought hard to get that land back and to have the right to have that land. They fought hard to get a store building. It would have been 40 or 50 years ago where we work. They are very proud of running their store. They do seek to improve their knowledge, practice and skills in running the store, and more support should be given in that regard.

You need to have a philosophical approach to stores. You need to have a look at an Indigenous approach to the store as not just a store in that community. It is a gathering place. It is a place where people can practice their governance, meet and talk about what happens in that store and what they sell. They also do a lot of services and community activities through the store, so you need to change your mindset from the non-Indigenous thinking of what a store is to what an Indigenous person living in a community thinks.<sup>4</sup>

---

2 FaHCSIA, *Submission 62*, p. 3; *Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action*, November 1996.

3 Department of Health and Ageing, *Submission 72*, p. 2.

4 Tania McLeod, Senior Coordinator-Governance, Fred Hollows Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, Darwin, 22 July 2009, p. 104.

## Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.9 On 4 December 2008 the Committee accepted terms of reference from the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to inquire into and report on the operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 1.10 In particular, the Committee was asked to report on:
- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues,
  - the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models, and
  - the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.
- 1.11 The Committee has examined a range of issues relevant to the role of the store in remote Indigenous communities including governance models, food supply, quality and cost, competition issues, store management and the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of remote Indigenous communities.
- 1.12 The Committee received 112 submissions from a wide range of sources including Commonwealth, state and territory government departments, store owners, store managers, freight providers, health experts and providers, individuals living in remote Indigenous communities, academics, and Indigenous representative organisations. A list of submissions and exhibits received is at Appendix B.
- 1.13 The Committee conducted 28 public hearings in Canberra, Darwin, Alice Springs, Broome and in remote areas of the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia. A list of public hearings is at Appendix C. The Committee visited and inspected stores in 17 remote Indigenous communities. A brief summary of remote community visits is at Appendix A.
- 1.14 The Committee thanks the Indigenous communities it visited for their hospitality and the welcome received to the land and the communities. The Committee also notes the commitment of these communities to ensuring the success of their local store and the Committee was privileged to meet with many inspiring and dedicated community leaders and professionals working in remote areas.
- 1.15 Submissions received and transcripts of evidence can be found on the Committee's website:  
[www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/communitystores/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/communitystores/index.htm)

## Structure of the report

- 1.16 There is a range of factors that impact on the successful operation of a community store. As each community varies, so do its particular needs and the context within which the community store operates. The Committee recognises that, while there is no simple recipe for success, there are a number of initiatives which would greatly assist communities and store managers to achieve the best outcomes appropriate to each area.
- 1.17 This report discusses the need for flexible community store models to address the needs of individual communities. Indigenous communities are varied and unique and a community store must appropriately respond to the population size, the history of store management and ownership in the area, the cultural framework, the geographical location and environmental conditions, and the local economic and social capacity of the community.
- 1.18 Essential to improving the widespread operation of community stores is a clear appreciation of the role they play within remote Indigenous communities, and the great variation that appropriately exists across communities in how stores are owned and managed. Accordingly Chapter 2 outlines how community stores function as much more than a shop in remote communities, and the range of ownership and management models.
- 1.19 Chapter 3 discusses the health outcomes of Indigenous peoples and how healthy produce promoted and sold in stores can contribute to healthy communities.
- 1.20 Chapter 4 examines logistical difficulties in delivering fresh and quality produce in remote communities, and infrastructure and storage issues. Different purchasing and supply models are considered, along with opportunities to increase local production.
- 1.21 Chapter 5 details the higher cost of living experienced by those living in remote areas, and the impact of these costs on health outcomes. The chapter considers possible mechanisms to redress these financial and health costs.
- 1.22 Chapter 6 discusses the governance of community stores, outlining the importance of good governance, governance models, cultural protocols, regulatory obligations, and improvements to the required oversight and support of stores.
- 1.23 Chapter 7 discusses the future of remote community stores across Australia and comments on the Outback Stores model and the proposal for a national licensing scheme.