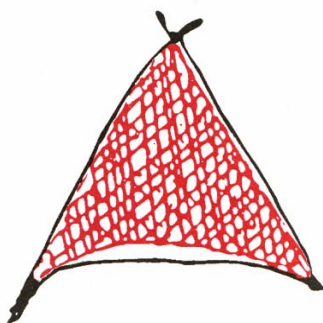


Laynhapuy Homelands Association Incorporated



SUBMISSION TO

**The Hon Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and
Indigenous Affairs**

ON THE

**Proposed Introduction of Income Management
on 9 June 2008 under the
Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)**

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Yananymul Mununggurr
CEO
February 2008

1.0 Executive Summary

The Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. (LHAI) supports the Government's elevation of the issues of chronic Aboriginal disadvantage in remote communities.

LHAI believes however that the physical and social circumstances of remote homelands pose particular challenges to the Government's Income Management approach, and that LHAI could, with Government assistance provide a more effective and appropriate response which builds on our existing systems and approach.

Many of the assumptions underlying the income management approach do not apply to any significant degree in the homelands. The LHAI homeland communities are essentially free of alcohol and other substances misuse. The real issues relate to physical and cost access to food outlets, and barriers to education and training relating to financial and economic literacy.

LHAI seeks your support to:

- **Maintain and expand our current deduction system.** Firstly, we would recommend maintaining and expanding the current deduction system as operated by LHAI which already covers, rent, power, funeral fund, work lunches and limited travel. We have good relationships with our members and good access/communication to the Homelands. We are proposing to enhance this system with a remote bill paying system, and are currently investigating opportunities for a banking service to Homelands, and financial literacy and numeracy support.
- **The Federal Government to contract LHAI to provide these services in lieu of extending the role and use of Centrelink resources.** LHAI requests that funding from the Australian Government be provide to LHAI to enhance these services in lieu of further expansion of and outlays on Centrelink's role. A Financial Support Manager attached to LHAI would be able to ensure the Government's Income Management objectives. This would enable a more holistic approach to be adopted, linking in with our existing training function and other measures to reinforce the long-term financial security and sustainability of Homeland members, from within their own association. This builds capacity, social capital, and Yolngu employment opportunities.
- **Delay introduction of income management to coincide with the introduction of the LHAI Homelands Stores systems.** LHAI requests that the date (9 June 2008) for the roll out of income management in the Laynhapuy Homelands, which will precipitate an urgent need for 'food security', be held over until the LHAI Homeland Stores proposal is implemented. Local homeland access to food and essential supplies will maximise the effectiveness of the proposed income management, and engender localised support from those affected by the income management process, thereby increasing its chance of success. This builds capacity, social capital, and Yolngu employment opportunities.

2.0 Intention of the NTER measures

Following the 'Little Children Are Sacred Report', the Australian Government implemented the NTER to address chronic issues within some Aboriginal communities, such as:

17 years' less life expectancy than the Australian average;
Lower numeracy and literacy rates; lack of education
Poor nutrition and health;
Higher levels of violence, child sexual abuse and substance abuse;
Lack of employment

LHAI agrees strongly with the government on the desired outcomes of the NTER and has been working locally with its members over a long period of time to address these problems, where they exist. It should be noted, however that all communities have individual and diverse circumstances and should be treated as such.

3.0 The Laynhapuy Homelands

3.1 *Recent history of the Homelands*

The Homelands consist of 19 separate Yolgnu communities in North East Arnhem Land. Fourteen of these are permanently occupied. Please find a map at attachment 1.

In the Laynhapuy area, the move out of the missions and back to permanent settlements on the homelands was precipitated by the social trauma that ensued following the building of the mining town and the introduction of alcohol to the area. It was also motivated by a positive desire to protect clan estates from further incursion, and Yolngu groups began to go back to country in 1971-2. This homelands movement was a Yolngu initiative, and began before there was any official support from government for such movements. It began before the era of 'self-determination' ushered in by the first Whitlam government, and predated the NT Land Rights Act.

