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Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
submission to the

Submission No 80

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander Affairs inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait communities**

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (the committee) has invited the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) to make a submission to its inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities. The committee is asking for submissions that present views on any or all of the terms of reference.

**The committee's terms of reference**

The committee shall inquire into and report on the operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, with a particular focus on:

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

The committee is also interested in more information about programs that support traditional Indigenous practices in areas such as fisheries, horticulture and trade, which may have an impact on the health and economic outcomes of Indigenous communities.

**The department's response**

While the department does not have direct involvement in the operation of community stores, a number of portfolio programs contribute directly and indirectly to the health and economic outcomes of communities. We provide an overview of these programs overleaf.

## **Departmental program overview**

The department's role is to develop and implement policies and programs that ensure Australia's agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry industries remain competitive, profitable and sustainable.

The department is committed to enhancing relationships with Indigenous Australians and ensuring that the diverse needs of Australian communities are represented. An aim of the department is to improve the attraction and retention rates, and the development, of Indigenous employees and to make programs more accessible to Indigenous stakeholders. This will ultimately enable Indigenous Australians to create and share in the benefits of competitive, profitable, secure and sustainable agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry industries.

As well as taking part in and/or supporting whole-of-government initiatives, the department is responsible for a number of programs and initiatives that relate specifically to Indigenous Australians, including:

- Australia's Farming Future
- Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy
- Indigenous Aquaculture Strategy
- Torres Strait Island Fisheries (Protected Zone Joint Authority)
- National Indigenous Forestry Strategy
- employment and training-related programs, including the National Indigenous Cadetship Project
- Landcare Sustainable Practices (under Caring for our Country)
- whole-of-government initiatives.

## **Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) activities in the Torres Strait and the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy**

AQIS is responsible for the quarantine management of the movement of people and goods from the outer Torres Strait Islands (Protected Zone) to the southern Torres Strait Islands (Torres Strait Special Quarantine Zone) and to the mainland from either of these zones.

AQIS employs staff on all inhabited islands of the Torres Strait Protected Zone, on Horn Island and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and at Bamaga and Weipa on Cape York Peninsular. Currently, 26 AQIS staff are employed in the Torres Strait, 22 of whom are Indigenous and work in their own island communities.

AQIS Torres Strait Islander staff play active roles in their communities and are vital to the success of AQIS working in the Torres Strait. They ensure that quarantine messages are effectively communicated to Torres Strait Islanders and visitors.

The primary activities carried out by AQIS in the Torres Strait are clearance of vessels, clearance of aircraft, delivery of insect monitoring and response programs, pest and disease surveillance and raising awareness of quarantine matters within local communities.

Regular animal and plant pest and disease surveillance activities are undertaken in the Torres Strait. These activities involve Island communities surveying domestic and feral animals and community gardens for pests and diseases.

The Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy (NAQS) program was established in 1989 and employs primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to help address the unique quarantine risks in this northern region. The NAQS program conducts surveys along our northern coastline and neighbouring countries, looking for early signs of new pests or disease. The NAQS program also has a high presence in the Torres Strait, monitoring traffic between the Papua New Guinea and Australian mainlands and ensuring high public awareness of people living in this strategically important quarantine zone.

### **Indigenous aquaculture**

An Indigenous Aquaculture Unit was established in the department in 2003 to promote Indigenous involvement in the Australian aquaculture industry.

Twenty projects and initiatives have been supported to date, at a cost of \$490 000. Two projects are located in South Australia, two in New South Wales, six in Queensland, three in the Northern Territory, five in Western Australia and one in Victoria. The projects have been designed to provide employment and training opportunities for Indigenous Australians to improve their economic and social circumstances. The projects cover a range of aquaculture industries, including a mud crab project in the Northern Territory, a pearl farming project in the Torres Strait and a mussel farm project at Port Lincoln.

## Departmental program information

The department's programs that relate to Indigenous Australians are outlined below. Some programs focus specifically on Indigenous people, while others result in positive outcomes for Indigenous people through close work with Indigenous communities.

### Australia's Farming Future

The Australia's Farming Future initiative will provide \$130 million over four years to help primary producers adapt and respond to the impacts of climate change and maintain their productivity despite these growing challenges. There are two elements that specifically relate to Indigenous activities: *Farm Ready* and *Community Networks and Capacity Building*.

- *Farm Ready*

Within the Australia's Farming Future framework, the FarmReady program provides \$26.5 million over four years to increase the adoption rate of risk management and business management skills, new technologies and best practice management. This will help primary producers, Indigenous land managers and agricultural industries to adapt and respond to the impacts of climate change.

The program consists of two separate elements:

- FarmReady Reimbursement Grants of up to \$1500 per financial year to individual primary producers and Indigenous land managers to attend approved climate change training activities
- FarmReady Industry Grants of up to \$80 000 per financial year to industry organisations, farming groups and natural resource management groups to undertake projects that will enable their members to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Primary producers and Indigenous land managers are able to apply for reimbursement of course costs and the associated expenses of attending approved training courses under FarmReady Reimbursement Grants.

- *Community Networks and Capacity Building*

This component of Australia's Farming Future aims to increase the leadership and representational skills of target groups in order to strengthen primary industry productivity and build rural, regional and remote community resilience to a changing climate. The target groups include women, youth, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Support is available for activities that:

- build and share knowledge and experience
- increase access to planning tools and resources
- develop leadership and management skills
- develop programs to increase participation in agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries
- develop skills to contribute more effectively to government and industry decision-making
- build networks among rural, regional and remote Australians.

