

Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council

PO Box 7770, Cloisters Square, Perth, Western Australia, 6850
 Telephone (08) 9235 8000 Facsimile (08) 9235 8088
 waaac@dia.wa.gov.au

ENQUIRIES : Mr Wayne Bergmann - Ph 0417900255

Mr Elton Humphery
 Committee Secretary
 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
 PO Box 6100
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Humphery

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS INQUIRY INTO SUICIDE IN AUSTRALIA

The Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (WAAAC) is very concerned about the high levels of suicide within Aboriginal communities in Western Australian.

Suicide is a critical issue within many Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. In the last few years a spate of cluster suicides in the Kimberley and the South West regions has created an overwhelming need for a culturally sensitive but rapid response to address this issue particularly in the towns of Fitzroy Crossing and Narrogin.

Community groups and organisations on the ground in these areas are often at the forefront when dealing with these issues and the WAAAC acknowledges the work many Aboriginal organisations and representative groups are currently doing to address this issue.

The Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource and Legal Centre, the Marr Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation, Nindilingarri Cultural Health Service and the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre in the Fitzroy valley have recently released the document *Community-Owned Approaches to Social Recovery - Overcoming Suicidal Despair in the Fitzroy Valley*, which outlines their priorities and recommendations to address this issue in their community.

Similarly Aboriginal organisations in Narrogin including the Narrogin Reference Group, Narrogin Interagency Reference Group, the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia and the Southwest Aboriginal Medical Service have worked tirelessly to holistically address the issues of suicide in their community.

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In February 2008 Mr Alistair Hope, the Coroner of Western Australia, released his findings into the 22 alcohol and drug related deaths of Indigenous people in the Kimberley. While the report focused specifically on the Kimberley region, it did however, recognise the often multi-faceted and complex nature of the issues faced by Aboriginal people in the region including those associated with alcohol and drug abuse, and subsequent mental health issues. The community driven responses to these recommendations are to be commended and collectively the relevant Aboriginal organisations working in the Fitzroy Valley have begun to address these very complex issues.

I believe it will be vitally important in the course of your Inquiry to investigate the current status of initiatives addressing the recommendations of the Hope report. The WAAAC also recognises that social inequality can also result in unequal distribution of and access to, services and resources allocated to individuals, families and communities at risk. This is another factor that needs to be considered by Government in developing a response to the issue of suicide in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

I look forward to the outcome of your Inquiry and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the government to address this issue.

Yours sincerely

WAYNE BERGMANN
CHAIRMAN
WESTERN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

15 January 2010

Cc *Mr Wes Morris*
Centre Coordinator,
Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre