

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 has previously reported to the Senate on four occasions: in September 2008; June 2009; November 2009; and May 2010. This is the committee's final report for the 42nd parliament under its current terms of reference.

1.3 The committee received a total of 122 submissions, with one received since the committee's previous report. Public submissions are available on the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/indig_ctte/index.htm.

1.4 The committee held a total of 17 public hearings in six states and territories. Of these, eight were conducted in regional and remote Indigenous communities. Additionally, the committee visited a further 13 communities and met with local organisations and individuals.

Public Hearings

- Canberra, ACT (13–14 November 2008)
- Adelaide, SA (4 March 2009)
- Alice Springs, NT (1 May 2009)

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

- Katherine, NT (20 May 2009)
- Darwin, NT (21–22 May 2009)
- Canberra, ACT (9 June 2009)
- Fitzroy Crossing, WA (24 August 2009)
- Halls Creek, WA (25 August 2009)
- Broome, WA (26 August 2009)
- Narrogin, WA (8 October 2009)
- Perth, WA (9 October 2009)
- Sydney, NSW (15 October 2009)
- Cairns, QLD (14 April 2010)
- Brisbane, QLD (15 April 2010)
- Cherbourg, QLD (16 April 2010)

Site visits

- Fitzroy Crossing, WA (19–20 August 2008)
- Balgo, WA (21 August 2008)
- Derby, WA (22 August 2008)
- Broken Hill, NSW (17 November 2008)
- Cobar, NSW (17 November 2008)
- Dubbo, NSW (18 November 2008)
- Mutitjulu and Yulara, NT (1 March 2009)
- Amata, SA (2 March 2009)
- Alice Springs, NT (29 April 2009)
- Ntaria (Hermannsburg), NT (30 April 2009)
- Milingimbi, NT (19 May 2009)
- Weipa, QLD (12 April 2010)
- Napranum, QLD (12 April 2010)
- Bamaga, QLD (13 April 2010)

1.5 The submissions provided to the committee and the transcripts of evidence resulting from public hearings represent a unique body of evidence for those interested in the wellbeing of Indigenous communities. The views of hundreds of witnesses and submitters, many of whom live or work in regional and remote Indigenous communities, provide an insight into the policy area that statistics and reports alone cannot provide.

1.6 Crucially, these submissions and transcripts highlight the perceptions held by people involved in the day to day life of these communities. An understanding of these perceptions is vital in allowing individuals across government, community and other sectors to work together for the betterment of Indigenous wellbeing. The committee therefore commends the inquiry's body of evidence to the reader.

Structure of the Report

1.7 The report contains two chapters, of which this is the first.

1.8 The second chapter outlines:

- (a) the committee's overarching findings based on the committee's experience visiting regional and remote Indigenous communities and talking with community members;
- (b) the committee's findings in relation to specific issues including housing, education, employment, health and justice, drawing on the discussion of these matters in the first four reports; and
- (c) a way forward to address these issues in the 43rd parliament.

Note on Terminology

1.9 This report uses the term 'Indigenous' as well as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. Both terms should be recognised as interchangeable for the purposes of this report.

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.

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.

