

Capacity Building
Inquiry
Submission No. 59

**VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED
(VAEAI)**

RESPONSE TO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

INQUIRY INTO CAPACITY BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

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1. Introduction and background

Overview of the VAEAI

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) was established in 1976 and represents the Koorie community in relation to education policy development and strategic programming at the local, state and national levels.

VAEAI is a statewide Koorie community organisation consisting of eight regions. These regions are divided on the basis of family ties with a number of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) within each region. Our local advisory arrangements are solidly embedded in local communities through LAECGs, which are constituent units of VAEAI and have representation on the VAEAI Committee of Management. Membership to the LAECG is open to all members of the Koorie community in their respective localities.

Over the last decade our functions have been enhanced through a number of policies and strategies, including, the *Partnership in Education: Koorie Education Policy* (1990), the formal recognition of the VAEAI as an Industry Training Board within the State Training System (1990), the *Koorie 2000 Strategy* (1997) and more recently, *Wurreker: The Koorie Community and TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership* (2000) and *Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium* (2001).

These developments have ensured that the VAEAI has a primary role in the development of appropriate policies and strategies that will continue to advance Koorie education and training.

VAEAI Structures

Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) form the core of VAEAI's functions in that they represent local community perspectives. They fulfil a significant role in providing the links between Koorie communities, the VAEAI Committee of Management, Government Departments and educational institutions. LAECGs are best placed to provide local perspectives on education and training matters and highlight the needs and aspirations of local Koorie communities.

The role of LAECGs includes:

- Provision of advice on all education and training matters that affect Koorie students;
- Monitoring the current trends in education that impact on all Koorie students;
- Provision of an advocate role for Koorie students and their families in respect of education matters;
- Provision of representation to committees and forums on education and training at the local and regional level; and
- Provision of representation to all VAEAI forums.

LAECGs are constituted by volunteers and membership is open to all members of the Koorie community in their respective localities.

The VAEAI Committee of Management (COM) is the decision making body of the organisation, and formulates policies, strategies and programs for Koorie education and training in Victoria. The VAEAI COM comprises of five Office Bearers, eight Specialist Representatives and the LAECGs (28).

The Office Bearer positions comprise of President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and Public Officer.

The Specialist Representatives have the responsibility to provide a comprehensive overview of their nominated area to the VAEAI COM, and consist of Early Childhood, Primary School, Secondary School, Post Secondary School, Vocational Education and Training, Tertiary, Aboriginal Independent Schools and Catholic Education.

LAECG representatives to the VAEAI COM are elected by the relevant local community and are responsible for facilitating the information flow between local communities and the VAEAI.

The Victorian State Government and VAEAI

Yalca: A Partnership in Education and Training for the New Millennium
(Koorie Education Policy: 2001)

In October 2001 the VAEAI and the Victorian State Government recommitted to the formal partnership, which has formed the foundation of a sound working relationship and provided a solid framework for the development of strategies and programs for the benefit of the Koorie community since 1990.

Yalca supports a birth-to-death philosophy of education, places the Koorie student at the centre of education policy and decision-making; and acknowledges that local Koorie communities through Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups are best able to determine local education and training needs. *Yalca* signifies a commitment from both VAEAI and the State Government to working together to improve the education and training system in ways that will significantly improve pathways and outcomes for Koorie students and communities.

Notably, *Yalca* provides an overarching framework for the development and implementation of collaborative initiatives and strategies between Government departments and Koorie communities, and across departments and agencies, for the benefit of Koorie students and communities.

Yalca contains six major objectives:

1. To place the Koorie student at the centre of education policy and decision-making.
2. To maintain and strengthen the formal partnership between the VAEAI and the Victorian State Government.
3. To recognise the central role of Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) in education and training.
4. To formalise the protocols that inform all education related discussions and negotiations with the Koorie community.
5. To strengthen the framework, at all levels of education and training, for the implementation of strategies which will:
 - Enable involvement of Koorie people in education decision-making,
 - Increase the participation and outcome rates of Koorie students,
 - Provide a supportive and culturally relevant learning environment,
 - Provide to all Victorian students an understanding and respect for Koorie traditional and contemporary cultures, and
 - Increase the number of Koorie people employed within all sections of the education and training system.
6. To ensure that Koorie education forms part of the core business of all sectors of education.

Wurreker: The Koorie Community & TAFE in Victoria in Equal Partnership
(Vocational Education and Training Strategy)

Launched in July 2000, the *Wurreker* strategy further consolidates the partnership in Koorie education, and signifies a formal relationship between the VAEAI and the Office of Tertiary Education and Training (OTTE), Department of Education and Training.

Wurreker supports the principles of self-determination, Koorie community development and sustainability, and individual development. In addition, it will also ensure that delivery and support services respect Koorie culture and value the needs of individual Koorie students, and enable Koories and Koorie communities to have a say in their future.

Under *Wurreker* there will be greater Koorie Community involvement, through LAECGs, in planning processes through:

- The establishment of Regional *Wurreker* Committees, chaired by LAECG representatives to identify Koorie training needs and develop Regional Training Plans;
- The Employment of *Wurreker* Brokers to facilitate key stakeholders to develop better pathways between training and employment; and other desirable community outcomes in a more co-ordinated way
- The provision of advice to Government through the development of a Statewide Training Plan.

