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Submission

To

House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Affairs Committee

Inquiry into Indigenous Employment

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The Chair
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
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Dear Senate Committee Chair

The Capital Region Area Consultative Committee (Capital Region ACC), and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sub-Committee, is pleased to present its submission to the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee Inquiry into Indigenous Employment.

The Capital Region Area Consultative Committee (Capital Region ACC) is part of a national network of ACCs and is the Area Consultative Committee for the NSW local government areas of Queanbeyan City, Palerang, Goulburn Mulwaree, Upper Lachlan and Yass Valley and the Australian Capital Territory. ACCs work in accordance with the Charter for the National Network of ACCs.

Up until August 2004, the Capital Region ACC was contracted by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to work with private enterprise to improve employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To deliver on this project, the Capital Region ACC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Promotion Sub-Committee was established to assist the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to gain equal access to employment and business opportunities throughout the Capital Region. A dedicated Project Officer was engaged to work under the direction of this Sub-Committee.

This submission includes some references to the facilitation and coordination undertaken by the subcommittee and the Project Officer that resulted directly or indirectly in positive employment outcomes during that period.

The Sub-Committee, now renamed, works as a reference group to the Capital Region ACC by providing advice to the ACC on key issues impacting on the Capital Region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The ACC in partnership with its Sub-Committee then determines the way forward for addressing those issues.

Mr David Malloch
Chair
Capital Region Area Consultative Committee

Mr Terry Williams
Chair
ATSI Sub-Committee
Capital Region Area Consultative
Committee

Capital Region Area Consultative Committee

The Capital Region Area Consultative Committee (Capital Region ACC) is one of 56 Area Consultative Committees in a national network that works collaboratively with businesses and the community to find ways to generate sustainable employment opportunities and boost business performance in regional Australia.

The Capital Region ACC maintains important links with all levels of government, as well as a wide variety of interest groups, and is well placed to help improve the coordination of economic and employment activities in the Capital Region.

The Capital Region at a Glance

The Capital Region encompasses the Australian Capital Territory and the five surrounding New South Wales local government areas of Queanbeyan City, Goulburn Mulwaree, Palerang, Upper Lachlan, and Yass Valley.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Nationally, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population comprises some 410,000 people or 2.2% of the total population. In terms of both numbers (282,300) and proportionally (4.1%), more of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population resides in Australia's regions or non-metropolitan areas, than in the capital cities¹.

The Capital Region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community

At the time of the 2001 Census, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of the ACT and Southern Tablelands of NSW was recorded at approximately 4,697 or about 1.1% of the Region's total population.

A higher *proportion* of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of the total population resides in the region around Canberra, centred on two other population centres in NSW, nearby at Queanbeyan (2.1%) and the Yass catchment (2%), than in the city itself (1%). However, the greatest *number* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people residing in the Capital Region is in Canberra. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander proportional populations at Queanbeyan and Yass are higher than the NSW average, where, the overall Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is 1.9% of the total population, just under the national average (2.2%).

The 2001 Census recorded that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment rate was nearly three times that of the region's population as a whole. Disturbingly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander unemployment in the 15-24 year old age bracket was recorded at 29%, double that of the region's general population.

The census also painted a similar picture in documenting the percentage of the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who obtain post school qualifications, revealing a similar trend - about half the number of all persons in the region.

Significant social, economic and cultural circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra are outlined in the ACT Government's social and cultural profile²:

- 'The living conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra are much better than for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally, but remain much lower than for the non-indigenous people in Canberra;

¹ 'Wellbeing indicators and service access', A report prepared for the Department of Transport and Regional Services, October 2003. G Haberkorn, C. Charalambou, S. Kelson, and T. Webb.