The Laynhapuy Homelands have been recognised for their cultural and environmental significance with the establishment of the Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) by the Federal Department of Environment and Heritage in 2000.

3.2 *The viability of Homeland communities*

The underlying strength of Homelands communities is well documented in recent reports such as the 2006 report '*Survey of Outstation Resource Centres in the Northern Territory*' from the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination and the Frances Morphy (CAEPR) Report "*the Future of the Homelands in north-east Arnhem Land*" of 11 January 2005.

The 2006 report '*Survey of Outstation Resource Centres in the Northern Territory*' from the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, argues against Homelands/Outstations being closed down. It says that the '*marked resilience of many Outstations in this region suggests that arid region outstations can become viable.*' "*What emerges from this survey is that the issue of viability, and related issues of cost-effectiveness, are not clear cut*", the report notes. "*Whilst distance, remoteness and smallness.....add to costs, other factors*

can work to reduce costs.”

The report also says that advances in technology can change the costs of remoteness. The report names four areas of economic development; the arts and crafts industry; environmental projects; coastal surveillance and general security; and small scale cattle and livestock enterprises. *“An important finding of the survey was the strong view expressed by the ORC managers and others surveyed that outstation and similar communities enjoy good social and health outcomes by comparison with the residents of major communities and town camps.”* The report notes that there is an *“absence of indicators of social dysfunction”* in many outstations, and that they play an important rehabilitation role for alcoholics and drug addicts.

The paper from CAEPR (Frances Morphy “The future of the homelands in north-east Arnhem Land” 11 January 2005) recommends that government “Support the existing homelands resource agencies to develop as community development agencies, understand these populations comparatively, stop the cost-shifting game, revolutionise the attitude to training and take people’s desire to create jobs on their homelands, rather than moving to hub communities or urban centres.”

Morphy concludes “In the long term, if the small business sector of the remote economy can grow, it will generate a genuine income stream for homelands communities, and their dependence on government monies for their survival will correspondingly decrease. At best, remote Australia will be home to networks of thriving, functioning small communities, where thousands of people continue to balance, in a creative way, their sense of being uniquely themselves with the demands of being part of the wider polity and economy. The alternative- at it’s worst- could be an empty wilderness full of feral animals and weeds and subject to hot wildfires, and a significant swelling of the ranks of the alienated, dispossessed rural and urban poor. Neither of these alternatives will be cheap for governments, but one seems infinitely preferable to the other.”

3.3 Challenges and local solutions

Many of the disadvantages inherent in Homeland communities are a result of isolation and lack of infrastructure and resources (including education and meaningful training), rather than poor income management. The nearest grocery store, bank and Centrelink is over a 400km round trip from some Homeland communities.

The traditional kinship-based structure (“Gurrutu”) of the Yolgnu people represents an effective community-based approach for dealing with a range of issues such as school attendance, income management, and abuse in all its forms. Social pressure in tight-knit communities can have a stronger impact than any externally applied pressure, which will be extremely difficult to monitor from a distance.

Some of the local initiatives developed and supported by Yolgnu include:

- a “walking school bus” in some communities to increase school attendance;
- substance dependency programs;
- violence and abuse programs;
- Raypirri Rom project
- alcohol plan of management

In the Laynhapuy homelands our Yolgnu members are pursuing initiatives such as

the development of 'Hub' homelands to enable more effective access to services and economic development opportunities
chronic disease initiatives
maternal health, child health programs
Homeland Stores/Bush tucker run to improve affordable access to foodstuffs to improve nutrition
self funded Homelands housing alternatives and Homelands
Youth development programs such as music and Sport and Recreation
improving access to training.

4.0 The Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc

Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc (LHAI) is a member owned Aboriginal organisation incorporated under the *NT Associations Act* to provide services to its members in the homelands of North East Arnhem Land.

