



27 August 2007

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Senate Committee Members,

**Re: Submission to Inquiry into Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment  
(Cape York Measures) Bill 2007**

The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership ('the Institute') strongly supports the measures outlined in the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Amendment (Cape York Measures) Bill 2007 and urges the Senate to pass the Bill without amendment.

The Bill appropriates the initial instalment of funding for two important measures: (a) the rollout of a proven remedial reading program (MULTILIT) into four Cape York schools; and (b) the creation of Student Education Trusts (SETs). These measures were recommended by the Institute to be adopted by the Australian Government as part of an overall 'Welfare Reform' package to be trialled in four Cape York communities.

For the benefit of Committee Members, this submission outlines the nature of the welfare reform package and how these two measures fit into it. It then provides the rationale and evidence for underpinning each of the two individual measures under inquiry.

**The Welfare Reform package**

For the last 12 months, the Institute has been working with the Australian Government, Queensland Government and four Cape York communities in designing a transformative agenda to tackle entrenched disadvantage in Cape York indigenous communities.

The agenda has two overall objectives: (a) to rebuild social norms, particularly in relation to children; and (b) to create incentives to promote engagement in the real economy and reduce passivity. The Design Recommendations to achieve these objectives were provided to the Australian and Queensland Government in May of this year in a landmark report, *From Hand Out to Hand Up*. The recommendations have been adopted by the Federal Government and have received unqualified support from the Federal Opposition. Recommendations are in four areas:

- Restoring social norms by attaching reciprocity to welfare payments, most importantly in relation to school attendance and child protection.
- Addressing the welfare pedestal through changing the incentives so that people are encouraged to come off welfare (or not enter welfare) and join the real economy or undertake education or training opportunities.

- Supporting individual engagement in the real economy through converting CDEP positions into real jobs, making communities more business friendly, introducing measures to support mobility for employment and education, and improving educational standards.
- Moving from welfare housing to home ownership.

A copy of the Executive Summary of the Report is attached. (**Attachement A**) The education measures that are the subject of the Inquiry are part of the recommendations to support engagement in the real economy. Clearly individuals will struggle to enter into the real economy unless they have mastered the basics. Mastering the basics is not happening in Cape York communities today. We do not suggest that the two education measures under Inquiry solve all the educational issues, but they will make a decisive impact.

### **Embedding MULTILIT**

The first measure that the Bill under Inquiry supports is the embedding of MULTILIT teaching methodology into four Cape York schools (those that are located in the Welfare Reform communities) through a partnership between Cape York Partnerships and Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC).

MULTILIT is a remedial reading program developed by Professor Kevin Wheldall and Dr Robyn Beaman of the Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC). It is a program specifically designed for low-progress readers in Year 2 and above who are reading at a level considerably below (typically two or more years) that expected for their age.

The Institute has recommended that this program be introduced into Cape York schools for a number of reasons, but primarily because it has been demonstrated to have a decisive impact on children's reading levels in a variety of settings, including in Cape York. Students typically gain 15 to 20 months in reading accuracy and comprehension with less than 6 months instruction. **Attachment B** provides further detail behind the choice of MULTILIT above other remedial programs.

Remedial intervention is urgently required in Cape York schools. Students are typically 2 to 4 years behind in literacy levels of average mainstream Queensland students. In some Cape York schools, 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.

The Bill will allow MULTILIT to be embedded in the four schools over a four year period. The holistic design of the MULTILIT will touch a number of teachers through extensive professional development and a rigorous teaching strategy, both indigenous and non indigenous, a number of families by improving their own literacy development by reading to their children and a significant proportion of the local primary school students

The aim of this project is to 'bridge the gap' in indigenous literacy levels so that aboriginal students are, on average, achieving at, or at least close to, grade level. To this end a MULTILIT intervention plan will roll out across the four communities of Aurukun, Mossman Gorge, Hopevale, and Coen.

The funding in the Bill would support: i) the establishment of a MULTILIT Tutorial Centre within each school in the four sites; ii) embed MULTILIT instructional practices across the school as necessary from Year P -7 (and above as necessary); iii) provide for an after school community Reading Club as part of the MULTILIT Tutorial Centre; and iv) provide support to transition to school programs in terms of pre-reading and language development in feeder pre-schools.

There are approximately 570 indigenous students enrolled in schools across the four sites. It is anticipated that all of these students will be involved in a MULTILIT intervention in some way over the four years of the roll-out

### **Establishing Student Education Trusts**

The second measure that the Bill supports is the establishment of Student Education Trusts ('SETs'). SETs are education trusts that enable low income parents to support their child's education and development needs from 'birth to graduation'. Through responsible income management, parents make regular contributions to their child's SET, which they use to meet education-related expenses.

Consultants are responsible for identifying, signing up and managing donors. Parents will come to for advice and assistance with establishing a SET for their child. Consultants will help the Donor work out their fortnightly contribution, ensure all forms are completed and submitted, answer questions, and talk donors through the process and benefits of establishing a SET for their child.

The trust guidelines would stipulate that funds are used for legitimate education purposes only. Parents are provided with regular financial statements detailing the balance held and recent transactions. All costs associated with the Trusts, such as monthly fees, auditing and administration costs would be borne by the program.

**Attachment C** provides further detail in the SET proposal.

This concept has been successfully trialled in Coen. Its outstanding success provides the impetus for a broader roll out beyond Cape York to low income families everywhere. The project achieved an outstanding 80 per cent take up in the first two months. Today there are 102 SETs for Coen children, which equates to approximately 90% of children under the age of 18 in the community, with up to two donors contributing an average of about \$30-40 per child per fortnight. Such high demand shows that families value opportunities to provide for their child and are willing to contribute to their child's education expenses.

Other successes from the trial were:

- 70 per cent of primary school children had their school uniforms purchased and were ready to start school on time;
- 80 per cent of primary school children had on average two books purchased through the school book club;
- 11 children participated in sporting/education excursions subsidised by savings from their SET;
- One child had a laptop computer purchased for home use.

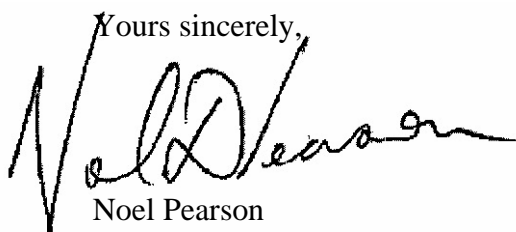
The Bill will allow SETs to be embedded in the four communities over a four year period. We estimate that 800 children will have SETs.

### **Conclusion**

The Institute urges the Senate Committee to support the Bill under inquiry. The Bill supports measures that will deliver tangible educational benefits to the children of Cape York communities.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Noel Pearson  
Director