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Victorian Government Submission

to

House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Inquiry into Indigenous Employment

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## 1. Terms of Reference

That the Committee inquire into positive factors and examples amongst Indigenous communities and individuals, which have improved employment outcomes in both the public and private sectors; and

- 1) Recommend to the government ways this can inform future policy development; and
- 2) Assess what significant factors have contributed to those positive outcomes identified, including what contribution practical reconciliation has made.

## 2. Background

As a proportion of Indigenous population within each state and territory, Victoria has the lowest percentage (0.5 %).

A lack of formal education and training greatly impacts on future employment options. In Victoria, Indigenous students were almost half as likely to attain a year 12 certificate, 40% of Indigenous students in 2001 completed year 12 compared to 79% of other Victorians<sup>1</sup>.

The rate of full time employment in 2001 for Indigenous people was much lower than that for non-Indigenous people in all age groups and geographic regions. Nationally full time employment as a proportion of the labour force was 41.5 % for Indigenous people, compared to 60.2 % for non-Indigenous people<sup>2</sup>.

At the 2001 Census, 18% of Indigenous Victorians aged 15 years and over were unemployed, compared with 6.7% of non-Indigenous Victorians. Victorian Indigenous unemployment was 32% for 15-19 year olds.

The *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria, Report on Progress Identifying Future Directions* identified that giving Victorians the chance to develop skills will also create new employment and investment opportunities, as well as improving the capacity of Victorians to fully participate in community life. The main source of well being for individuals and households is income earned through access to work.

The recently released *A Fairer Victoria, Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage* identifies Indigenous people as one of a number of disadvantaged groups where action is needed to tackle entrenched disadvantage. *A Fairer Victoria* sets out Victoria's approach to addressing disadvantage by building skills and capacity within the Indigenous community to make real and lasting improvement.

Victoria is acting to address barriers by working in partnership with other levels of government, business and the community sector and by taking action to strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities in order to increase their choices and control over life's opportunities. This partnership approach is particularly important to the success of any employment program for Indigenous people.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of Australian Governments Review of Commonwealth/State Services Provision.

<sup>2</sup> Source. ABS 2001 Census

### **3. Indigenous Employment Programs in Victoria**

#### **3.1 Wur-cum barra**

Wur-cum barra, the Victorian Public Sector Indigenous employment strategy was launched in July 2002 to improve Indigenous employment opportunities and promote diversity within the public sector workforce. The strategy identified and responds to barriers to Indigenous employment and sets targets to increase the representation of Indigenous people throughout the Victorian Public Sector. It also aims to bring an Indigenous perspective to the development of public policy in Victoria.

The strategy is not concerned with targets alone. The level of employment is one of only six key result areas. Wur-cum barra is also concerned with capacity- building and pathways, induction and retention, career development, changing workplace culture and supporting Indigenous employment in government funded organisations.

There has been a significant increase in Indigenous employment related activity throughout the public sector which is likely to sustain Wur-cum barra in the future and increase the number of Indigenous Victorians seeking employment in the public sector.

In 2004, action was taken to extend Wur-cum barra to the broader public sector which includes statutory authorities and positions in community organisations funded by the public sector. As part of this process a data collection strategy is being developed to ensure that future reporting accurately reflects the number of Indigenous Victorians employed by the public sector.

A review of the first phase of Wur-cum barra is currently underway. The outcomes of the review will inform the roll out of a second stage of the Strategy (2005-2008).

Within the framework of Wur-cum barra a number of departments have developed innovative partnership programs with the Indigenous community that continue to build on positive outcomes. These include programs developed by Parks Victoria and the Victorian Department of Justice, described further below.

#### **Parks Victoria**

The Parks Victoria has a successful Indigenous employment program as part of its Indigenous Partnership Strategy. The partnership strategy focuses on the six key result areas of Wur-cum barra.

##### *1. Capacity Building and Pathways*

Parks Victoria is active in capacity building in two main areas: via direct engagement with local Indigenous communities, led through our Indigenous Partnerships Branch; and also by participation in job fairs, a series of which are currently in progress.

##### *2. Recruitment*

Parks Victoria has set a target of seven (7) percent as a minimum Indigenous staff percentage to achieve over the next two years. This will represent 63 Indigenous employees out of a total Parks Victoria staff of 900 people. As at 1 April 2005 there were 49 Indigenous staff representing over five (5) percent. This percentage will be maintained as Parks Victoria's minimum figure until the seven percent target is achieved.

