



The Secretary
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission No. 122
Date Received

RECEIVED
09 MAY 2006

Dear Sir

BY:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Committee with details of the Commission's APS Employment and Capability Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employees.

As discussed, the Strategy was announced in August 2005, and provides the framework for the Commission to work in partnership with Commonwealth agencies to address the declining representation rates of Indigenous Australians in the APS.

Please contact me on (02) 62723222 should you wish to discuss this matter.

Yours sincerely

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12 April 2006

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

Inquiry into Indigenous Employment

Submission by the Australian Public Service Commission

BACKGROUND

The opportunity to participate in employment provides a significant contribution to improving socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within the Australian Public Service (APS) also provides a major contribution to achieving government outcomes. It increases the range of skills and capability available to agencies in the areas of policy advice and in implementing the Government's policies and programmes, including by, but not limited to, ensuring that the APS is sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public in delivering services.

The 2004–05 State of the Service report identified the decline of Indigenous employment as a critical challenge facing the APS. There is also a need to improve the capacity of the APS more generally to provide effective service delivery to Indigenous Australians.

ISSUES

In August 2005, the Commission expanded its existing Indigenous Employment Strategy to provide a framework for the development and implementation of human resource management practices and initiatives in the APS that:

- increase the representation of Indigenous Australians in the APS;
- improve opportunities for skills/capability development and promotion of Indigenous employees;
- reduce the high separation rates of Indigenous employees from the APS;
- support agencies' workforce planning and capability development strategies in relation to Indigenous employees; and
- increase the capacity of the APS to deliver whole-of-government outcomes in relation to Indigenous policy development and programme delivery.

Achieving these aims requires the following strategic directions and initiatives.

Pathways to Employment - attraction and recruitment.

An increased emphasis on graduate qualifications and higher-level work is now an established feature of the APS. Alternative pathways into public sector employment for Indigenous Australians need to be considered, but there must also be a focus on attracting Indigenous employees with graduate qualifications into the APS.

Alternative pathways need to provide Indigenous Australians with the skills and capability to contribute to the APS and compete with other APS employees. The APS also needs to promote itself as an employer of choice for Indigenous people in a tightening labour market.

Initiatives under this component of the strategy include:

- a service-wide Indigenous graduate programme
- bulk recruitment on behalf of APS agencies for Indigenous cadets
- Indigenous traineeship programme
- School-to-work programme
- provision of job ready training for unemployed Indigenous Australians delivered through Job Network
- promoting the APS as an employer of choice
- some reconsideration of APS1–2 entry level employment opportunities for Indigenous people (also relevant in the context of expanding opportunities for people with a disability).

Supporting Employees - development and retention

Indigenous Australians in the APS have poor promotion and retention outcomes. They are overrepresented in lower classifications, underrepresented in leadership positions (although this has been improving), and are more likely to leave the APS than other employees.

Commission research and networks highlight the importance of culture, capability and skills development on these fronts. Initiatives include:

- targetted development programmes (eg specific development programmes for APS and executive level Indigenous staff)
- Indigenous employee networks
- an Indigenous scholarship programme
- a central agencies exchange programme
- provision of coaching and mentoring services
- further research into retention issues.

Supporting Employers - workforce planning and capability strategies

There is a need for agencies to have effective Indigenous employment strategies that are aligned with broader strategic workforce planning. Initiatives under this component of the strategy include

- regular Indigenous human resource forums coordinated by the Commission
- the development of a suite of evidence-based better practice guides for employers
- tailoring the Commission's "Get-it Right Recruitment Kit" and advice to assist agencies in incorporating Indigenous recruitment initiatives in broader workforce planning strategies.

Supporting Whole-of-Government - Indigenous service delivery

New arrangements for the delivery of such services have highlighted the need to ensure staff involved have the skills and ability to provide effective service to Indigenous Australians and understand, and have the skills for, effective whole-of-government ways of working.

The Commission has already co-ordinated the delivery of training in “working in a whole-of-government” context to all Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs), including training in working collaboratively, APS values, negotiation and cultural awareness skills. New proposals include:

- continuing and expanding cross-agency training
- developing a cross-agency workforce planning strategy
- developing a secondment strategy for senior managers working in Indigenous-related areas
- providing career transition and support services for ICCs as required.

Partnerships

In implementing each of these directions, the strategy seeks to establish collaborative and innovative employment solutions through the development of a range of strategic partnerships with APS and other Commonwealth Agencies, State and Territory Governments and non-Government organisations.

Implementation

The full implementation of the Indigenous Employment Strategy is dependant on the successful engagement and participation of agencies across the APS. The Commission is well placed to lead a collaborative and collegiate approach to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous Australians, and to work individually and collectively with agencies to improve the employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the APS.

Australian Public Service Commission