

Ramingining Homelands Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation

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Submission to

Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

BY: ATSLA



On

Community Stores in Remote Indigenous Communities

Ramingining is about 600 km east of Darwin on the edge of the heritage-listed Arafura Swamp in eastern Arnhem Land. The Community was established in the early 1970s, following the movement of a number of Yolgnu clan groups from nearby Nangalala. It became Aboriginal land with the declaration of the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976.

The Ramingining Homelands Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation (RHRCAC) is an Incorporated Aboriginal Association made up of approximately 265 members who are residents of the 10 main homelands surrounding Ramingining. It was established in 1991 to improve the welfare and promote the development of these residents.

The RHRCAC arranges for the provision and maintenance of employment, housing, health, communication, and other essential services to the Homelands. Increasingly, the Corporation's activities are becoming focused on enterprise development and the promotion of economic independence.

In Ramingining there is a school, a clinic, an Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) store, and the Bula Bula arts centre that are all accessed by the Homeland residents. The RHRCAC also operates a small 'garage type' convenience store and is the outlet for retail fuel sales to the Ramingining community. The East Arnhem Shire – Ramingining office is also located in the Community.

Whilst Ramingining is accessible by road (4WD) and air, most roads to the community are closed during much of the wet season. Travel time by road to Darwin (in the 'dry') is approximately 8 hours, as it is to Nhulunbuy also.

Ramingining has a sealed, all-weather airstrip, but has no direct service to either Darwin or Nhulunbuy. These services depart from, and arrive at the island of Milingimbi. To connect with these flights residents must either travel by small

private boat or by small aircraft charter from Ramingining to Milingimbi. The cost of this 10 minute Ramingining to Milingimbi flight is currently \$240 one way.

There is a weekly freight barge service from Darwin to Ramingining via the Dhabila Landing located 32 kms from Ramingining over a dirt road. This service delivers all goods for the community, including dry, chilled and frozen food for the two stores, and fuel. There is little competition for this barge services and it is provided by one large Darwin based company.

As with all remote communities the biggest problem with both the ALPA and the RHRCAC stores is the cost of transporting grocery goods to Ramingining. The higher than average cost of food in Darwin is exacerbated by the transport costs levied by the barge service, and the cost of bringing the goods from the barge landing to the community; 32kms over dirt road that needs constant maintenance grading and degrades during the wet season.

Coupled with this is the fact that in order to meet barge loading deadlines all goods have to be at the barge marshalling area ready for loading some five to seven days before it is finally delivered to the community. This ensures that 'fresh' food is really not that fresh when it is finally received at the local stores.

These problems of cost and delivery times for food and fuel for the stores would be ameliorated by the construction of an all weather road linking Darwin with the remote communities of Arnhem Land, including Ramingining. Such an initiative would decrease the transport times for delivery by days, and while the RHRCAC has not undertaken a cost analysis, it is assumed that the cost of road transport would be less than the cost of barge transport.

As an alternative, the Committee may wish to consider recommending to Government that a subsidy be paid to help offset the cost of transport, and/or investigating ways of increasing competition for the barge service for delivery to remote coastal communities in Arnhem Land.

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