It is planned to achieve the increase in Indigenous staff numbers through a number of bulk Indigenous recruitment programs over the next two years and by identifying specific vacant positions (dependant on location) to identified Indigenous positions.

Currently the 49 Indigenous staff are located at some 36 locations across the state. The majority of roles are in field service and ranger roles, with several in project officer and visitor service roles, most are located in areas of significant cultural importance and visitor impact such as the Grampians and Wilson's Promontory. EO exemptions have been used to flag such roles as being advertised as available only to Indigenous applicants.

Parks Victoria are now moving to bring Indigenous staff into non-field roles such as HR, IT and finance, within the corporate area and regional offices and we will be using the Commonwealth Government National Indigenous Cadetship Program as one avenue to progress this.

In addition to the recruitment of on-going staff, Parks Victoria has provided short-term employment to Indigenous community members to work on specific projects. These included 12 Indigenous term staff working for 10 weeks in our Koala Management Project at Mt Eccles National Park, and a further 38 Indigenous term staff for periods up to six weeks on cultural heritage surveys, particularly in the Alps Fire Recovery Program. A range of other Indigenous contract employment occurs within relevant park management projects across the state.

Each year, Parks Victoria employs seasonal rangers in areas of high visitation over summer. Of the 30 hired this summer, 3 were Indigenous staff. Parks Victoria will continue to make Indigenous appointments at a minimum of seven (7) to ten (10) percent of seasonal ranger opportunities.

### *3. Induction and Retention*

In addition to standard workplace and enterprise induction, all Indigenous recruits are introduced to other Indigenous staff within their district. Mentoring and buddying relationships are encouraged but not imposed.

Although a number of short-term projects provide employment opportunities for Indigenous Victorians, Parks Victoria focus has been on providing traineeships with the offer of on-going employment.

### *4. Career Development*

Parks Victoria has used Commonwealth traineeships as a way of implementing training. Currently 22 Indigenous staff are enrolled at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, studying their Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management. Students attend the Yarra Bend campus for a full week, one week per month from April to September, and all are on track to complete their program this year. There are a further two staff completing their Certificate III at other regional TAFEs.

### *5. Changing Workplace Culture*

In 2000, Parks Victoria commenced a Cross-Cultural Awareness and Learning Exchange Program for permanent staff within a flexible framework and program that is jointly delivered with relevant Indigenous communities at workshops.

The workshops are held at Indigenous managed centres in partnership with relevant Indigenous communities, where possible. These workshops enable staff to meet Indigenous people, establish networks with Indigenous communities and start to build working and social relationships that help communities and staff in their day-to-day work. The program has increased staff awareness, provided opportunities to involve relevant Indigenous communities in planning and work programs, and explored options for employing Indigenous people and engaging Indigenous businesses.

## *6. Indigenous Community Organisations*

Over the past five years, Parks Victoria has made considerable progress in developing sound relationships and engaging with relevant Indigenous communities to ensure they are involved in park management throughout Victoria.

To date, consultation is occurring with around 30 groups, some on an 'as needs' basis, others at regular intervals in both formal and informal settings. In addition, there is ongoing liaison with the five Regional Cultural Heritage Program Boards, particularly with their cultural heritage officers.

The Indigenous Partnerships Branch and Indigenous Cultural Heritage Team Leaders play a crucial role in working with and establishing working relationships with relevant Indigenous communities and advising Parks Victoria staff about who to contact and what protocols need to be observed.

### **Department of Justice**

The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (VAJA) is part of Victoria's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Agreement signifies the Government's ongoing commitment to its partnership with the Indigenous community and to implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations.

It is recognised that it is not possible to tackle the over-representation of Aboriginals in the criminal justice system without also tackling the high levels of Indigenous disadvantage including unemployment.

The Department of Justice has an active employment and training program designed to give Indigenous people an increasing role in crime prevention, promote citizenship rights and deliver justice-related services.

Recruitment and retention strategies were successful in increasing the overall numbers of Indigenous staff and their levels across the state. The program has also focussed on future supply through the provision of Koori Tertiary scholarships. As at June 2004, 27 Koori tertiary scholarships were awarded.

Awareness of careers in Justice within the Indigenous community has also been enhanced by the *Gateways to Justice Job Fairs*. Up to six job fairs are held annually.

### **Capacity building and Workforce sustainability**

Data analysis from the Wur-cum barra strategy clearly identifies that further effort is required to address Indigenous workforce supply and sustainability issues.

A number of Victorian Government Departments have established Cadetship programs that aim to achieve a long-term increase in the number of qualified Indigenous staff across all areas of government.

