

Copley & Marree Community Members

To Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

RECEIVED
23 FEB 2009

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RE: Submission to the inquiry into Remote Community Stores in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Communities.

We are a group of Aboriginal women working in our communities as health workers community workers and Community Foodies (volunteer peer education around nutrition). We come from Copley and Marree in South Australia. Copley is 550 kms north of Adelaide and Marree 700 kms north of Adelaide.

We would like to take this opportunity to provide the below information to the Enquiry into Remote Community Stores in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Communities. We very much appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns and issues with food supply to our communities.

Food Supply

- Food supply is inadequate; it does not provide enough healthy foods for the population of the town.
- Marree receives one food delivery truck per week.
- Leigh Creek, which also services Copley (5kms) and Nepabunna (70kms) has two food deliveries per week.
- Marree food is packed in Adelaide and travels over 800 kms via several other townships, where the truck is opened and the cold chain may be broken.
- Cost of freight over unsealed roads is significantly higher per km than on sealed roads.
- Marree, Copley and Leigh Creek each have one store. Options are very limited in Marree and Copley, which have small stores and Leigh Creek being a small supermarket.
- Therefore between store competition does not contribute to pricing.
- The delivery truck is unreliable, and is often seen broken down causing delay in fresh food delivery.
- Because fresh food is in limited supply and delivery days do not coincide with pay days, people on low incomes often miss the opportunity to purchase fresh foods as these are sold out within days.

- Marree is a very arid environment, and it is too hard to grow our own vegetables and fruits. Our water is of poor quality (high in salt) and our soils are also very poor (saline and hard cracking clay).

Food Quality

- The fresh fruit and vegetables usually arrive in the store in good condition but it does not last until pay day when often it is of poor quality, bruised, brown, wilted, soft/overripe.

Food Cost

- Food is too dear at Marree and at the Copley store. Items are up to 2-3 times the cost in Pt Augusta (the closest regional centre). This is our information, and we would like it backed up by a Market Basket Survey.
- Fuel is also very expensive and there is no local transport between towns for any purpose (shopping, or accessing health services). Many households do not have a car and are therefore unable to travel to do their shopping at a bigger centre.
- If able people from Nepabunna, Copley and Marree prefer to shop in Leigh Creek or Port Augusta where prices are lower and quality is better.

Water Supply

- Town water supply in Marree and Nepabunna is not-drinkable. SA Water have provided Marree residents with a letter saying that the water is unsuitable for drinking, cooking, bathing, cleaning teeth. People must have rainwater tanks.
- During drought times households run out of rainwater.

Private Store Ownership

- All these stores are private businesses run for profit. There is not a focus on providing adequate food for the community.

Impacts

- In our culture we have an obligation to share and care for our extended family. Food is always shared among family, and extended family. This makes it hard to make the weekly/fortnightly shopping last between food deliveries.
- There are many large low income families in our communities, food prices, makes it hard to make the weekly or fortnightly shopping last between food deliveries.
- Because fresh food is in limited supply and delivery days do not coincide with pay days, people on low incomes often miss the opportunity to purchase fresh foods as these are sold out within days.
- We have many low income large families and high prices make it difficult to buy healthy choices such as lean meat, fresh veggies and fruit. This means that we buy cheap foods that 'go around', such as tinned and frozen foods, whatever is cheap or on special (tends to be fatty food).
- Marree - Inadequate Electricity Supply - town generator, frequent break downs especially in summer, can lead to food going off.
- Electricity costs, and high demand (Air conditioning, refrigeration and freezers) affects food budget and storage.
- Shopping for fresh foods in a regional centre, requires appropriate storage facilities limiting the quantity of fresh foods that can be transported home, (300-400kms) for example 4 large families sharing the cost of car fuel to Pt Augusta are not able to keep all their food cool to transport it home as you can't fit 4 big eskies in one small car.

- For children that travel on the school bus, if there is no food for lunches our kids will miss school; the older kids will go hungry rather than miss school.
- Some stores have a 'book-up' system that is ok for people that can budget, and not ok for some other people. Some people have 'snow-balling' debt and the book-up system has become intergenerational.
- We make as much use of bush tucker as we can, but to get kangaroo meat we need a good car, gun and licences, fuel and bullets....good quality meat but not always cheap.
- Our people are dying too young from chronic diseases – this is a BIG issue for us. We know we need to eat healthier, but we can't afford it and food is too dear. We cannot afford 2 fruit and 5 vegetable serves per person per day in our household.
- When the food and money get low, the foods that stretch to the end of the week are: \$10 hot chips, Corned beef curry, bread and sauce, damper fried in fat with vegemite/jam – this is our left over culture from the ration days.

Some Solutions

- We would like the enquiry to commission a market basket survey in our communities so we know the real differences in food prices between regional and remote stores.
- Assistance with energy/electricity savings and power management
- Support for local stores to subsidise healthy foods by increasing costs on 'junk foods'.
- Assistance with making agreements with store owners for community members to bulk buy to reduce costs to families and support our store's viability.
- Request Centrelink to encourage/support people to change their pay days to the some day the food truck delivers to the community.

We request that the enquiry include the communities of Copley and Marree within this inquiry to assist us with providing healthier food to our communities at an affordable cost.

Yours Sincerely, on behalf of the Marree and Copley communities,

Colleen Roberts &
Family

Yvonne Brady
Chairperson,
Aroona Aboriginal Council,
Copley

Monica Brady

Gladys Dodd,
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