



GREAT SOUTHERN
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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Our Ref: E1:1035
Your Ref:
Enquiries: Graham Townley

16 MAY 2005 P

11 May 2005

BY: ATSI/A

Ms Cheryl Scarlett
Inquiry Secretary
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Cheryl,

INQUIRY INTO INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT

Thank you for your invitation to provide comment and input into the above inquiry.

The attached document contains a number of comments relating to the inquiry's terms of reference.

As discussed, our AED officer is on leave and we appreciate the extra time given to complete this response.

Thank you.

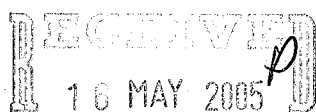
Yours faithfully

BRUCE W MANNING
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



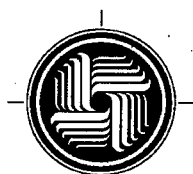
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT



BY: ATSIA

GREAT SOUTHERN DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



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DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

May 2005

COMMENT

Role of the Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC)

The Great Southern Development Commission plays a key role in Aboriginal Economic Development in the Great Southern region of Western Australia. Through various interagency forums and its project development role, GSDC's Aboriginal Economic Development Unit supports indigenous employment initiatives, focusing on long-term sustainable infrastructure, employment and enterprise development outcomes.

GSDC input into WA's Aboriginal Economic Strategic Framework

GSDC recently provided input into the WA's Aboriginal Economic Development Strategic Framework, currently being drafted by the State's Office of Aboriginal Economic Development (Department of Industry and Resources). Some of the issues addressed in that response may be usefully applied to the inquiry's terms of reference. The following points of interest may be considered:

- There needs to be some consideration of the risks associated with creating job opportunities in industries where job shedding is common, particularly where commodity price fluctuations and export markets create uncertainty.
- Joint management arrangements in national parks and high conservation areas create opportunities for infrastructure development and increased investment opportunities for indigenous enterprises delivering park contracting services. Long-term sustainable Indigenous employment opportunities would be a major outcome in these circumstances.
- Encourage public and private sector investment in jobs and training within the indigenous arts and tourism industries, where indigenous people have a real competitive advantage.
- Encourage the select tendering for indigenous employment through public works projects.

Critical success factors in brokering positive indigenous employment outcomes:

- Culturally appropriate mentoring of indigenous job seekers to ensure the transition into work is as smooth as possible.
- Improve coordination between State and Commonwealth training and employment agencies to ensure adequate planning and resources are made available to secure indigenous jobs through select tendering and negotiated employment agreements with industry.

- Ensure indigenous people are involved through appropriate regional representative bodies in the delivery of indigenous employment services.
- Ensure up-front pre-employment expenses are bundled into training and support packages for indigenous job seekers, particularly in group training schemes or employment agreements where employers expect these costs to be met by employees or training organisations.

Significant factors contributing to positive outcomes

- In relation to integrated service delivery, the Great Southern Regional Indigenous Affairs Coordinating Committee (RIACC), chaired by the State's Department of Indigenous Affairs, has had a very positive effect.

The recent demise of the Commonwealth Indigenous Employment Program run by the Great Southern Area Consultative Committee (GSACC) was unfortunate. While the importance of Indigenous Employment Centres is understood for CDEP placements, the ACC was instrumental in negotiating mainstream indigenous employment outcomes at a regional level. Regional indigenous employment service delivery was impacted negatively by the cessation of this service. While the IEC plays a constructive role in moving CDEP participants into work, many indigenous job seekers do not have access to this employment service and job network members are not always remunerated to deliver the type of intensive mentoring needed to make a difference at a local and regional level. There is a lack of mentoring and human resources available to create viable pathways to employment for medium to long-term unemployed. The level of structural underemployment and unemployment among indigenous communities is still around 40-45% of the regional indigenous population (incl. CDEP).

Ideally, a Regional Indigenous Training and Employment Forum should be created in the Great Southern to enable public sector training, employment and development agencies to coordinate indigenous employment initiatives with job network members, Centrelink, the Southern Aboriginal Corporation Indigenous Employment Centre and Registered Training Organisations. Such a forum would enable the GSDC and other State development agencies to work closely with State and Commonwealth agencies in coordinating indigenous employment initiatives. This would complement RIACC's role as the primary vehicle for State-Commonwealth policy coordination at a regional level by providing an employment-specific reference group to respond positively to current skill shortages in the context of persistently high indigenous unemployment levels in the region.

As an interagency forum, the next step in RIACC's co-ordination role will be to engage with the proposed regional indigenous representative body (i.e. following the demise of ATSIC Regional Councils) to develop Shared Responsibility Agreements in partnership with Commonwealth agencies to deliver long-term sustainable indigenous employment outcomes allied to State-sponsored projects. Projects such as the proposed Stirling Range Visitor Centre near Bluff Knoll will require negotiated SRAs

tied to state and Commonwealth investment in tourism infrastructure and further discussions on joint management arrangements in the National Park. This is a good example of practical reconciliation, with concrete employment and enterprise development outcomes tied to the development of a project that will bring long-term benefits to the wider community.

- Reconciliation must deliver benefits to all sectors of the community within a framework of Social Justice and Aboriginal Economic Development. The Kodja Place in Kojonup is a further example of practical reconciliation, whereby all sections of the Kojonup community worked together with Commonwealth and State agencies to celebrate Noongar and settler culture and create indigenous employment opportunities. The GSDC and OAED were instrumental in negotiating CDEP support and Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP) funding through DEWR for this project.
- Notwithstanding these positive development outcomes, the GSDC and OAED note the difficulty of securing long-term sustainable employment outcomes for infrastructure projects such as visitor centres, cultural centres and museums. Such centres typically incur an operating deficit for four to five years after opening until their cash flow position improves. Moreover, trainees often require three years training at TAFE or another Registered Training Organisation before being employable on a recurrent basis. There is uncertainty as to who will meet the indigenous employment and training costs in the first 4-5 years of operation until commercial feasibility is secured. To assist Indigenous employment subsidies should be made available for a longer period, not 2 years as is currently the case. Moreover, additional resources may be needed to pay for up-front work-related costs (e.g. tickets for fork-lift operators, drivers etc..) as part of the training and employment support provided to indigenous job seekers entering the workplace (i.e. as pre-employment costs).