The cadetship programs offer a combination of work placement, financial support to continue with tertiary studies and specific education and training. A number of the programs also provide ongoing employment at the completion of the cadetship.

Successful recruitment of Indigenous youth in Victorian Government Departments has been aided by the appointment of Koori Human Resource (HR) Officers in individual departments to support the establishment phase of employing a trainees and cadets. It also provides a cultural awareness of the Indigenous community and

the ability to advocate effectively on behalf of the host employer and the Indigenous community.

The Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) established an Indigenous Cadetship Program in 2005. The Department offers five (5) cadetships to Indigenous students across all areas of the Department and on successful completion of study, a two-year fixed term contract is offered. Students are supported financially for up to two years study and undertake work placements throughout the semester and semester breaks.

In addition to this program, DVC also offers an Indigenous Cadetship program for tertiary students who wish to pursue a career in Indigenous cultural heritage management. The program is supported with funds from the National Indigenous Cadetship Project and DVC (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria). It provides cadets with the opportunity to gain practical experience in Indigenous cultural heritage management and will enable them to take a leading role within the industry after graduation.

Seven of the ten Victorian government departments have established scholarship or cadetship programs and further support Indigenous employment through targeting employment information to Indigenous communities and to education and training providers.

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV) has also developed training and education programs which not only act to increase the supply of qualified Indigenous applicants but also provide education and training aimed at increasing the capacity of Indigenous Victorians to manage their own cultural heritage resources.

These programs include:

- Accredited heritage skill training for Indigenous people, delivered through the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. This will also assist Indigenous Victorians who are called on to represent community interests on commercial and infrastructure development projects.
- A field investigation and training program, delivered in partnership with Parks Victoria, which provides accredited heritage skills training for up to 20 Indigenous people from across Victoria who wish to work in the land and cultural resource management field.

These programs will be further enhanced through the establishment of an Aboriginal Land and Economic Development Program announced in the 2005/06 Victorian State Budget and detailed in the recently released social policy statement, *A Fairer Victoria, creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage*.

The program will promote and protect Victoria's rich cultural heritage and involve more Indigenous people in land and resource management, sustainable tourism and new business opportunities. A range of training initiatives will be included to support economic independence and employment in Aboriginal communities.

In the first year of operation it is proposed to commence five projects and develop two training programs. Projects and training programs will be developed in partnership between Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria.

The *Koori Business Network (KBN)* continues to address Aboriginal social and economic disadvantage through promoting Indigenous entrepreneurs.

While the Commonwealth continues to be a key funding source for Indigenous business development, the KBN developed a range of complementary services

aimed at business training, assistance in finding new markets and business networking and business support services. KBN officers operate throughout Victoria utilising Victorian Business Centres and working directly with clients and communities as requested.

The 2004/05 budget provided an additional \$3.8 million over three years for the KBN to focus on business opportunities presented by Indigenous ownership of land, eco-tourism and cultural activities.

The KBN will continue to support Indigenous business growth through the development of a strategy to link key Victorian Government economic development agencies with Indigenous entrepreneurs and business owners to ensure that they are provided with comprehensive business support services which allows for growth and sustainability of Indigenous participation.

Key areas for future strategic action are:

- Development of business support services;
- Developing industry development programs (arts, cultural tourism, aquaculture and bush foods);
- Growing business leadership capacity;
- Developing and maintaining business networks; and
- Raising the awareness of Indigenous enterprises, products and services.



### **3.2 Jobs for Victoria: the Victorian Government employment and training initiative**

The *Jobs for Victoria* initiative aims to:

- increase the engagement and participation of people in their communities and the workforce;
- assist young people to gain paid work experience, training and qualifications that lead to sustainable employment; and
- assist communities to meet future skill and employment needs, supporting the growth of sustainable industries and jobs.

*Jobs for Victoria* includes a number of programs, including *Jobs for Young People (JYP)*, the *Youth Employment Scheme (YES)* and *Community Jobs Program (CJP)*, which aim to get more young Victorians into sustainable jobs, whilst at the same time recognising that the Commonwealth has primary responsibility for national employment policy and mainstream assistance programs for job seekers.

*Jobs for Victoria* targets a number of disadvantaged groups including Indigenous people, people with a disability, young people and the long-term unemployed. It is delivered by the Department for Victorian Communities (Employment Programs).

#### **Jobs for Young People (JYP)**

*Jobs for Young People (JYP)* aims to improve employment prospects for young people by creating 1,100 new traineeships and apprenticeships in local government.

