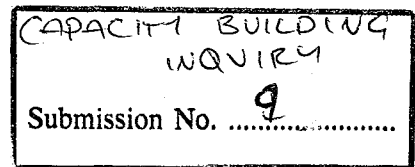


29 August 2002

Ms Catherine Cornish  
Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
On Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Ms Cornish,

**Submission to the House of Representatives Parliamentary Inquiry:  
Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities**

Thank you for your letter of 3 July 2002 inviting the MAV to make a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities. The MAV wishes to provide a number of comments from a Victorian local government perspective which may be helpful to the Inquiry in determining future strategies to build the capacities of Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence service delivery.

By way of background, in Victoria there are 78 councils of which the majority (71 councils) have populations where less than 1% is Indigenous, based on Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census data. The overall proportion of Indigenous people in Victoria is 0.5%. The Indigenous population is spread throughout Victoria, with half located in regional areas.

The small numbers of Indigenous people relative to the wider community and disparate locations has a number of policy consequences for Indigenous affairs in Victoria:

- It can make it difficult for local government to be aware of the particular needs of Indigenous people, particularly where there is no well-organised Indigenous community.
- In many Victorian councils reconciliation and recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage has often been at the instigation of non-Indigenous groups and members of the community.
- There are only a small number of Aboriginal policy officers employed in local government, and low overall (known) employment of Indigenous people. It is therefore mainly non-Indigenous officers in councils who are implementing Indigenous initiatives. These officers are usually located in the community development departments of councils. Resource pressures in councils also mean that it will be rare for council staff to be employed solely to undertake Indigenous activities.

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In Victoria attempts have been made to achieve greater coordination between federal, state and local government agencies involved in service delivery to Indigenous people. The MAV Indigenous Interagency Coordination Committee for Local Government (IICCLG) was established in 2000, at the suggestion of ATSIC. Its first project was to establish a benchmark for future policy development on what councils were undertaking in relation to Indigenous issues, and to provide a resource to councils to assist in developing the relationship between Indigenous communities and local government.

The recently launched report "Toomnangi: Indigenous Communities and Local Government - a Victorian Study" has proved to be a constructive exercise in federal, state and local governments working together, with a comprehensive study of local government and Indigenous affairs in Victoria produced. A copy is attached. It is based on survey results from all 78 councils, and was launched at the end of May 2002. Feedback so far has been positive. The IICCLG is hopeful that it will lead to new relationships starting up as well as providing encouragement to those already established. Alerting councillors and council staff not previously involved in Indigenous issues to what might be possible in their own municipalities has also been a positive outcome.

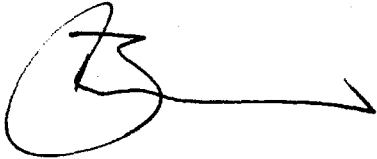
Other matters arising from the report which may of interest to the House of Representatives Inquiry include:

- Organised Indigenous communities commonly span more than one local government area, which in turn has lead, where the Indigenous community is relatively organised, to regional groups of councils working together, for example the Inter Council Aboriginal Consultative Committee in Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs. This has enabled a group of councils to achieve projects that would not have been possible if undertaken by one council. (See "Toomnangi" p33 for further details).
- A number of councils have entered into partnerships of various kinds with local Indigenous communities, for example the Memorandum of Understanding between Glenelg Shire Council and the local Indigenous Community, and the planning protocols between Greater Geelong City Council and the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative. (See "Toomnangi" pp 27 & 32 for further details).
- Determining the circumstances leading to greater involvement by councils in Indigenous activities remains unclear. Although this was explored in "Toomnangi", no clear patterns emerged. Further analysis remains to be undertaken about whether the existence of an organised Indigenous community is essential to greater activity by government organisations. In the case-studies of Glenelg and Greater Geelong the Indigenous communities were organised and in a position to sign a memorandum on behalf of their communities, which may have been important to the development of the agreement process.

The MAV also coordinates a Local Government Indigenous Network which provides a forum for interested councillors and council officers to share information. One of the issues raised at Network meetings has been the problem of knowing whom to approach in Indigenous communities. In some cases it might be that a number of representatives are competing to 'speak for the community'. Native title applications have exacerbated the problem, as the issue of which group or individual councils might be developing relationships with in a particular area can have greater significance in terms of who may be claiming to be a traditional owner or elder.

The above is provided to alert you to some of the issues relating to Indigenous communities and local government in Victoria. If you would like further information, please contact Rosemary Hancock at the MAV on (03) 9667 5520 or by email [rhancock@mav.asn.au](mailto:rhancock@mav.asn.au).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B Matheson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Cr. BRAD MATHESON,  
President.