

# Chapter 1

## Committee report

1.1 The *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007* was introduced into the House of Representatives on 16 August 2007. On the same day, the Senate referred the provisions of the bill to the committee for inquiry and report by 5 September 2007.

1.2 Notice of the inquiry was posted on the committee's website and advertised nationally in *The Australian*. The committee called for submissions and received only two, the details of which are listed at Appendix 1. This may indicate either broad support for the bill, or at least a broad acceptance of its provisions. The committee did not therefore conduct a public hearing.

1.3 The committee would like to thank all those who contributed to the inquiry.

### Background

1.4 The *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* replaced the *Indigenous Education (Supplementary Assistance) Act 1989* as the primary mechanism to appropriate funds specifically for indigenous education. The current 2005-2008 quadrennium provides funding of \$865.9 million and has a specific focus on students in remote areas. The following broad program areas are supported:

- Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme;
- National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy; and
- Indigenous Education Direct Assistance.

1.5 In July 2007 the government announced \$48 million in funding for welfare reform trials in Cape York, with \$12 million allocated to the education initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The government decision to support the trials followed consideration of the recommendations in the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership's report *From Hand Out to Hand up: Welfare Reform Design Recommendations* released in June 2007.<sup>2</sup> The report focussed on the four Cape York communities of Coen, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge and put forward policy recommendations in four areas:

- making welfare payments conditional specifically in relation to school attendance and child protection;

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1 The Hon Mal Brough MP, Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 'Cape York welfare reform trials to begin in 2008', Media Release, 18 July 2007.

2 The report is part of the larger Cape York Welfare Reform Project undertaken by the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership in conjunction with Cape York Partnerships Projects, with support from the Queensland Government and funded by the Commonwealth.

- changing welfare incentives to support people to find employment or undertake education or training opportunities;
- supporting participation in real employment, encouraging businesses, supporting mobility for employment and education, and improving educational standards; and
- encouraging and supporting home ownership.<sup>3</sup>

### **Provisions of the bill**

1.6 The purpose of this bill is to amend the *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000* to appropriate an additional \$2 million over the 2008 program year. Item 1 of the bill seeks to amend table item 4 of subsection 14A(1) of the act—which provides appropriations for the period 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2009—to increase the appropriation from \$259 736 000 to \$261 745 000.

1.7 The additional funding will be used by the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (the Institute) to support the expansion of the Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MULTILIT) accelerated literacy program and Student Education Trusts (SETs). These measures will be implemented in the communities of Coen, Hope Vale, Aurukun and Mossman Gorge in the Cape York region of Queensland, providing approximately 800 indigenous students with additional support.

1.8 Additional funding of \$8.1 million has also been approved for the years 2009-2012 and will be appropriated through subsequent legislation for the 2009-2012 Indigenous Education Quadrennium.

### **Making Up for Lost Time in Literacy (MULTILIT)**

1.9 A portion of the appropriated funds will be used to implement the MULTILIT program through a partnership between the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). It is expected to provide approximately 1280 MULTILIT interventions for students who require intensive literacy support.<sup>4</sup>

1.10 MULTILIT was established in 1996 by Professor Kevin Wheldall and a team from MUSEC. The program places a strong emphasis on systematic phonics instruction combined with the reading of natural language texts and is specifically designed to teach low progress readers.<sup>5</sup> The program is based on a direct instruction model and comprises three independent components, these being MULTILIT Word

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3 Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership, *Submission 2*, pp. 1-2.

4 The Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Education, Science and Training, 'Second Reading Speech', *Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007*, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 16 August 2007, p. 2.

5 Kevin Wheldall and Robyn Beaman, Macquarie University Special Education Centre, Macquarie University, *An Evaluation of MULTILIT*, 1999, p. 11.

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Attack Skills, MULTILIT Sight Words and MULTILIT Reinforced Reading.<sup>6</sup> The committee notes that this program is firmly in line with recommendations made in a report commissioned by the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), *In Teachers' Hands: Effective Teaching Practices in the Early Years of Schooling*.