JYP offers young people paid work experience, training and qualifications that lead to sustainable employment and has been designed to assist communities to meet future skill and employment needs and support the growth of sustainable industries and jobs.

The program also provides one-off wage subsidies to local councils offering apprenticeships and traineeships.

Local government areas experiencing high levels of youth unemployment or low levels of young people completing a Year 12 or equivalent qualification have been particularly targeted.

In its first year of operation (2003/04), 58 local councils participated in the program with six (6) of these councils specifically targeting apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities to Indigenous young people.

In 2003/04, the JYP was used to support young Indigenous people gain employment. 17 young Indigenous youth were supported to gain employment in traineeships/Apprenticeships. Of the 17 Indigenous participants, one (1) completed the program and is employed with the host employer and 16 are currently completing the training.

## **The Youth Employment Scheme (YES)**

YES creates opportunities for young people to gain paid work experience and training in the public sector. It provides wage subsidies to State Government organisations offering apprenticeships and traineeships.

In 2003/04 YES had a target that 30 percent of participants in the program were long-term unemployed or disadvantaged. Young Indigenous job seekers were one of the 'disadvantaged' categories. Based on data available to date, six percent of YES participants in 2003/04 were Indigenous.

In 2003/04 39 Indigenous youth were employed under the YES scheme, 33 Indigenous young people have either completed or are still completing a traineeship within a Victorian Government Department.

Successful recruitment of Indigenous youth into YES positions within the Department for Victorian Communities (DVC) has been aided by the appointment of an Indigenous YES co-ordinator within DVC to support the establishment phase of employing Indigenous trainees. It has provided a cultural awareness of Indigenous communities and the ability to advocate effectively on behalf of the host employer and the Indigenous community.

The development of partnerships with regional based Indigenous Employment Officers (Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations) has been an important element for employing Indigenous youth into both the YES and JYP programs. These Officers have supported brokering with both YES and JYP to local councils, State Government Departments and informing their local Indigenous community of employment options.

### **Indigenous Employment Co-ordinator**

The Victorian Government recently appointed an Indigenous Employment Coordinator within Employment Programs of the Department for Victorian Communities to increase the participation and completion of Indigenous Victorians in JYP and YES. The role of the Indigenous Employment Coordinator is to develop and implement strategies such as:

- targeted recruitment and communication;
- develop support networks for Indigenous young people participating in JYP/YES, including mentoring support for participants;
- develop and promote tools for employers/program sponsors to support the recruitment and retention of Indigenous participants including cross-culture awareness and programs;
- support the development of individual career plans and post program placement support;
- encourage the development of specialised training modules; and
- increase Indigenous Community organisations participation in the delivery of State employment programs (particularly through the Community Jobs

## **Community Jobs Program**

The CJP funds community organisations and government agencies to employ disadvantaged job seekers on community projects. It consists of two programs that ensure tailored assistance is given to the most disadvantaged job seekers in the labour market.

### *1. CJP- Jobs and Training*

CJP - Jobs and Training projects normally employ a minimum of 12 job seekers for up to 15 weeks and provide them with an opportunity to experience paid work situations, develop skills, be involved in projects that benefit the local community and improve their prospects of finding ongoing employment and/or further education within their local communities.

In 2003/04 community organisations were funded for 63 CJP – Jobs and Training projects. Based on data available to date, four percent of participants that commenced in 2003/04 were Indigenous.

### *2. CJP- Employment Initiatives*

The Community Jobs Program-Employment Initiatives aims to enhance the employment prospects of the long-term unemployed and those at risk of long-term unemployment through increasing their access to the labour market. The program funds organisations to assist unemployed job seekers:

- from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have been in Australia less than two years (or Temporary Protection Visa holders up to three years), and
- who are disadvantaged because of relatively high levels of local unemployment, limited access to services (including Job Network), and/or target group characteristics.

The program targets Victorian residents aged over 15 years, who are unemployed and disadvantaged in the local labour market because they:

- experience multiple barriers to employment
- are ineligible for or receive limited assistance through Job Network and/or
- need additional support to access Job Network assistance (eg: 15 to 20 year-olds, Indigenous job seekers).

Groups to be assisted include:

- recently arrived migrants less than two years in Australia, or Temporary Protection Visa holders up to three years in Australia
- job seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- young unemployed people 15-24 years of age – particularly those who are long-term unemployed (12 months or more) or at risk of long-term unemployment, including young offenders and early school leavers
- Indigenous job seekers
- long-term unemployed mature aged (45 years and over) job seekers and
- retrenched workers.