² Data for this profile is sourced from the ABS 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. 'A Social and Cultural Profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Canberra', August 2004, is available from the ACT Government Chief Minister's Department at http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/demography/atsi_canberra/index.shtml

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra have higher levels of participation in the workforce than nationally, but still significantly lower than for the non-Indigenous population in Canberra;
- The public service is the major industry in Canberra and this industry is particularly important for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially females;
- Overall it appears that the health of Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has more in common with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population nationally, than with the total population of Canberra;
- By year 9, half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (compared with a quarter for non-Indigenous students) have not reached literacy standards, and they have much higher rates of absenteeism from school;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra make up only 1% of the total population but comprise around 10% of people in the justice system. This involves youths, especially males.'

The Capital Region ACC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sub-Committee

For three years, from 2001 to 2004, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) contracted the Capital Region ACC to work with private enterprise to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The project primarily involved the promotion of the suite of DEWR Indigenous Employment programs to the private sector.

To deliver on this project the Capital Region ACC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander³ (ATSI) Employment Promotion Sub-Committee was established in 2001 to assist the local indigenous community to gain equal access to employment and business opportunities throughout the Capital Region. A dedicated Project Officer was engaged to work under the direction of this subcommittee.

Vision Statement

The vision for the Capital Region ACC's ATSI Employment Promotional Sub-Committee was to operate as a resource to the Capital Region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, assisting it to gain equal access to employment and business opportunities.

The Aim

The Capital Region ACC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Promotional Sub-Committee actively worked with and engaged peak industry bodies and employers throughout the Capital Region in order to provide leadership, direction and assistance in the pursuit of sustainable employment opportunities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

This was achieved by:

- Promoting all facets of the Australian Government's Indigenous Employment Policy;
- Identifying regional skills needs and employment opportunities;
- Developing links and partnerships with Employers;
- Identifying and initiating targeted youth employment activities;
- Promoting awareness of the Capital Region ACC to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and wider Community;

³ The Capital Region Area Consultative Committee chooses to use the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) instead of the term Indigenous to acknowledge the many cultures that exist. The term Indigenous is used in this document when the Australian Government has used the term to describe the ATSI community or, if used in its programs or policies.

- Developing and implementing strategies to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain employment within the local/regional area, especially in the private/business sector; and
- Identifying and promoting economic development initiatives that champion and advance employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the region.

Activities

A snapshot of activities undertaken and supported by the Capital Region ACC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sub-Committee during this period included:

- Koori Jobs Challenge – part of the annual Canberra and Region Employment Expo in 2002 and 2003
- Adaptation of the *Getting it Right Employing Indigenous Australians: A Guide for Employers*
- Assisting organisations to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategies – for example, ACTION buses and the Master Builder's Association
- A week long Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists' exhibition featuring local artists at the National Museum
- Various Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business and employment profile raising workshops and seminars
- Facilitating cross-cultural training for employers and mentoring arrangements
- *Stepping in the Right Direction* project – workshops and industry dinner to promote awareness and increase the uptake of school to work programs to ACT and Queanbeyan based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategies with two large employers in Canberra proved to be the necessary springboard to attract and recruit numbers of Aboriginal workers.

This submission showcases 2 employment initiatives that this ACC and its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Promotional Sub-Committee supported:

- ACTION buses
- MBA Upskilling project

Case Study 1

• ACTION Buses

Promotion of the STEP program by the Capital Region ACC's Indigenous Employment Program Manager to ACTION Buses senior personnel in 2003 was a catalyst for the development and implementation of an Indigenous Employment Strategy. The Strategy has provided the framework for the successful 'Bus Driver Indigenous Recruitment Campaign'.

From the ACTION website:

ACTION seeks to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the Canberra community. With the support of Indigenous Employment Specialists and the Department of Employment & Workplace Relations, ACTION is proud to continue its successful Bus Driver Indigenous Recruitment Campaign.

Information on the benefits of a career as a commuter bus driver can be found under "Commuter Bus Driver Recruitment". If you would like more information on the Indigenous Recruitment campaign please call ACTION's recruitment area on (02) 62078068 or John Jeffrey from Indigenous Employment Specialists on (02) 6282 9755.