LHAI has operated for over 20 years, and now is a strong, medium-sized association delivering a range of services to Homeland members and external communities. These services include housing management, infrastructure, municipal and essential services, aviation transport, protection of culture and country, advocacy, income management assistance, and CDEP. LHAI now has over 70% Yolngu staff, including the CEO.

5.0 Local initiatives in place

While it is essential that the objectives of the NTER are achieved, we believe that the income management regime as proposed by Government, will either duplicate, replace or contradict aspects of existing local initiatives aimed at achieving the same outcomes in a number of areas. These areas are:

- Improving management of Income
- Improving Nutrition
- Improving School attendance and educational outcomes
- Improving Health
- Reducing Substance abuse
- Reducing Sexual abuse and violence
- Improving housing conditions and tenant responsibility

5.1 Improving management of Income

LHAI already has a voluntary deduction system in place to assist Homeland members manage their income. This voluntary system is well managed and well accepted by the community, and is taken up by 100% of all CDEP employees. In the past, LHAI has also managed a bill paying service.

In addition to the voluntary deduction system, LHAI is proposing to:

- Provide financial literacy training, family budgeting support and some tax support;
- Provide its remote bill paying service;
- Investigate banking facilities in the Homeland, particularly in conjunction with a Homelands food store;

For financial security to be sustainable for its members, LHAI recognises the importance of income management to become more of a personal responsibility. The long-term vision is that all Homeland members will have the capability and understanding to manage their own finances.

It is worth noting that LHAI has contacted ANZ Bank in the past wishing to be included in the ANZ Bank/FaCSIA "Money Business" program to assist in financial literacy training and personal financial responsibility for Homeland members. We would be keen to be involved in an expanded program, if the pilot (now several years old) has been deemed successful.

5.2 Improving Nutrition

The Homelands do not currently have a affordable access to food stores/distribution service and this is an issue that is currently being addressed through the development of a feasibility study/business plan by an external consultancy. This business plan is due by the end of April 2008 with a view to implementing food security for the Homelands by 9 June 2008. A local supply of nutritious, fresh and reasonably priced food is of fundamental concern and LHAI is moving to rectify this situation through establishment of Homelands Stores/food service in the Hub communities, which would service the smaller outlying homelands.

Currently, Homeland members must travel to either the IGA or Woolworths in Nhulunbuy to buy groceries. This can entail up to \$1200 in aircraft charters or 'bush taxis', or up to a 422 km return road trip (from Dhurupitjipi). For much of the wet season, the roads access to some homelands is not possible.

The current barriers to responsible expenditure and improved nutrition (and hence health) do not relate to parental responsibility or a need for income management.

5.3 Improving School attendance and educational outcomes

Laynhapuy has 5 schools in its Homelands, and two of them secondary school function (ie. Yilpara and Garthalala). Attendance at Homeland schools is higher than in some prescribed communities with the SHEP system (senior secondary homeland education program) giving students the opportunity to finish high school where this wouldn't normally be possible. This initiative of secondary school education originally began from grass roots level Yolngu engagement and without any formal Government funding, but has now attracted limited funding to support it.

There is clear evidence to suggest that there is an overwhelming demand for schooling, but not enough funding to resource it. The Homelands SHEP program has to turn away students every year due to this barrier, however this year it is hoped that 7 of the 31 secondary students will finish their final year's study.

LHAI is seeking ways to improve access to local schools in all Homeland communities, through options such as School of the Air or flights into the Hub homelands for school week.

Local communities have 'truancy officers' in place, and 'walking school buses' to get children to school. A Breakfast program has also been started in one of the major

communities, in an effort to get children to school, and ready for participation and learning. It is the goal of most Homeland community members that their children receive an education and go to school. Government systems/processes themselves often do not support the desired outcomes. For instance, at Gurrumurru, a community of approximately 40 people and a large number of children, they were told that if they wanted to access education services, they needed to get 13 children to line up for roll call every school day morning and sign off on an attendance book, continuously for 6 months, and then go back home. Only after that attendance data had been collected (and after children and parents were dejected at going through this demoralising process) would this community be eligible for visiting teacher support. Another homeland suffers from the lack of any relationship between the School of the Air Service, and the Dept Educations Homeland School Service. They need the support of the latter to make School of the Air effective.