A component of the CJP program is a small highly targeted program that provides tailored assistance to the most disadvantaged Indigenous job seekers in the labour market. Under the program, the Murray Mallee Group training company has been funded to provide assistance to young offenders at the Malmsbury Youth Training Centre. The project is a partnership with the Department of Human Services, parole officers, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and employers and targets young Indigenous people. The program has assisted eight Indigenous young people into employment.

### **3.3 Regional Jobs Package 2005**

*The Regional Jobs Package (RJP)* is a flexible, place-based approach which aims to identify and address both existing and emerging skills shortages in regional Victoria and to provide training and employment opportunities to young people.

Shortages exist in traditional skill trades such as building, tool making, automotive, furniture making, horticulture, and hospitality, health services, child and aged care. Specific skill needs will also exist in specific regions and particular industries based on local economies.

The RJP has appointed lead agents who, with the support of industry consultation committees, will match unemployed young people with sustainable employment opportunities).

The program has the flexibility for "targeted" projects to address specific and complex barriers faced by some young people, including Indigenous, that extend across local areas. This has resulted in two specific Indigenous related RJP projects:

### **3.4 Shepparton Common Fate Endorsed Project: Ladders to Success**

In December 2002, the Victorian and Commonwealth governments jointly funded the CFE project in Shepparton as a three-year project. The project aims were to increase Aboriginal participation in the economic, social and political life of the district. In particular, the project aims to contribute strategies to improve employment opportunities for Indigenous people in Shepparton. It brings together the indigenous community and local businesses to embark on joint projects that will improve employment prospects and leadership skills of the community.

The Shepparton project is a partnership between the local Indigenous community, the Victorian Government, the City of Greater Shepparton, the local business community and Common Fate Limited.

Ladders to Success (Shepparton) incorporated a Commonwealth Jobs Program (CJP) - Jobs and Training, which played a key factor to on going outcomes achieved by the project. CJP – Jobs and Training was the foundation to support participants with motivation, mentoring and work-readiness to further develop career aspirations.

Ladders to Success placed 39 participants in employment on a full time basis (35 hours per week or greater), 25 of those have achieved a 26 week milestone.

A key factor to the success of the Shepparton project included the employment of Indigenous employment officers to provide:

- case management support, vocational assessments and counselling
- pre-employment training
- job placement; and,
- up to 26 weeks of post-placement support.

#### **4. Outcomes and Reconciliation**

In 2005 the Victorian Government is continuing to work in partnerships with Aboriginal communities to further reconciliation and promote Aboriginal well being. In addition to its commitments to address dispossession and undo the damage of the past, the Government is committed to building a positive future through community strengthening and development of a strong economic base.

Successive Victorian Budgets have reflected this continued commitment to achieving true Reconciliation. The 2004/05 budget provided an additional \$31.75 million over four years for Indigenous specific programs and services. This support for improved outcomes was augmented further in the 2005/06 Victorian Budget with \$45.8 million provided for new initiatives. These initiatives reflect a new Government approach to tackling high levels of disadvantage. This new approach is based on building skills and capacity within Indigenous communities to make real and lasting improvement.

The Victorian Government continues to work towards Reconciliation in partnership with Aboriginal communities. This partnership approach is the foundation on which all this work is built and positive outcomes are achieved.

The employment programs which specifically target Indigenous Victorians have demonstrated that a number of key factors need to be incorporated into the program design if they are to achieve positive and sustained employment outcomes for Indigenous people. These include:

- The programs need to be developed as real partnerships with the local Indigenous community, all levels of government (Commonwealth, State and Local) and the local business community.
- Programs that target young Indigenous people in regional areas and provide real career and employment opportunities to allow them to remain and be active members of their local community.
- Providing appropriate support services such as mentoring, buddies and support networks for Indigenous staff within the workplace; and
- Establishing work place cultures that have an understanding and respect for Indigenous culture.

This submission provides a summary of some of the Government's many initiatives and programs designed to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Victorians and promote Reconciliation. This objective is promoted by all government agencies and programs working through true partnerships with Indigenous communities.

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**To:** Committee, ATSI (REPS)  
**Cc:** Leanne Harbottle; Angela Jurjevic; Frank Maas  
**Subject:** Submission - Inquiry into Indigenous Employment



/ic Govt Submission  
on Indigen...

Please find attached the Victorian Government submission on Indigenous Employment.

The submission has been faxed under cover of a letter from the Premier today, and the original will follow by post.

(See attached file: Vic Govt Submission on Indigenous employment - May 2005.doc)

Kind regards

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