Source: <http://www.action.act.gov.au/career.cfm#IndigenousRecruitment>

To date ACTION's Bus Driver Indigenous Recruitment Campaign has been 100% successful with the 7 Indigenous recruits now employed for more than 12 months. Another 3 are currently undergoing pre-entry assessment for recruitment.

The key success factors of the strategy and campaign include:

- Support from the top down with senior management proactively embracing the strategy and campaign;
- Cultural awareness training across all levels of the workforce, including supervisor and manager training on cultural communication issues;
- Sourcing recruitment expertise to assist the process;
- Access to government Indigenous Employment Program funds to purchase recruitment expertise and support.

ACTION stressed that it has the same expectation and standards that it applies to all recruits regardless of background. The standard extends to meeting prerequisite literacy and numeracy standards.

When recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees ACTION recognised that additional support and modified recruitment practices, including streamlining the process, are needed to ensure success. Typically the recruitment process can take up to twelve months from the initial promotion campaign to screening, interviewing, intakes for driver training and assessment before recruits are engaged as full time bus drivers. ACTION seeks to streamline the process as much as possible for its Bus Driver Indigenous Recruitment Campaign to maintain the interest and retention of new recruits.

Local firm 'Indigenous Employment Specialists' (IES) has been engaged by ACTION to provide ongoing professional support and advice to ACTION and recruits, assisting with identifying and screening potential applicants. IES also advises ACTION on interview techniques and style, participates on the interviewing panel and the development of media and communication recruitment messages.

Applicants are assisted with resumes, job applications addressing selection criteria, and upgrading literacy and numeracy skills.

In addition IES facilitates mentoring services for both the employee and supervisors when necessary to ensure issues that arise are addressed promptly.

Ongoing support to employees is available and has been particularly helpful in overcoming cultural issues and barriers. This has included helping employees deal with

their obligations to, and the expectations of, the employer as well as balancing shift work with family life and responsibilities, coping with racial discrimination remembering these drivers mostly work alone and interact with the general public every working day. They are the public face of ACTION.

Of overarching importance is encouraging direct communications between the employer and employee as much as possible, with IES only becoming involved when exceptional circumstances arise.

Case Study 2

Master Builders Association Pilot Up-Skilling Project 'Trade-up'

Background

In 2003 the Master Builder's Association ACT, a membership based organisation representing the building and construction industry in the Capital Region, took the lead role in delivering *Trade-up!* a regional upskilling project. The project, through the support of the Capital Region ACC, attracted funding for 2 years from the Australian Government's Regional Assistance Program (now subsumed into the Regional Partnerships Program).

This pilot project and aimed to proactively improve the skills base of the region's building and construction industry by creating opportunities for up to 200 participants. Those targeted for participation included the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, people of diverse backgrounds, the unemployed, school leavers, semi skilled labourers, and people from regional and rural communities to develop alternative skills to diversify their income options.

The project commenced in mid 2003, and ultimately involved placement of more than 200 participants, in staged intakes, with industry subcontractors in specific skills areas:

- internal demolition
- plasterboard fixing and stopping
- roof tiling
- wall and floor tiling
- painting and decorating
- other new technology skills areas

The participants were employed under normal industry conditions to develop skills, on-the-job, in practical workplace environments. Formal instruction was provided in the form of a one-day pre-employment induction program (primarily OH&S) and on-the-job tuition by the co-ordinator, supplier tradespeople and the Master Builders Group Training Skills Centre personnel.

All participants were assessed for skills relevant to the industry's competency standards and received formal recognition at the completion of the program. Approved installer accreditation was also available. Participants were also eligible for full trade status recognition under the Construction Industry Training Council's Skills Recognition Programs. Participants were also, where necessary, provided with job placement assistance post programme.

