

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 three occasions: in September 2008; June 2009 and November 2009.

1.3 As at 12 May 2010, the committee had received a total of 117 submissions, including 7 since the committee's last report in November 2009. Submissions are listed at Appendix 1. All 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 fourth report, public hearings were held on 14 and 15 April 2010 in Cairns and Brisbane. Meetings were also held on 12, 13 and 16 April 2010 in the regional and remote communities of Weipa, Napranum, Bamaga and Cherbourg in Queensland.

1.5 The committee has previously held public hearings in capitals and communities in South Australia, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales, including: Adelaide, Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, Canberra, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Broome, Narrogin and Perth and in Sydney 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 2.

1.7 The committee also advertised its inquiry in *the Australian* newspaper.

Future Plans

1.8 The committee intends to provide a final report in the latter half of 2010.

Structure of the Report

1.9 The report contains three chapters, of which this is the first.

1.10 The second chapter provides an update on the Commonwealth policy framework guiding Indigenous Affairs in Australia. It also outlines the Council of Australian Government's Closing the Gap national policy to address Indigenous disadvantage.

1.11 The third chapter outlines the committee's findings drawing on its visit to Queensland.

Note on References

1.12 References to the committee Hansard are to the proof Hansard – page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard.

Note on Terminology

1.13 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

1.14 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.

1.15 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.

1.16 The committee would like to thank all individuals and organisations in Weipa, Napranum, Bamaga, Cairns, Brisbane and Cherbourg for their assistance in preparation for the committee's visits and hearings.

Further Submissions

1.17 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

1.18 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.