## Torres Strait fisheries

Fishing plays an important role in the culture of Torres Strait Islanders. It also offers Islanders an opportunity to make an income and thereby reduce their dependence on the Commonwealth Development Employment Program.

The Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) is responsible for the management of commercial and traditional fishing in the Australian area of Torres Strait, including:

- monitoring the condition, and developing policies and plans for the good management, of the various fisheries
- consulting the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) and other Joint Authorities on matters of common concern
- maximising the opportunities for Islander participation in all sectors of the fishing industry.

The PZJA was established under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*. Membership includes the Commonwealth and Queensland ministers responsible for fisheries and the Chair of the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

## National Indigenous Forestry Strategy

The Australian Government developed the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy (NIFS) in collaboration with Indigenous interests and the forest industry to encourage greater Indigenous participation in the timber and non-timber forest products industries. NIFS focuses on providing support for Indigenous people to participate in forestry activities, especially those promoting the economic independence of Indigenous communities. The government, representative bodies of forestry industries, the Indigenous Land Corporation and Indigenous Business Australia are working in partnership to develop and oversee a five-year implementation plan.

The NIFS implementation model is based on the four stages of development for Indigenous business and employment: raising awareness, employment, building capacity and sustainability.

The model takes a comprehensive approach to training and development, including use of apprenticeships and cadetships, the creation of real jobs for Indigenous people and the development of viable Indigenous business enterprises in appropriate industries and regions.

## Employment and training related programs

The department's employment and training programs include:

- Indigenous cultural awareness training  
The training is included as a compulsory module of both the graduate and traineeship programs and is held approximately eight times a year.
- regional training and job rotation  
In the department's AQIS regional offices, Indigenous staff are rotated, across programs, from the airport in Cairns to the outports of Mackay and Townsville

and given business-specific training. This provides them with the opportunity to learn new skills and broaden their overall program knowledge.

- AQIS Far North Queensland holds a week of intensive training on Thursday Island for NAQS Indigenous employees (there are 22 Indigenous NAQS staff in Far North Queensland). Specific program training is held in Cairns and the Torres Strait throughout the year.
- National Indigenous Cadetship Project (in conjunction with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations)  
The National Indigenous Cadetship Project (NICP) is a government initiative that improves the professional employment prospects of Indigenous Australians. It links Indigenous tertiary students with employers in a cadetship arrangement involving full-time study and work placements.
  - The department has placed three cadets through the NICP in 2009, bringing the total number of Indigenous cadets in the department to four.
- Indigenous Entry Level Recruitment Program (in conjunction with Australian Public Service Commission)  
The Indigenous Entry Level Recruitment Program (IELRP) is an 18-month career development program. It provides the opportunity for trainees to learn new skills and undertake structured training and development.
  - Across our regional AQIS offices, two trainees in South East Queensland and one in the Northern Territory graduated in late 2008. Another two trainees successfully completed their traineeship in early 2008. The Western Australia regional office has also used this program, recruiting one trainee in 2006 and participating in 2007.

### **Landcare Sustainable Practices program**

Under Caring for Our Country, the Landcare Sustainable Practices program funds projects that develop and demonstrate best practice and innovative approaches in agricultural and natural resource management activities. While the program does not have a specific target for Indigenous involvement, some of its projects involve Indigenous natural resource management knowledge and participation, which directly benefits the communities involved—for example:

- **Northern Territory Seafood Council—\$114 800 over two years**  
*A Collaborative Recruitment Forecasting Program for the Northern Territory Mud Crab Fishery*  
Utilising the skills and knowledge of Indigenous marine rangers and commercial crab fishers, and scientifically based surveys, this project will determine when and where juvenile mud crabs recruit to the fishery. The findings will assist in the prediction of annual recruitment dynamics and a sustainable Northern Territory Mud Crab Fishery.
- **Torres Strait Regional Authority—\$300 500 over two years**  
*Implementation of Sustainable Horticultural Practices in Torres Strait*  
This project will conduct relevant training that helps Torres Strait communities develop guidelines for sustainable horticultural practices and a process for the

quality assurance of produce, and to implement pilot projects. Torres Strait Island communities will learn about developments and be encouraged to continue participation through the local media and distribution of case studies and technical information.

- **Northern Territory—Central Land Council—\$195 800 over two years**  
*Improving Land Condition and Profitability through Sustainable Grazing Strategies in the Indigenous Pastoral Program*  
This project will conduct natural resources property assessments, develop sustainable grazing strategies, and develop and deliver targeted grazing land management resources and training for central Australian Indigenous pastoralists.
- **New South Wales—Sapphire Coast Marine Discovery Centre (Eden Whale Discovery Centre Research Trust)—\$99 468 over three years**  
*Oyster Growers Fight Green Shore Crab Menace*  
This project will refine and implement control methods for the green shore crab, which is implicated in the decline of shellfish populations on the Far South Coast. The local Koori people will help trial a new oyster harvesting infrastructure designed to minimise oyster predation by the green shore crab.

#### **Whole-of-government initiatives**

The department participates in several interdepartmental committees that focus on the commitment of the Council of Australian Governments to Closing the Gap. These include:

- Australian Employment Covenant
- Indigenous Economic Development Strategy
- East Kimberley Development

The department also has in place a Reconciliation Action Plan outlining the practical contributions the department makes to building positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.