

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

12.th October 2000

I refer to the inquiry into the needs of country and urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

This submission refers specifically to points two through six of the Terms of Reference set down by this inquiry. Reference is made to issues of education and employment, in particular, to long term planning for gradual and lasting improvement in the career paths and training open to Indigenous Australians.

The Aboriginal Education Program (AEP) at the University of New South Wales is committed to access and education at this University for Indigenous people. The AEP currently runs intensive preparation programs for Indigenous students who wish to study Law and Medicine. Senator Herron will be aware of the Pre Law program as he was the special guest at the 1998 graduation ceremony. A significant number of these students who undertook the 1998 program are currently enrolled at UNSW and other Universities throughout Australia.

The success of the Pre Law Program is measured by the high retention rate of students. Previously 95% of students enrolling to study Law, left the course within the first year. This situation has been reversed by the Pre Law program to the extent that there is now a 95% retention rate, and it is anticipated that 100% of the 2000 class will successfully complete the academic year.

The AEP in conjunction with the Faculty of the Built Environment is endeavoring to implement a similar program for Indigenous students wishing to study in any of six Built Environment disciplines.. (I refer to

the attachment, "Built Environment Preparation Program for Indigenous Students"). This new program will address several key areas of the current inquiry.

It is anticipated that the course will run annually from 2002, for four weeks prior to the commencement of the academic year. However, this is dependant upon securing the necessary funding from private, corporate and government sources. Given the strong commitment of the Government to address Indigenous Education issues, we hope to secure a significant proportion of the funding from Government sources.

The attached document addresses points two through six of the Terms of Reference. Below is a summary of the key points as they relate to each matter under your consideration.

2. Ways to extend the involvement of urban Indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements

"The importance of providing an appropriate built environment for indigenous communities is now widely recognised. This has been prompted in particular by recent studies establishing clear relationships between health issues, living conditions, architectural settings, built environment infrastructure, and broader issues of built environment planning and landscaping.¹ Despite this recognition, however, Indigenous people are largely unrepresented in built environment professions." pp.1-2

By having Indigenous graduates in these discipline areas, a flow on effect will be created, giving Indigenous people the opportunity to assist their communities in their area of expertise.

3. The situation and needs of Indigenous Young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness

¹ See for example Paul Pholeros, Stephan Rainow and Paul Torzillo, *Housing for Health. Towards a Healthy Living Environment for Aboriginal Australia*, HEALTHHABITAT, Newport, 1993; Healthhabitat, *The National Indigenous Housing Guide*: Canberra, 1999; and ATSIC, *Indigenous Australia Today*, Canberra, 1996: "Inadequate housing and poor or non-existent essential services are recognised as major contributors to the appalling health standards suffered by Indigenous people." The *Evaluation of the National Aboriginal Health Strategy* (1994) also discusses the relation between housing and health, and reinforces the need for education regarding these allied issues in the following terms: "the provision of housing and essential services should be accompanied by strategies for improved maintenance of facilities and appropriate education, including health promotion, to equip individuals to achieve a lifestyle and level of economic stability which permits healthy choices."

Indigenous people are poorly represented in built environment education – for example, in professions such as architecture, planning, landscape architecture, interior architecture, industrial design and building management.

The Built Environment Preparatory Program (BEPP) aims to;

- inform prospective Indigenous students about the range of careers available in the built environment,
- give students a detailed insight into the skills necessary to complete the programs,
- allow both students and the university to assess their aptitude for doing so successfully.” p.1

4. The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged

“access and equity

Establishing culturally appropriate mechanisms for access to university has dramatically improved the intake and graduate numbers of indigenous students in higher education – for example, in the fields of Law and Medicine at UNSW.” p.3

5. *Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas*

We believe opening up broader and more culturally appropriate educational opportunities for Indigenous people will ultimately lead to an increase in economic independence for them and their communities. This and the other courses run by the AEP at UNSW will, in the long term, lead to greater independence for Indigenous people and their communities.

6. *Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban communities*

“One way in which the design and delivery of appropriate built environments for Indigenous communities can be promoted is through an increase in the number of Indigenous practitioners working in mainstream built environment disciplines. The proposal for a Built Environment Preparatory Program (BEPP) is a practical response to this need.

There are currently no courses in built environment education that specifically address issues of access by Indigenous Australians. The Built

Environment Preparatory Program aims to broaden higher education opportunities for Indigenous people by redressing this situation.” p.2

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our views on what we believe to be effective and relevant approaches for Indigenous people in relation to Terms of Reference set out by your inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

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