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**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

**Inquiry into Indigenous Employment**

**Tasmanian Government Submission**

**Introduction**

The Tasmanian Government is continuing to work towards better employment outcomes for Indigenous people in Tasmania as part of its strong commitment to reconciliation. Work is progressing on improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal Tasmanians through a mixture of mainstream and targeted education, training and employment initiatives. The Tasmanian Government views improvement of employment outcomes as an important part of practical reconciliation.

This submission is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a brief statistical 'snapshot' of current employment outcomes for Aboriginal Tasmanians. This highlights that, while Aboriginal Tasmanians are generally better placed against a number of employment indicators than Aboriginal people in other jurisdictions, they are still highly disadvantaged when compared to the broader population. The second section outlines the broader strategic context for policy action aimed at improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal Tasmanians, which includes reference to the 20-year plan for the State, Tasmania *Together*, local Government Partnership Agreements and the development of bilateral arrangements with the Commonwealth Government. The third section provides specific examples of initiatives aimed at increasing Indigenous employment. This section captures both targeted initiatives and relevant mainstream programs accessed by Aboriginal Tasmanians. In addition to initiatives that focus directly on employment, emphasis is also placed in this section on education and training programs in recognition that such initiatives are vital in building job-readiness and ensuring smooth career pathways for Aboriginal Tasmanians into the future.

**Indigenous Employment in Tasmania: A Snapshot**

The recent release of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2005* Report provides a sobering summary of current employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians in all jurisdictions, including Tasmania.

While the Report generally shows that Tasmania performs well compared to most other jurisdictions against a number of indicators, including those related to education, labour force participation and employment, Indigenous Tasmanians still remain clearly disadvantaged against a number of indicators when compared to the non-Indigenous population.

For example:

- In age standardised terms, Tasmania has the lowest non-Indigenous labour force participation rate, but the second highest Indigenous participation rate of all jurisdictions. Labour force participation for the Indigenous population in Tasmania, at approximately 55 per cent, is second only to that of the ACT (75 per cent), but is still close to ten percentage points lower than for the Tasmanian non-Indigenous population.
- Tasmania recorded the third lowest rate of (age standardised) Indigenous unemployment (15 per cent) of all jurisdictions, but this is still more than double the rate for the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous employment has, however, improved substantially over the period 1994-2002.
- Tasmania recorded the highest figure nationally (35 per cent) against the indicator - 'Indigenous long-term unemployment as a percentage of overall Indigenous unemployment'.
- The 2003 OID Report indicated that in Tasmania, non-Indigenous people are approximately 1.5 times more likely to be self-employed than Indigenous people.

### **The Tasmanian Policy Context for Improving Employment Outcomes for Aboriginal people**

#### ***Tasmania Together***

*Tasmania Together* provides the overarching social, environmental and economic plan for Tasmania within which improved outcomes for the Aboriginal community are an important priority. Ultimately, *Tasmania Together* is about the Government working in partnership with the broader community to achieve a shared vision of Tasmania by the year 2020.

Under *Tasmania Together* there are 24 goals supported by 212 agreed benchmarks by which achievement is charted by an independent Progress Board reporting to Parliament. One of these goals (Goal 10) is specifically targeted at improving outcomes for the State's Aboriginal community. This goal includes 14 benchmarks, a number of which directly relate to improving outcomes around Indigenous employment, participation and decision-making. They include:

10.2.1 *'number of Aboriginal people employed in the Tasmanian Public Service'*

10.6.1 *'number of Aboriginal people employed in policy development, planning and management of natural resources'*

### **Local Government Partnership Agreements**

The Tasmanian Government is well advanced on a program to negotiate partnership agreements with individual and regional groupings of local Councils across the State. As part of the negotiation of each agreement, the Government seeks to promote links between Local Government and the Aboriginal community. The aim is to identify key issues that affect Indigenous people in the municipality and develop strategies to address these. Broadly, the partnership agreements cover:

- Measures to enhance economic development and employment opportunities for Indigenous people;
- Strategies to improve the level of participation of Indigenous people in Local Government;
- Promoting understanding of Indigenous issues in the wider community;
- Sustaining the reconciliation process by encouraging public support and participation; and
- Taking joint action to reduce social disadvantage in the Aboriginal community.

### **Bilateral Arrangements with the Australian Government**

Tasmania is currently working closely with the Australian Government and the Aboriginal community as part of the Australian Government's new arrangements for Indigenous affairs and service delivery. The Tasmanian Government sees the three priority Outcome Areas identified in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) Framework* as well as the COAG Principles for Indigenous Service Delivery as key drivers for improved employment outcomes for the Aboriginal community.

