

Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into indigenous education funding arrangements

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Tasmania

MINISTER *for* EDUCATION

18 FEB 2005

Senator Trish Crossin
Chair
Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Senator Crossin

Inquiry into New Indigenous Education Funding Arrangements

Thank you for your letter of 7 December 2004 regarding your Committee's inquiry into the implications of funding policy changes contained in the 2004 amendments to the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000*. I apologise for the delay in responding.

During 2004, officials from within the Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE) met with personnel from the Federal Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) regarding the proposed new arrangements under this legislation. These preliminary discussions highlighted a number of issues regarding provisions contained in the Program Guidelines. In particular, these concerns relate to the Federal Government's strengthened reporting requirements, implications under the changes to Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) and the freezing of Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) funding. These and other issues are addressed in more detail under the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Bilateral negotiations between DoE and DEST are planned for late February 2005. I anticipate that a new Indigenous Education Agreement will be completed after that meeting.

If your Committee requires further clarification of the issues raised in the attached submission please contact Ms Anne French on telephone (03) 6233 7187 or e-mail anne.french@education.tas.gov.au.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter. I look forward to your Committee's finding.

Yours sincerely

Paula Wriedt, MHA
Minister for Education

Terms of Reference

1. **Proposed changes to the IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:**
 - (a) **the new tutorial assistance arrangements and Whole of School Intervention strategy under IEDA.**

Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS)

It is proposed that Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) be administered by States and Territories. The focus of the program will be shifted to students in Years 4, 6, and 8 who failed to meet the Year 3, 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks in the previous year, as well as students in Years 10, 11 and 12.

It is anticipated that the number of Indigenous students accessing this service will decrease dramatically from those who accessed its predecessor - Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). In Tasmania up to 1000 students accessed ATAS during 2004. The numbers projected for ITAS in 2005 is less than half being approximately 440.

During December, DEST advised that there will be flexibility in relation to how ITAS funding can be distributed so that other Indigenous students can benefit from the program. However, providers will only be funded for the number of students who do not meet the Years 3, 5 and 7 benchmarks. Although this flexibility is welcomed, there remains in Tasmania a real concern that many Indigenous students who were previously eligible for ATAS tutoring will now miss out.

In relation to administration, it is anticipated that the cost of running ITAS will be significant both for systems and individual schools. Accordingly, Tasmania believes that there will be some cost shifting from the Australian Government to the State and Territories despite the 10% administrative allowance from within ITAS funding.

Whole of School Intervention Strategy

This strategy has the potential to impose increased strain on State resources if, as has been suggested, State Departments and DEST work together in partnerships with school communities to develop submissions. Additionally, a submission-based process in a small, non-remote state such as Tasmania, has the potential to discourage schools and communities from applying for funding because of the strong possibility of being unsuccessful. This process also may also result in disempowerment of the Aboriginal parents and local community in decision-making at the school level.

There is also the issue of how reporting will be undertaken. If it is to occur from the school directly back to the Australian Government it raises issues of Australian Government intervention in State issues and if it is to be via the States, it raises issues of adequate resourcing from the Australian Government to States to avoid cost-shifting.

(b) new strategic initiatives for indigenous students in remote areas and the new flagship project for teaching literacy under IESIP.

Only one school in Tasmania with a population of 8-10 students will be eligible for this funding. While Tasmania acknowledges the very high level of need of Indigenous students living in remote areas, it believes that the level of disadvantage of Indigenous students in urban and rural areas should not be overlooked.

2. The likely educational outcomes of the Commonwealth's new indigenous-specific funding measures, with reference to:

(a) the Indigenous Youth leadership and Indigenous Youth Mobility Programs.

Tasmania believes that these programs will be very beneficial for the youth who are involved.

(b) the Government's objective of accelerating educational outcomes for indigenous students, as stated in the 10-point national agenda for schooling announced in November 2003.

Although under the 10 Point National Agenda increased funding has been indicated for all States and Territories, there is no "new" Indigenous money. In order to increase funding for remote areas it would appear that non-remote areas must miss out.

While the SRA per capita payments will continue for Tasmania under the new package, there is to be a "freeze" placed on the rate paid for school and VET FTEs in metropolitan regions. This freeze means that per-capita rates in the Greater Hobart area will remain at the 2004 rate.

In Tasmania, the 2003 August Census of government enrolments recorded 38% of Indigenous students being enrolled at a school in the Greater Hobart area. The percentage of Indigenous students enrolled in VET in the same area is estimated to be approximately 35-40%.

Despite this freeze, statements from DEST indicate that the amount of SRA provided for Tasmania is increasing from \$10.3 million for 2001-2004 to \$12.3 million for 2005-2008. It is therefore expected that the additional funding will be directed towards rural/provincial enrolments through increased per capita SRA rates.

Payments to the non-government sector under SRA will continue to be approximately three times that of payments to the Government sector. The primary school government rate for Metropolitan areas in 2005-08 will be \$335.85, compared to the non-government rate of \$1,119.51.

3. The accountability requirements applying to funding agreements made under IEDA and IESIP programs, with reference to:

(a) the new framework of performance monitoring and reporting in educational outcomes.

Some issues of concern in relation to IESIP performance indicators include the following:

- Year 10 completions - most states and territories do not have Year 10 completion certificates. A possibility may be making use of numbers of students who complete the compulsory years. Tasmania (2008) and Queensland have changed the leaving age to 17;
- issue of accuracy and consistency - Tasmania believe data sets should be the same as those reported for the Australian National Report.
- pre-school attendance - COAG requires that jurisdictions be locked into this indicator but data gathering in this pre-compulsory area is problematic for Tasmania.

(b) the new financial reporting arrangements.

The sanctions to be imposed on States and Territories for failure to provide complete/accurate and timely reports poses problems for Tasmania. Benchmark data is usually not finalised until at least 12 months after the year the tests are applied. DEST is aware of this issue and changes need to be made to reporting timeframes to take into account the processes undertaken through DEST and MCEETYA to sign off on national data. This is a serious issue which must be addressed by all stakeholders at the national level

Another new reporting requirement is the inclusion of an annual Indigenous Education Statement. Although details of this requirement is not exactly clear, that is whether it is attached to IESIP and/or GRG reporting, this process could see smaller State such as Tasmania penalised if it is not seen to be matching the efforts of the larger States.

4 The effect of the proposed funding measures in current state and other systemic indigenous programs, and the future implications for the operation if ASSPA committees.

It is unlikely that this new initiative will result in the same level of Indigenous participation in educational decision-making as it was through the ASSPA program. In addition, schools will miss out on valuable cultural awareness associated with having ASSPA Committee's within schools.

5. The extent of consultation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, schools and parents, especially ASSPA committees, about the policy and details of changes to the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000.

During 2004 DEST held consultations with state officials, Catholic systems, schools, parents and ASSPAs. DEST reported that there was minimal attendance by parents and ASSPA Committees at the school consultations.

As a result of the federal election in 2004, consultations and informal discussion between the DoE and DEST were put on hold. A consequence of this has been a shortened negotiation timeframe for satisfactorily bilateral negotiations on establishing targets and performance indicators under the Indigenous Education Agreement. In addition, ITAS administrative arrangements are to be finalised and NIELNS submissions are to be developed within a shorter period of time.