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To: Committee, ATSIA (REPS)
Subject: Indigenous Employment Review

This is a private submission and not on behalf of any Department. It represents knowledge and experience gained in the NT and Qld for the past 51 years. I have lived and worked in Darwin (including working on NT surveys), Cooktown, Lockhart River, Dauan Island among others. The last 13 years as an ATSI/ATSIS Officer in Brisbane, Townsville, Mt Isa and Roma.

The "Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report of 2005 identified one of the key indicators as "Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities"

There are many inhibiting factors to Indigenous employment, and to me, the main one is the Government. There are a number of people, spread throughout the Government, who are dead scared of the economic independence of Indigenous peoples. If Indigenous people were in control of one aspect of the economy, then the threats to peoples positions, influence and control would be enormous.

For economic independence to occur, and thus full time sustainable employment, there is one critical factor - is the enterprise "time critical". There are many failed Indigenous enterprises where this factor has not been addressed - farming, glass replacement, fish farming - you name it. They fail when a community has cultural obligations which are of more importance than the enterprise timelines.

The only enterprise that meets this critical factor is forestry. If a tree is not harvested today or tomorrow, who cares - all it gains is value.

The "National Indigenous Forestry Strategy" is a good example of where Indigenous people have not been given the full information and opportunities to exploit a possible source of economic independence. The strategy did not address ways to Indigenous economic independence but chose to concentrate on "partnerships" with existing forestry producers and processors. The strategy did not address Native Title issues or cultural issues, and the fact that trees grow all over this land not just on the coastal belt.

The Indigenous community collectively hold (in various forms) 13% of the land area of Australia, or nearly 1 million square kilometres (113m hectares) of the 7.7 million square kilometres land mass.

Any forestry will not proceed, with full community support, where cultural assets and Native Title are not addressed.

The large scale clearing of existing trees will remove valuable cultural assets from the community - "gum" trees, spear trees, digeridoo trees, honey trees and bush tucker. This clearing will be resisted and is a barrier to Indigenous forestry as perceived the "Strategy"

There is an answer, and that is to INCREASE the number of trees, of value, established within the region. This does not involve clearfelling or removal of cultural assets. Where there is an existing cleared area, as at Lockhart River "Cottonfields", then that area can be planted to exclusive high value timbers.

On current information, there would be one permanent job for each 50 hectares of timber. That is in administration, nursery, planting, care, harvesting, milling, transport or building.

If only 1% of the land held ie 1.13m hectares were to be under viable forestry then there would be 22,600 jobs created. If Lockhart River planted the 37,000 acres (14,800 hectares) this could create 300 jobs. 14,800 hectares would grow at the rate of approx 1.5cubic metres per hectre per year or 22,200 cubic metres/ year. To generate sufficient wages for 300 persons would require a price of approx \$675/cm. Good timber, in finished state can fetch upwards of \$4,000 per c/m. Even without the "carbon credit" funding there is a considerable "profit" for the community. The Community would be economically independent of Govt funding - influence, power and control would rest with the community.

Australia wide the Indigenous Community COULD control the timber industry - meeting the 2.6m cubic metre shortfall in the Pacific rim countries.

Those seft same forestry industries that the Report is saying the Indigenous community should work with, would be the same ones objecting to working with the Indigenous community.

Would the Govt really tolerate control of an industry resting with the Indigenous Community - I think not.

Is this possible? Yes, if Indigenous Communities were able to deal in "carbon credits", the setup costs would be at no cost to the Government, but be available through the forward sale of carbon credits. The biggest forestry owners in the world are BP, Shell and Toyota - with BP committed to plant 6,000 hectares in WA in 2003. Ask the question what they have in common - they are all responsible for "carbon debits" and know that sometime in the future they will be called upon to prove "carbon credits" to balance.

Ian Alcorn