### **Aboriginal Ownership of Culturally Significant Land**

The Tasmanian Government has recognised for some time that land ownership is a priority for Aboriginal people in Tasmania and central to progressing reconciliation in the State.

In March 2005 the Tasmanian Parliament approved the transfer of 42,706 ha of Crown land on Cape Barren Island (CBI) and 8,149 ha of Crown land on Clarke Island to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Land ownership has the potential to generate significant benefits in terms of community development and future economic opportunities.

In addition, funding associated with the transfer included:

- Up to \$350,000 p.a. for upgrading and ongoing maintenance of roads on the Island, including training for CBI community members undertaking the maintenance work;
- \$372,000 in up-front capital funding to purchase road maintenance plant and equipment; and

- increased recurrent funding for land management activities to support the additional responsibilities of the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania associated with the land transfers.

This funding will have direct employment benefits for the CBI community.

### **Specific Initiatives Aimed at Improving Employment Outcomes for Aboriginal Tasmanians**

#### **Education and Training Initiatives**

The Tasmanian Government recognises the fundamental link between educational attainment and workforce participation and development, particularly within the Aboriginal community. Education is also key to developing and achieving improved wealth creation and economic sustainability. The Government is currently directing substantial effort at post-secondary education through mainstream programs.

Building smooth transitions between education and training and workforce participation is recognised as a key strategy in maximising the gains from Government investment in both education and employment programs. The Government continues to regard as high priorities the successful transition of students - both Indigenous and non-Indigenous - from education to work and the establishment of partnerships between schools, colleges, training providers, businesses and community groups in order to facilitate this transition.

The Tasmanian Government also acknowledges that there is a continuing need to increase participation by, and outcomes for, Indigenous people in vocational education and training in order to help them in accessing opportunities for employment in a variety of areas, and to ensure that opportunities available are the same as for non-Indigenous Tasmanians.

#### ***Tasmania: A State of Learning***

In 2004 the Government released *Tasmania: A State of Learning*, the State's first strategy for post year 10 education and training. The strategy contains 27 new initiatives, which together aim to lift Tasmanian participation and training across the board. The initiatives address learning needs of both young and adult Tasmanians and support the needs of local industry and communities. The strategy focuses on engaging and re-engaging Tasmanian students in education and training to build a workforce that has the capacity to match the skills needs of business and industry in a growing economy.

As part of *Tasmania: A State of Learning*, the Government has provided \$7.2 million over the next four years for *Guaranteeing Futures*, which will assist young Tasmanians make successful transitions from school to independent young adulthood. As part of this effort the Government is:

- Continuing to employ Youth Learning Officers, who reach out to young people who have left school early, or who are at risk of dropping out, and assisting them reconnect with a suitable education or training program;

- Supporting Pathway Planning for all students from Year 8 onwards to help students develop their education and training plans, based on their individual interests, aspirations and capabilities; and
- Progressively establishing Area Taskforces to coordinate and improve service delivery for young people as they move from school to further education, training and employment.

The program will develop, implement and review a model in 2005 for the provision of pathway planning and transition support for Year 8 students which will result in the development of learning pathways for all students. The development of the program has had a strong equity focus to ensure that the needs of Indigenous students are specifically considered.

### ***Vocational Education and Training (VET)***

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges that there are a number of factors that reduce Indigenous people's ability to successfully undertake VET. In responding to these issues, the Tasmanian Department of Education in 2002 launched *oana mallacka - The Tasmanian plan for action for increasing Aboriginal people's access to vocational education and training*. The plan was established in line with the national strategy, 'Partners in a Learning Culture' 2000-2005, which was developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Committee (ATSIPTAC) in 2000.

To support positive vocational education and training experiences and to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous people, a number of actions have been implemented through the development of effective partnerships, the provision and production of appropriate support materials and the continued funding of training activity. Examples of effort in this area include:

- supporting the Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Association (TAEA), an Indigenous advisory body that provides advice on Aboriginal training and employment issues;
- working with the Aboriginal Vocational and Education Training Officers in the Institute of TAFE Tasmania to provide support and information for Aboriginal VET clients and prospective clients in each region of the state;
- the establishment of links between Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) operating in the school sector and the Institute of TAFE Tasmania Aboriginal VET Officers to support improved transition for Aboriginal students from school/college to VET;
- membership of the Partners in Aboriginal Education (PAE) group to develop and extend pathways to further education, training and employment for Indigenous students;
- provision of information sessions for Aboriginal students and their parents/carers are promoted in the three regions of Tasmania;

- continuing to provide funding for entry-level training for Aboriginal students (including for Aboriginal adult offenders and youths in detention). In consultation with the Aboriginal community, Tasmania continues to target training to areas of high employment potential through the Competitive Bids funding; and
- the provision of funding to support Community Development and Employment Programs (CDEP).

