

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Terms of Reference

1.1 On 19 March 2008 the Senate resolved to appoint a Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities to inquire into and report on:

- a. the effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response,<sup>1</sup> specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;
- b. the impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;
- c. the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and
- d. the employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

### Inquiry process

1.2 As at 3 June 2009, the committee had received a total of 92 submissions. Fifty four of these were received since the committee last reported in 2008 and are listed at Appendix 1. The submissions are also available on the committee's website at [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/indig\\_ctte/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/indig_ctte/index.htm).

1.3 In the lead up to the committee's second report, public hearings were held in Adelaide, Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin and Canberra. The committee also visited several regional and remote Indigenous communities including:

- Broken Hill, Cobar and Dubbo in Western New South Wales;
- Amata in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, South Australia;
- Mutitjulu, Ntaria (Hermannsburg) and Alice Springs in Central Australia, Northern Territory; and
- Milingimbi in Arnhemland in the Northern Territory.

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1 The committee notes that the Northern Territory Emergency Response is now being referred to as Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.

1.4 A list of organisations that appeared at its public hearings and which the committee visited appears at Appendix Two.

### **Future plans**

1.5 The committee intends to hold a public hearing in Sydney later in 2009 and to visit Kimberley communities and hold public hearings in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek during 2009.

1.6 The committee also intends to visit regional and remote Indigenous communities and hold public hearings in Queensland in the later half of the year before the committee is next due to report on 26 November 2009.

### **Structure of the report**

1.7 The report contains five chapters, of which this is the first. The second chapter sets out the Commonwealth policy framework and overarching governance directing Indigenous Affairs policy in Australia. The third chapter contains a snapshot of the type of available data on the nature and status of regional and remote Indigenous communities.

1.8 Chapter 4 addresses the Northern Territory Emergency Response and details evidence presented to the committee and its findings at this stage of the inquiry. The fifth chapter case studies the impact of state and territory policies in relation to South Australia and the Northern Territory, the two jurisdictions in which the committee has had the chance to take evidence from the state government and from the Commonwealth.

1.9 While the committee visited both Western Australia and New South Wales, it has not had a chance to take evidence in relation to issues raised in these states and will defer its substantive report on Western Australia and New South Wales government policy until its next report.

### **Previous and current inquiries of relevance**

1.10 Since the committee last reported, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs tabled *Open for Business: Developing Indigenous enterprises in Australia*, its report of the inquiry into developing Indigenous enterprises. The report made 15 recommendations on Indigenous business strengths and competitive advantage, the role of government, industry and community programs, corporate incentives to trade and engage with Indigenous businesses and the pilot Indigenous Supplier Development Council.<sup>2</sup>

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2 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Open for Business: Developing Indigenous enterprises in Australia*, October 2008, pp. xv-xviii.

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1.11 The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is also currently undertaking an inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a particular focus on:

- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
- the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
- the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.<sup>3</sup>

## **Acknowledgements**

1.12 The committee appreciates the time and work of those individuals and organisations that provided written and oral submissions to the inquiry. Their work has assisted the committee considerably in its inquiry so far.

1.13 The committee would especially like to thank community elders, members and staff of agencies and organisations who spoke with them during the inquiry and who were generous with their time and information. The committee is also grateful to the many individuals and organisations in each location they visited who worked hard to make the committee's visits possible.

1.14 The committee would like to thank people and organisations in Broken Hill and Dubbo for meeting with them, and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and staff of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) for allowing them to participate in their leadership workshop in Cobar.

1.15 The committee would like to thank members of the Mutitjulu community and staff from Mission Australia for meeting them in conjunction with the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs in Mutitjulu on a Sunday afternoon, and representatives from Voyages and the GPT Group in Yulara who also met with the committee on a Sunday afternoon.

1.16 The committee's visit to Amata was greatly assisted by officers of the South Australian government. The committee thanks the South Australian government and FaHCSIA officers for attending this visit, and local staff and community members in Amata for allowing access to organisations and the community. The committee was grateful for the opportunity to visit the Amata Anangu School, and appreciated the tour given to them by staff and students.

1.17 Due to rain, the committee was unable to undertake its planned visit to Umuwa and regrets that it was unable to meet with members of the Anangu

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3 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Terms of Reference, <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/communitystores/index.htm>

Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Executive and staff from other organisations in Umuwa. The committee acknowledges the assistance of the APY Executive in arranging access to the APY Lands.

1.18 The committee was grateful for the opportunity to visit Milingimbi in May 2009 and thanks the Milingimbi community, staff of agencies and organisations for their time.

### **Further submissions**

1.19 The committee welcomes further submissions both in writing and orally. Submissions do not have to be long or detailed and may set out a community's or an individual's concerns in dot points. Additional details of how to make a submission are available at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/wit\\_sub/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/wit_sub/index.htm)

1.20 The committee is also keen to encourage submissions from a broad range of people, especially people living in regional and remote Indigenous communities. For people who are not able to or do not want to make a written submission, the committee secretariat can arrange for a submission or evidence to be transcribed over the telephone via the committee's toll free number 1800 728 963. Interpreters are also available.