Following the conclusion of the project activity period an evaluation was undertaken for the whole project and a transferable model of the project incorporating the lessons learned developed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation

The development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Training Strategy, with the assistance of the Capital region ACC, and the appointment of an Indigenous mentor were included in the delivery of the project to support the participation of people from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Without these resources the project would not have been as successful in attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

Evaluation

At the conclusion of the funding period an evaluation of the project as a whole was undertaken. Since the project was launched in 2003:

- More than 230 people had enrolled in the program
- More than people 160 had graduated with around 180 individual awards and certificates

An extract of the evaluation that reviewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the project follows:

- About one in eight trainees in the *Trade-up* program had been identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees.
- A total of 18 referrals were received from a range of different agencies, almost all of whom were classified as long-term unemployed.
- A specially designed one month full-time pre *Trade-up* entry course was mounted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees covering the following modules:
 - Trainee Introduction
 - Industry Calculation
 - Scaffolding
 - Plant Equipment
 - Work Organisation
 - Occupational Health and Safety Welfare
 - Work Communication skills
 - Working with Power Tools

This was found to be necessary to bring many of these trainees up to industry entry standard. Inadequate literacy and numeracy issues had to be addressed. Many of the recruits overcame significant barriers to remain on the program. Issues included income support and loss of entitlements, family pressures and coming to grips with attaining standards in a structured training environment. The dedicated mentor can be credited with keeping many of the participants focussed and on achieving accreditation success.

As at the end of August 2005 a total of 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees (representing 10% of the overall enrolments and 16% of overall completions) had undertaken pre- apprenticeship training under *Trade-up*.

All participants graduated from the program with 43 per cent classed as suitable for engagement as apprentices within the building and construction industry. A number subsequently made formal application for admission to the MBA's Group Apprenticeship Scheme. Some have gone on to associated fields of work utilising competencies gained and/ or green cards to gain employment.

Lessons Learned

The MBA has learnt many lessons from this pilot project. It is now much better informed about how to work with the community and the industry in the best interests of all to create employment opportunities.

Through evaluation of the *Trade-up* project and debriefing with host employers and participants, the MBA has developed a much better understanding of the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, especially the disadvantaged and long-term unemployed. The project has helped it realise that some things will need to be done differently in future if, and it intends to, it is to successfully work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to create long-term job opportunities and strengthen the industry's skill base.

Outlined below are some of the lessons learned and tips for success:

- Have the right teacher and style of teaching to suits learning needs of the target group.
- Have a mentor for ongoing liaison and pastoral care – particularly essential for watching over recruits who are long-term unemployed and for monitoring when placed on site with host employers and in workplaces.
- Allow a sufficient 'incubator' period for new recruits – 3 months minimum - to enable induction, life skills and inculcation of personal responsibility, instil a discipline of turning up for work appropriately dressed and prepared, including meals.
- Plan for and develop training remuneration packages so that participants are not disadvantaged when moving from income support to training wages/ paid employment; critical for long term unemployed and those with families to support.

- Work with employers from the outset of the project and before Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are placed. Introduce / educate host employers to cultural awareness and to overcome stereotypes; to raise awareness and recognise that culture and family often override/ interfere with work commitments.
- Trades with competencies that can be achieved in a reasonable (2 years or less) timeframe are more attractive; participants need to see an end to training and a real job within sight. Traditional four-year apprenticeships are generally too long.
- Tap into culturally appropriate support services for individuals to help build their self-esteem (suicide prevention, life skills etc) that focus on the individual.
- Understand that this target group is not generally self-directed. Participants should not be left to their own devices - personal discipline and motivation fell away when not involved with a training project. Attendance, interest and participation improved radically when the classroom was moved on site. Focus on practical hands-on learning, on site.

Critical Success Factors

Attention to the allocation of appropriate resources of any program that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, especially long term unemployed is vital.

The special needs of this community should not be underestimated:

- Transport
- Accommodation
- Counselling
- Mentoring
- Impact on welfare payments

These are all factors that have the potential to derail (as occurred in instances in the MBA project) training and employment outcomes. It is vital that alternative support measures and tools to address these special needs are available to boost the success of employment programs.