### **Employment Initiatives**

#### ***Partnership to Jobs***

The Government supports the need for initiatives to specifically address barriers to access to employment for Aboriginal people as part of mainstream employment programs. The Government's 'Partnership to Jobs' program, which provides funding to support the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged enter the workforce, addresses some of these issues.

The Government is currently exploring avenues to further expand Partnership to Jobs to the private and public sector. There has been some interest from the Aboriginal community in seeking support from the Partnership to Jobs program and there is scope to better target the Aboriginal community as a disadvantaged group through the existing program.

#### ***State Government Aboriginal Employment Strategy***

The Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) currently runs, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), a State Government Aboriginal Employment Strategy. The aim of this program is to increase access by Indigenous people to State Government employment opportunities.

The program has been successful in finding employment for Indigenous people across the State Service as teachers, policy officers, custodial officers, police officers, administrative assistants, human resource officers, Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and field officers, customer service officers, communication operators, teacher's aides, quarantine officers, and seasonal fire-fighters.

In 2004-05, OAA secured 14 Indigenous appointments within the State Service through this program. The current Tasmanian Government's Structured Training and Employment Project 2003 – 2005 has been extended until June 2006 to accommodate anticipated commencements resulting from the implementation of the Department of Health and Human Services' Aboriginal Employment Strategy and an increase in placements across the State Service in general. The Government aims to recruit at least 16 Indigenous people through cadetships, traineeships and base grade positions in 2005-06.

Since 1997, the Tasmanian Government has also made provisions for Aboriginal Identified and Tagged positions within the Tasmanian State Sector. This provision facilitates both short and long term planning for Aboriginal positions, recognising the unique nature of some tasks within the sector. Identified positions may only be filled by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and Tagged positions may only be filled by an applicant who has a demonstrated ability to communicate effectively and sensitively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and who has a knowledge and understanding of contemporary Aboriginal culture and society. There are currently 77 Identified and 14 tagged positions approved in the Tasmanian state service. Identified and Tagged positions were initially created through the "Aboriginal Employment Policy Guidelines", which were administered by the then Office for the Commissioner for Public Employment. A Ministerial Direction under the *State Service Act 2000* replaced the guidelines in November 2004.

The Tasmanian Government is specifically attempting to redress the under-representation of Aboriginal people in the allied health professions, nursing and other human services occupations by providing annual post-secondary scholarships under the recently developed Auntie Ida West Aboriginal Health Scholarships scheme.

Linked to this, the Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services has recently launched an Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy that will make available to Aboriginal Tasmanians a range of cadetships, traineeships and Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) placements in the Department.

#### ***Aboriginal Employment Policy Officers***

There are currently two officers working in OAA to assist Indigenous people and State Government Agencies with employment issues. The officers work with Agencies and individuals to assist in the development of individual State Government Agency employment strategies, case management, marketing, promotion, referral of suitable clients for employment, career development, training and intensive assistance for potential applicants.

#### ***Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Fixed Term Employment Register***

The OAA also manages a Fixed Term Employment Register, which is used to fill temporary Aboriginal identified positions, casual vacancies and traineeships created or targeted for Indigenous employment in the State Service. The register has proved successful to the extent that Aboriginal organisations, private enterprise and Australian Government Agencies are now seeking referrals from the Register.

#### ***Aboriginal Tourism Development Plan***

The Government has worked in close collaboration with the Aboriginal community to develop an Aboriginal Tourism Development Plan. The Plan aims to identify immediate and tangible steps to increasing employment opportunities for Tasmanian Aborigines in the tourism industry. A key objective of this plan is to foster the implementation of a range of Aboriginal tourism initiatives that deliver a range of

visitor experiences and that provide some insight and an appreciation of the Tasmanian Aboriginal story.

The Tourism Development Plan has the potential to improve economic outcomes for the Aboriginal community in both regional/remote and urban contexts.

***Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Indigenous Employment Initiative***

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) currently has underway a Commonwealth -funded National Indigenous Cadetship Program (NICP) scholarship. These scholarships offer important opportunities for training of members of the Aboriginal community in material culture and cultural heritage management.

There are also opportunities for cadetships at TMAG. The current Curator of Indigenous Cultures was also initially employed under a traineeship and the current position is an Identified Position within the State Service.