

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,¹ 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 The committee is required to report to the Senate twice a year. The committee has previously reported to the senate on two occasions: in September 2008 and June 2009.

1.3 As at 16 November 2009, the committee had received a total of 110 submissions. Eighteen of these were received since the committee last reported in June 2009 and are listed at appendix one. An additional three supplementary submissions were received from people or organisations that had previously made submissions. Submissions are available on the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/indig_ctte/index.htm.

1.4 In the lead up to the committee's third report, public hearings were held in Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Broome, Narrogin and Perth in Western Australia and in Sydney in New South Wales.

1.5 The committee has previously held public hearings in Adelaide, Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin and Canberra and conducted site visits in the following locations:

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

- 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;
- Milingimbi in Arnhemland in the Northern Territory; and
- Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and Balgo in Western Australia.

1.6 A list of organisations and individuals who appeared at its public hearings during this current reporting period appears at appendix two.

Future plans

1.7 The committee intends to visit regional and remote Indigenous communities and hold public hearings in Queensland during 2010.

Structure of the report

1.8 The report contains five chapters, of which this is the first. The second chapter provides an update on the Commonwealth policy framework guiding Indigenous Affairs in Australia. The third chapter reports on progress made on matters that the committee undertook to monitor in its last report.

1.9 Chapter four reports on the committee's findings in Western Australia while chapter five focuses on New South Wales.

Acknowledgements

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

1.11 The committee would especially like to thank community elders and members, and staff of agencies and organisations who spoke with them during this reporting period. The committee is also grateful to the many individuals and organisations they met with in each location they visited.

1.12 The committee would like to thank people and organisations in Narrogin and the Wheatbelt Region of Western Australia for their advice and assistance in preparation for the committee's hearing in Narrogin.

Further submissions

1.13 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.apf.gov.au/Senate/committee/wit_sub/index.htm

1.14 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.