Yolngu have actively campaigned to increase schooling capacity within the Hub Homelands, including teacher resources, dormitories, early childhood education and access to transport so that the larger hubs can service the smaller Homelands. LHAI has also actively pursued adult and VET training through the Hub Pilot Program, which aims to reduce barriers to economic independence, education, employment, social capacity, health, sustainable environment and provision of essential service delivery including telecommunications, IT, power and water. A VIIP application was submitted to DEET and DEST over 12 months ago, seeking the provision of 4 basic training areas complete with tutor accommodation, however we are unaware of any progress of this application at this point in time.

Educational achievement is not assisted by the lack of access to English language media through free to air television and radio (eg. ABC), which are not available to homeland residents.

The primary barriers to improved educational outcomes therefore do not relate to parental responsibility or need for income management.

5.4 Improving Health

In 2006-7, Laynha Health provided 2,764 episodes of care to 2,535 clients. Strategies from Laynha Health's Service Action Plan include a Health Advisory Group, Women's Advisory Group, participation in community council meetings, recruitment and development of the local health workforce, and improved provision of health related information in the Laynhapuy Homelands. Data from **ACIR** as at 31 March 07 showed that 91%, 92% and 88% of children aged 1 year, 2 years and 6 years respectively were fully vaccinated. As at 30 June 2007, 51.6% of Laynha Health's regular Indigenous clients with Type II Diabetes and 42.1% of clients with coronary heart disease had a chronic disease management plan.

The additional health input as a result of NTER is working well and the early outcomes of health checks in the Homelands suggest that there have not been any referrals for child sexual abuse. Data also shows that those children who underwent health checks as part of the Intervention, had also had the same checks previously through Laynha Health, and no referrals for sexual abuse had been documented to date.

In broad terms, the Yolgnu people of the Homelands have better health than the residents of many other major communities see the OIPC 2006 Report "*Survey of Outstation*

Resource Centres in the Northern Territory and the Frances Morphy (CAEPR) Report “*the Future of the Homelands in north-east Arnhem Land*” of 11 January 2005.

Some years ago, Home Management Programs were run through CDEP programs, to assist with Health issues, and proved very effective in managing and negating environmental health issues, however these programs were denied funding after ATSIC was abolished and CDEP was transferred to DEWR with the primary focus on employment and economic outcomes, rather than the foundation of community development.

In terms of priorities, better access to community health care and better access to local, nutritious and affordable food will have better health outcomes than income management. This can be achieved through:

- the rapid progression of LHAI’s business plan for Homelands Stores service to implementation phase.
- reinstatement of access to funding for ‘Living Skills’ programs (suspended in 2007) by the NT Govt. This should be reintroduced so this education and environmental health work can be reinstated. LHAI has the capacity to run such programs subject of funding availability.

The primary barriers to improved health outcomes therefore do not relate to parental responsibility or need for income management.

5.5 Reducing Substance abuse

The Laynhapuy Homelands have been voluntarily dry communities since their establishment, and they do not have the substance abuse issues of some other communities. During 2007, there were only 8 incidences of police presence at the 19 Laynhapuy homelands communities, which cover 6,500 sq km. These ranged from fishing offences, to alcohol related offences, and domestic violence. There were no reports of substance abuse in these Homelands. The same distance issues that impact on food supply make it easier to keep the Homelands as ‘dry’, and the new NT Alcohol Permit system in East Arnhem Land with further strengthen this, as no takeaway permits will be issued to homeland residents.