Koorie 2000 (Schooling Strategy)

Launched in 1997 *Koorie 2000* provides the framework for the delivery of Koorie education programs in Victoria that meet State and Commonwealth priorities for Koorie education. *Koorie 2000* strengthened and formalised the involvement of Koorie people in educational decision-making and built further on the original *Partnership in Education (1990)* between the VAEAI and the Department of Education.

The focus for decision-making under *Koorie 2000* is 8 Regional Koorie Education Committees (RKEC), with a Central Implementation Committee (CIC) to monitor the implementation aspects.

All LAECG's have representation on their respective RKEC, and an elected LAECG representative chairs each committee. Their role includes:

- supporting school communities to develop education programs through the allocation of funding and provision of educational advice;
- assisting schools in determining and locating the kind of professional and curriculum development support required; and
- enhancing professional development of teachers.

2. Capacity Building at the Local Level

The VAEAI provides a structure that enables Koorie communities, through LAECGs, to participate in decision-making processes in regards to policy and strategic directions at the local, state and national levels on all issues concerning education and training impacting on Koorie people.

At a local level, LAECGs have the required knowledge base to inform policy and strategic development within their local communities. They are at all times in contact with their communities and are aware of the social issues and shortfalls in relation to education and training. In recognition of this expertise LAECGs have increasingly been called upon to participate as equal partners in a number of regional and local structures, as outlined above.

However, as volunteer organisations, LAECGs are at times stretched in their ability to meet the needs of community, educational institutions and government departments. In response to this situation the VAEAI has implemented a number of programs aimed at building the capacity of LAECGs and therefore of local Koorie communities.

Capacity Building Project

The goals of the Capacity Building Program is to ensure that:

- All LAECGs participate in a "Fundamentals of Management" program.
- Annual Professional Development Plans for LAECGs and/or LAECG representatives on Committees are developed and implemented.
- The overall capacity of LAECGs to participate and lead a range of initiatives with regards to Koorie Education and Training are increased.

Consultation processes with LAECGs are currently being undertaken by the VAEAI secretariat and will inform specific training needs at the local level.

A Good Governance Guide for Koorie organisations

The "Good Governance Guide" is being developed in partnership with the Office of Training and Tertiary Education, as part of our commitment to strengthening Koorie communities and organisations.

The Guide will play an integral role in the future development of Koorie Organisations and Koorie Registered Training Organisations. It is intended to:

- Provide a practical guide for Chairs, Governing Committee Members and Executive Officers of Koorie Training Organisations to achieve excellence in governance;
- Support Koorie organisations in meeting their responsibilities;
- Recommend professional development activities which both new and existing Directors and Executive Officers can access; and
- Provide a framework to inform Koorie Training Organisations, Governing Committee Members and Executive Officers of their roles and responsibilities to the stakeholders.

Guide for Management: Aboriginal Child Care Services

This Guide has been compiled for Aboriginal Early Childhood Services and covers management issues, accountability of decisions and lines of protocol. It provides a practical guide for Management Committees and includes information on:

- Elected office bearers and their roles;
- Management committee meetings;
- Staffing; and
- Policy

3. Capacity Building of Koorie Organisations

The development of formal partnerships with the Victorian State Government and its Departments has enhanced and empowered VAEAI's role as the peak representative organisation in all matters relating to Koorie education and training in Victoria.

The VAEAI believes these partnerships, as outlined above, represent a model of 'best practice' for the Capacity Building of Koorie organisations.

4. Capacity Building of Government Agencies

Partnerships between Governments and their agencies, and Koorie organisations are the key to the ability of departments and agencies to meet the needs of Koorie communities and individuals.

VAEAI recommends that equal partnerships be developed across Governments and departments, including Commonwealth level partnerships with Peak State Aboriginal organisations. In order for partnerships to be effective it is crucial that they be developed in conjunction with Aboriginal communities and their representative organisations.

Furthermore, it is imperative that current partnerships are recognised and adhered to by all departments and agencies.

In terms of education and training, the effectiveness of partnerships will be strengthened by the inclusion of Koorie education and training into the core business of Governments and their departments. Implementing Koorie education and training as core business at all levels and operations of Government departments and agencies will increase the attainability of Partnership objectives.

The implementation of Koorie needs into the core business of Government departments and agencies will:

- Ensure Government is accountable for the well being of Koorie people.
- Koorie people will be secure in the knowledge that their individual needs will be met.
- Governments and their agencies will have the knowledge and capacity to meet their responsibility to the Koorie community.
- Ensure Koorie people are not marginalised.

Implementing Koorie needs into core business will require a new set of learning's from Government departments and their agencies, and from Koorie communities. It will take considerable effort and time to construct a core business prerogative and framework.

Appendices

Yalca: Koorie Education Policy 2001

Wurreker: The Koorie Community and TAFE in Equal Partnership

Guide for Management: Aboriginal Child Care Services