1.11 The proposed MULTILIT measures for Cape York will include both teacher instruction and the establishment of tutorial centres. In their submission, DEST outlined the intended roll out of MULTILIT which would include:

- a MULTILIT consultant to provide daily training on the MULTILIT instructional model for teaching staff, and where appropriate aides, peers, and parents or community members. The MULTILIT instruction will focus on five key elements of literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension; and
- the establishment of a MULTILIT Tutorial Centre within each school in the four sites to work with students identified with the greatest need for remedial literacy instruction. Students will be provided with three hours of daily MULTILIT instruction including intensive instruction in reading accuracy, sight word recognition, supported text reading, reading fluency, reading comprehension and spelling.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The case for MULTILIT in Cape York***

1.12 In their submissions, both DEST and the Institute identified two main reasons for introducing the MULTILIT program in Cape York in preference to other remedial literacy programs.

1.13 In particular both submissions identified the proven track record of MULTILIT as demonstrated primarily in a recent 12 month trial at Coen State School. The Institute noted that the two trial groups of ten students at the school in Years 4 to 7 on average gained:

21.4 months in reading accuracy, a 19 month increase in word recognition and a 10.7 month increase in reading comprehension, after only one year. They could also correctly read 75% more words per minute.<sup>8</sup>

1.14 DEST also noted the findings of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators Report 2007*—commissioned by the Council of Australian Governments—which looked at a range of best practice early literacy engagement strategies. This report identified the Coen State School MULTILIT trial as an

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6 *Submission 2*, Attachment B, p. 1.

7 *Submission 1*, pp. 5-6.

8 *Submission 2*, Attachment B, p. 2.

'example of an initiative that worked to improve the educational outcomes experienced by Indigenous students'.<sup>9</sup>

1.15 In addition, the Institute noted the suitability of the MULTILIT program to address the growing literacy problem in Cape York where indigenous students are currently two to four years behind their non-indigenous counterparts in Queensland. Of particular note were the national literacy benchmark test results, where:

As few as 21% of Indigenous students achieve minimum benchmark levels in national literacy tests for Years 3, 5 and 7. The best result for Indigenous students in a Cape York school is 54%. This is crisis levels.<sup>10</sup>

In considering 'the size and nature of crisis' the Institute concluded that MULTILIT, when compared with a range of other literacy programs,<sup>11</sup> could better address the issues as it is an 'evidence-based, remedial program, able to be implemented on a large scale quickly and with a track record of results'.<sup>12</sup>

### **Student Education Trusts**

1.16 The bill also proposes to establish SETs in the four nominated communities. These voluntary trusts—designed by the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership—will enable low income parents/guardians or extended family members to make regular contributions which they use to meet education-related expenses for their child.

1.17 Both submissions identify that SETs have already been well received in a trial in Coen, with an 80 per cent take up rate in the first two months and an average contribution of \$30-40 per fortnight.<sup>13</sup> The Institutes also notes that such a high demand for SETs 'shows that families value opportunities to provide for their child and are willing to contribute to their child's education expenses'.<sup>14</sup>

1.18 The Institute also identifies a need for expanding such a program into the three other communities as there are a high number of school children 'starting school without the required uniforms or equipment'.<sup>15</sup>

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9 *Submission 1*, p. 5.

10 *Submission 2*, p. 2.

11 The other literacy programs examined include the National Accelerated Literacy Program, Reading Recovery, Yachad Accelerated Learning Project, University of Queensland Early Literacy Fundamentals, and UQ Phonological Awareness for Literacy.

12 *Submission 2*, Attachment B, p. 4.

13 See *Submission 1*, p. 7 and *Submission 2*, p. 3.

14 *Submission 2*, p. 3.

15 *Submission 2*, Attachment C, p. 6

## **Referral of this bill**

1.19 The committee is surprised to have received this reference. As it has noticed previously, the reference of supplementary appropriation bills directed at specific programs has only a limited usefulness.<sup>16</sup> The amounts of money involved represent no more than what would be expected for the continuation of a policy which the Parliament has previously approved.

1.20 The committee does not see its role to review a policy which has obvious community support. Nor does it see itself as equipped to assess whether the appropriation is sufficient or otherwise for the purpose of the program which is proposed in the bill. However the committee is not in a position to assess whether the appropriation is sufficient or otherwise for the purpose of the program in the time allowed for consideration of the bill.

## **Recommendation**

**The committee recommends that the bill be passed.**

**Senator Judith Troeth  
Chairman**

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16 See the *Australian Technical Colleges (Flexibility in Achieving Australia's Skills Needs) Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2007* report and the *Higher Education Legislation Amendment (2006 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2006* report available:  
[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet\\_ctte/completed\\_inquiries/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/completed_inquiries/index.htm)