5.6 Reducing Sexual abuse and violence

Police statistics show that during 2006-7 there was only one incident of a possible attempted sexual assault, at Wandawuy Homeland, and this was not related to child sexual abuse. There have been no incidents of child sexual abuse reported to either the NT Police or Laynha Health. Traditional culture is still very strong in the Homelands, and the Gurrutu Rom (family law) system works extremely well in managing any issues that may occur.

5.7 Improving housing conditions and tenant responsibility

The success of Income Management in addressing housing issues in the Homelands will depend on the expedient resolution of an effective Homelands Policy. At present, many of the ‘prescribed’ communities under the NTER are being allocated housing, whilst no provision is being made to address overcrowding in Homelands/Outstations. Failure to address this issue may inadvertently result in Homelands residents who currently face overcrowding, migrating into large communities - simply shifting the problem rather than

solving it, and exposing more people, including children, to some of the risks and negative characteristics of large communities.

LHAI experiences very little deliberate vandalism of houses, and our housing stock is fairly well maintained. All adult residents pay \$20 per week through our deduction scheme. This 'poll tax' approach means some households in fact pay quite significant amounts in rent depending on the number of adults. Our major problems relate to overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure (power, sewerage systems).

LHAI is in the preliminary stages of investigating self-funded houses for Yolngu on Homelands, who will be involved in every aspect – from design, environmental impact, scope and training, to building, and maintenance.

Income Management per se is unlikely to significantly impact on current housing concerns as LHAI has minimal difficulty collecting rent, and tenants are generally fairly responsible. The problems damage associated with alcohol abuse is also absent.

6.0 LHAI Income Management proposal

6.1 *Whole of government approach*

The success of Income Management in the Homelands will very much depend on a supportive Whole of Government approach, in partnership with the local communities, and close examination of local initiatives already in place.

A clearly articulate CDEP Policy and Homelands Policy are critical to maintaining and further developing effective local responses that support income management.

Unfortunately there continues to be a confusion around policy and bureaucratic inertia. Officers within DEEWR, FHACSA, and Local Government, have voiced their doubts about the continuation of the CDEP program, and the re-introduction of 'community development' activities/focus back into the objectives for the CDEP program. From Local Government officers, it has also been communicated that CDEP wages administration is likely to go over to Centrelink, reducing CDEP to a welfare program, so that wages will be able to be quarantined. It was suggested that oncosts would be reduced, and the CDEP programs could be rendered unviable for the organisation to run.

LHAI and other organisations have also been told by DEEWR that our CDEP programs are now classified as 'at risk' in terms of organisation performance, because of the uncertainty resulting from the Intervention, lack policy clarity around future of CDEP, and local council amalgamations to form Shires.

Planning for the new Shires is taking place as if the citizens resident in the homelands, and their communities, don't exist - because a 'homelands policy' is not yet available to inform their planning.

LHAI strongly endorses the **14 Point Plan of Action for CDEP Reform** (produced by CDEP organisations throughout the Northern Territory) that was submitted to the Prime Minister and the Hon. Jenny Macklin in Darwin on the 15th December 2007. It is important that the new Federal Government move quickly to communicate the new direction to all public servants to ensure a Whole of Government approach is applied. Currently, local public servants appear to be making decisions "on the run" based on misinformation and

speculation due to this uncertainty.

6.2 Our proposal

The Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. (LHAI) supports the Government's elevation of the issues of chronic Aboriginal disadvantage in remote communities.

LHAI believes however that the physical and social circumstances of remote homelands pose particular challenges to the Government's Income Management approach, and that LHAI could, with Government assistance provide a more effective and appropriate response which builds on our existing systems and approach.

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We would welcome further discussion of this submission for Income Management within the Laynhapuy Homelands, and look forward to your correspondence on this issue.

Yours sincerely

Ms Yananymul Mununggurr

CEO

Laynhapuy Homelands Association Incorporated

cc. Marion Scrymgour

The Hon. Warren Snowdon

Senator Trish Crossin

Syd Stirling

Attachment 1 Map of Laynhapuy Homelands

