



**Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)**

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5th March 2008

Hon. P. Henderson MLA,
Chief Minister,
NT Legislative Assembly,
State Square,
Darwin NT 0800

Dear Chief Minister,

Policing and Justice: Central Australia

I am writing to you at the request of the NPY Women's Council (NPY) elected Directors in relation to the continuing lack of a police presence in some NPY member communities in the NT. We last spoke to you directly about this issue in the first half of 2007 when you were Police Minister. You have also met with NPY members on previous occasions to discuss policing and cross-border justice issues, as have previous NT Police and other Ministers, including your predecessor Ms Martin.

As you know, NPY runs a number of programs in the tri-state region, including a very highly regarded cross-border Domestic Violence Service that has operated for fourteen years. The former (1994 – 2007) Manager of this Service, Ms Jane Lloyd, has served as Chair of your Department's NT Domestic and Family Violence Advisory Council since 2003. NPY operates a Child Nutrition Program that frequently deals with child neglect and protection issues in a co-operative relationship with NT Family and Children's Services. Note that both these programs are funded by the Australian Government, not the NT Government.

The Australian Government's NT Emergency Response (intervention) has resulted in the staffing of the Mutitjulu police post and the location of police at the Imanpa community. The Mutitjulu post was of course funded by the (former) Australian Government following many years of lobbying by some local residents, mainly women, by NPY and by others who were justifiably concerned at the high level of lawlessness and substance abuse in the community. The presence of police at both these communities has had an extremely beneficial effect, as you may be aware.

The former Indigenous Affairs Minister Brough also established the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) in Alice Springs. We understand that the NT funds one of the two sniffer dogs allocated to the SAID. This small unit is extremely hard-working but without adequate police coverage in the region it cannot obtain all the intelligence it requires to assist it in intercepting traffickers and suppliers.

Unfortunately your government has failed, despite its professed support for the intervention, to contribute adequately to what was to be the intervention's highest priority, and remains the highest priority of NPY members: the provision of the basic essential

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service of a police presence to ensure the safety of women, children and other vulnerable people in all major communities. This is, of course, normally a State or Territory responsibility, but the NT Government appears content to leave it to others.

The situation remains completely unsatisfactory with no permanent police presence at Aputula/Finke or Docker River/ Kaltukatjara. We are well aware of what services do exist, and make no criticism of officers located in the region. Patrols to these communities from, respectively, Kulgera and the WA-NT cross-border post at Warakurna, do not constitute a sufficient police service. A previous commitment to a post at Docker River seems to have evaporated. Further, there are no police at Titjikala or Ayeronga, communities which are near the NPY region although not members, and which have been also been lobbying strenuously but in vain for a police presence. Other aspects of the intervention and in particular, any attempts to reduce alcohol and illicit drug supplies, will inevitably fall short of their potential without police based in communities.

There has been copious correspondence and numerous approaches from NPY to the NT, WA and SA Governments about this issue over many years. The NT's response has been the poorest by far. In November 2001 NPY wrote to then Police Minister Syd Stirling, Correctional Services Minister John Ah Kit and Health and Children's Services Minister Jane Aagaard in the following terms:

"The mere presence of fully qualified police officers would undoubtedly serve to reduce the level of anti-social behaviour and lawlessness, thus enabling people to exercise some control over their lives instead of, as is often the case, existing in an almost perpetual state of crisis. Where the community is unable to exert social control, surely the state has a responsibility to try to ensure at the very least, a safe environment for residents?"

....We understand that to place fully trained officers in all our member communities in the NT would not be cheap. We find it difficult, however, to understand how this argument can be sustained when the costs associated with physical injuries, medical evacuations, ill health, permanent disabilities, the psychological effects on children and adults and property damage are taken into account. A decent level of policing would surely be more cost effective, in both monetary and other terms....

Clearly, NPY members are tired of what they believe to be at best a second-rate service..... We seek your commitment to the provision of adequate police services on our NT member communities as a matter of urgency. We also request that you discuss this matter with your SA and WA counterparts, whom we have already approached. State and Territory borders are of little significance in relation to the activities discussed herein; they sometimes appear rather to be a barrier to effective action. NPY members would like to discuss this matter with you; however, as is also obvious, they are very tired of talking about these issues and want immediate action..."

In 2008, we have police in two of the four NT NPY communities as a result of Australian, not NT Government, action.

We note that the NT Government has at times expressed the view that the communities, including so-called 'elders' should do more. We make two points:

- 1) Night patrols, funded or not, are of little use unless backed by a police presence;
- and
- 2) we do not expect middle-aged and elderly people in urban areas to run around at night dealing with drunks, violent men and traffickers. We doubt that NT Ministers expect their

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mothers or fathers to do this, and NPY sees no reason why it should be so in remote communities.

The deterrent effect of a permanent police presence in relation to the behaviour of juveniles as well as older potential offenders, including domestic violence perpetrators, has frequently been cited, and should be obvious.

NPY believes it is time your government accepted its responsibilities in relation to residents in remote communities, who are no less entitled to a prompt police response than those of Palmerston, Humpty Doo or indeed the inner suburbs of Darwin. This is, or should be, more pressing than the installation of a wave pool at Darwin Harbour, or the upgrading of the Leanyer Recreation Park, which according to your Infrastructure Minister Delia Lawrie (Media release 21st Feb. 08)

“has quickly become a part of Top Enders lifestyle and is now set to become even more popular with families.....at least two waterslides, more life saving and first aid facilities, parking, shade, barbeques and areas for bikes, rollerblades and skate boards. The Territory Government committed \$5.2 million to stage 2 at the last election and I am glad to announce the project has begun.”

What about the ‘lifestyle’ of the vulnerable residents of remote communities who know that if they do manage to call the police, they will certainly not see them for hours and possibly not for days if they are committed elsewhere? Some communities lack even a basic recreation shed, let alone the sort of facilities Ms Lawrie is able to supply in Darwin.

In the past you have advised NPY that the Police Commissioner, not the NT Government, is responsible for allocating resources. We have not, and do not, accept this specious argument. It is for government to determine how to apportion funds in the first instance, and Commissioners cannot spend what they do not have.

We look forward to a positive response. Please note that I am currently on leave and Ms Kim McRae is Acting Co-ordinator. The Directors will next meet in mid-April.

Yours faithfully,

for: Vicki Gillick
Co-ordinator

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