

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Submission to the Inquiry into the implications of funding policy changes contained in 2004 amendments to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.

There are two issues that I would like to draw to the attention of the Inquiry regarding very remote delivery of schooling.

1. There is a fundamental flaw in the funding model that neither recognises nor acknowledges the very real commitment to schooling made by many Indigenous communities.
2. The extreme inequity of service delivery between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples living in very remote areas.

Point One.

Previously mission and now more recently government policy has centralised Indigenous peoples into 'communities'. The term community doesn't reflect the true the situation on the ground for townships like Galiwin'ku¹, on Elcho Island. It is a very misleading term. There are in a number of communities groups within the Galiwin'ku settlement. About twenty nation groups live within the Galiwin'ku township boundary. Each group has their own nation estate. People from these many different nation estates moved from their ancestral lands to Galiwin'ku after the missionaries located there in 1942. People from these nation groups travelled to Galiwin'ku for work. Work gave them access to stores and money, there were also medical services and school. In Galiwin'ku these nation groups do not mix very much, there are clearly identifiable areas where each group lives and sleeps. Approximately 90% of the people are thus disenfranchised. This affects the ability of all nation groups to 'see' a future, which in turn manifest in low attendance, youth suicide, domestic violence, substance abuse, and so on.

On their nation estates generally known as Homelands, each Yolngu nation has full authority and responsibility to speak for that land. When these Yolngu are forced (by bureaucratic policy) to live in a settlement, they do not have authority to speak for that land. By way of example: Even if an Elder from one these 'other nations' is on the local council, that Elder will still defer to the landowners when making decisions about settlement land. Even in western law we would not expect him to have 'a say' over someone else's land? Yolngu say being on a local council and making decision about land use is disrespectful of the custodians of that land.

People who live in Homelands² are often highly committed to schooling, this because they are making decisions for the survival of their families, on land where they have authority to forge a future for their children.

Point Two.

Many of the more remote communities in North East Arnhem Land have school attendances over 90%, I know of one that averaged 99% over 2.5 years. And yet these Home-Land Learning Centres (HLC) as they are called often have very limited access to qualified teachers. Even when they request a school be established, the letters are ignored. The HLC

¹ Galiwin'ku is used as an example to highlight the disempowerment of the peoples who have left their Homelands to become 'unconnected' on the township land belonging to 'others'.

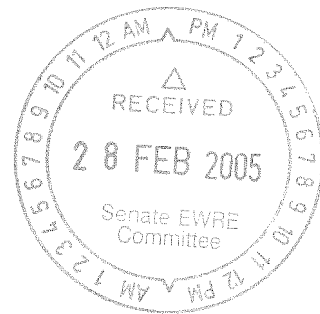
² Not all Homelands are the same, some have very strong leadership other not so. Some are close to the luxuries of town other are remote. There needs to be benefit for those communities that have proved shown their commitment to education.

above has no toilet, no running water the community paid to have their own generator connected and they pay for the power. They have no internet access or computer. And yet on the other hand the state and federal governments spent \$17.6 million on interactive learning some years ago. Cattle stations with very few children received satellite links to allow them to study through this new medium. And yet not one HLC received a satellite link, even those homelands³ where there are over 40 students attending daily. When the NT DEET set up Latis and delivered computers with satellite links to all schools, Indigenous teachers in Homelands were excluded from the program. While correspondence and other materials are available for white students to study of the net, there are currently no programs similar to those used by white students available to remote Indigenous students and young adults.

This submission is a call for equity in the delivery of schooling to remote Indigenous communities who have for decades proven their commitment to the education of their children, and who have for decades been overlooked by government.

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³ A number of Homelands have over 40 students attending daily, and have been operating school programs for over 20 years.