The MBA intends to continue to work with both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and its industry members to create pathways for young and mature age people into the industry. The Capital Region ACC is working with the MBA to realize further initiatives including consulting with the Indigenous Coordination Centre and the range of agencies represented to ensure that training remuneration packages do not disadvantage those moving from welfare dependency to work.

This pilot project can be readily transferred to other regions with the right degree of planning and targeted promotion for implementation. The MBA has developed a checklist that can be readily adapted to support the establishment of up-skilling initiatives elsewhere, including tailoring elements for targeting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The model's checklist is outlined on the following page:

Suggested Checklist for Use in Mounting a Regional Vocational Training Project
(developed from the recently completed RAP funded ACT and Region Master Builder's Association
'Trade up' up-skilling project)

Set up a Management Committee

- Carefully select membership to ensure a broad range of experience, skills, influence and representation relevant to the Project
- Seek members at the "right" level

Industry

- Consult with industry for needs and buy-in to project

Training

- Select/design the training programs to be offered
- Identify facilities and equipment needs
- Identify staffing requirements
- Arrange opportunities for work experience or on-job training

Organise finance

- Estimate costs
- Identify funding sources

Identify any regulatory or legal requirements that impinge on project activities

- Seek advice, including legal advice, as necessary
- Secure agreements, licenses etc as necessary
- Take out insurance, workers' compensation etc cover as necessary

Design information system to meet

- Operational requirements including communications
- Financial management requirement
- Monitoring and reporting requirements

Design enrolment forms and training record systems to ensure they provide the basic data input requirements of the information system

Develop selection process for the recruitment of trainees

Identify any special needs of client group *

- Transport
- Accommodation
- Counseling
- Mentoring
- Impact on welfare payments

Design marketing system

- Identify clients and the people who influence potential clients
- Identify any special groups for targeting
- Prepare informational materials
- Identify and prepare list of media contacts

Identify and prepare list of contacts who could benefit the project

- Political
- Commonwealth Government agencies
- State Government agencies
- Local Government agencies
- Community groups (*including ATSI Community leaders)
- Business/commercial
- Training agencies and providers

****Attention to allocation of appropriate resources to this element of the checklist is critical for the success of any program that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, especially the long-term unemployed.***

Challenges, lessons and progress towards 'Getting it Right'

Reflections on our experience as well as some observations and learnings from other regional areas are the focus of the final section of our submission.

Overall, in the three years of delivering on the DEWR contract, the Capital Region ACC, its Employment Promotion Sub-Committee and Project Officer found working with government, employers and the business community to be very challenging. Some of these challenges were overcome and some were not.

It takes time, patience and perseverance to overcome employer perceptions about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to overcome a lack of understanding or an awareness of the importance of culture or simply to overcome a lack of interest. Systemic embedded resistance to changing community perceptions is not overcome within a short-term contract.

DEWR's STEP program requires an employer to employ five trainees to qualify for funding support. In our experience this proved to be untenable as most of the region's businesses were either micro or small businesses, with modest workforce needs. DEWR proved to be inflexible on this policy. Recently we have become aware of another ACC's success. The Sunraysia ACC is gaining cooperation from DEWR to increase the flexibility of the STEP placements in their region where 'small businesses' are able to engage fewer than five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons under the STEP.

Early factors hindering the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the *Trade-up* project were in part due to poor communication, a lack of 'whole of government' co-ordination and inconsistencies in what should have been complementary responses to issues. Representatives from government agencies, (one instance in particular involved staff from different parts of Centrelink), either could not agree on key issues such as income support and eligibility, or their programs created insurmountable barriers to the *Trade-up* project. This frustrated the efforts of the MBA and Capital Region ACC and led to a loss of faith in the project by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community; consequently relationships with the community were at times tense and considerable time was invested in bolstering goodwill and buy-in to the project.

Industry leader, the MBA has not given up. It is committed to rolling out training and job pathways initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The *Trade-up* project has provided them with the necessary insight to a better way forward.

With employers like ACTION Buses and MBA taking a lead role in providing real job opportunities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people we are encouraged that other employers might now follow their example and take a step in the right direction.

Local governments are major employers in regional communities and for this reason were also targeted to promote DEWR incentives for employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Approaches to local governments to develop MOUs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategies were typically met with either no response or lack of interest.

We note however, that recently there has been a positive shift and receptiveness within two local governments in the Capital Region towards introducing cross-cultural awareness training for the workforce and encouraging Aboriginal employment. One local government has now developed and is implementing an 'Aboriginal Employment Strategy' with the aim of achieving 'equitable representation of Aboriginal employees within the workforce supporting Aboriginal people to enter and remain in the workplace, Council is building trust, raising awareness and working towards reconciliation for the entire community'.

We are aware also that in the South East ACC region, a neighbouring ACC, the Bega Valley Shire Council's Aboriginal Employment Strategy has been recognised nationally and at a state level, for its considerable success with increasing the participation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Council's workforce. Factors attributed to the success of Bega Valley Shire Council's Aboriginal Employment program include:

- The negotiation of a meaningful MOU between Council, the Lands Council and Traditional Elders in 2002 that included real targets for proportional Aboriginal population representation on Council staff (exceeded).
- Implementation of cross-cultural awareness training for staff involving the local Lands Council, Elders and others.
- Implementation of a supported training program for up to 8 trainees across a number of Council business units eg tourism, help desk, library, customer service, outdoor parks and recreation fields of work.
- Commitment to permanent jobs at Council after successful completion of the two-year training program – all trainees at the initial intake completed and went on to full time jobs. Some are still at Council while others have moved on to other opportunities. These vacancies have been filled with new Aboriginal trainees.
- A significant factor in ensuring equitable employment opportunities has been the engagement of an Aboriginal Liaison Officer to provide support to trainees and Council, and a firm commitment between Bega Valley Council and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to work together.
- Aboriginal consultants have conducted an independent evaluation of Bega Valley Shire Council's MOU and Aboriginal Employment program. Key areas to be targeted in the next stage of implementing the MOU have been identified.

In the ACT, the largest employer is the public service, with both the Commonwealth and ACT governments providing many employment opportunities for the community including the Aboriginal community; employment opportunities are typically more readily accessible and available in the ACT than in the wider region. Even so, we are aware there is still reluctance within some government departments to develop and implement Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategies.

The barriers encountered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to find jobs in the public sector is now compounded with the abolition of ATSIC where the majority of the workforce was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For those who have not left the public service altogether challenges to 'practical reconciliation' remain. Many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who remain in the sector are experiencing a lack of empathy for, or awareness of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture from those in the mainstream workforce. These comments are supported by a survey of Indigenous employees launched recently by the Public Service Commissioner, Lynelle Briggs. The spill-over effect of this is that there is also less understanding across Departmental workforces of the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that they now service.

Clearly there is still a lot of work to be done in relation to providing real job opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which includes training to real job pathways and more broadly, cultural awareness training across workplaces and for employers.

Equitable training and employment subsidies that are, as a minimum, the equivalent of existing income support measures, are necessary to remove some of the impediments to the take-up of employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed. A successful long-term job outcome is also often dependent upon recognition, planning and investing in tailored life and work skills support initiatives to complement training and workplaces. Employers who put in the effort and adopt the strategies and principles in the *'Getting it Right* Employing Indigenous Australians: A Guide for Employers' publication are effectively contributing to improving the lives of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

So the question remains, and while we recognise some progress has been made, how effective and what evidence is there to support claims of the **long term** and meaningful effectiveness of programs such as DEWR's Indigenous employment programs, as well as the Job Network and Indigenous Employment Centres, particularly for the long-term unemployed?