



Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members

We welcome this opportunity to tender a submission to the Senate Select Committee looking at issues pertaining to remote and regional Indigenous communities. Given the breadth of the Committee's terms of reference, acknowledged by the Committee Chair Senator David Johnston in his invitation for submissions, Reconciliation Australia will submit a range of documents for consideration by the committee.

We are confronted with daily reminders of the difficult circumstances of those living in remote and regional Indigenous communities, both through the media and through the findings of reports such as the recent Mullighan Inquiry. No Australian would be unaware that across key areas of disadvantage – health, education, employment – residents of remote Indigenous communities are faring poorly. These stories and reports also highlight the political failures and resourcing shortfalls that have led to a social and environmental context where, as has been much publicised, the average life-span of Indigenous Australians is 17 years shorter than the national non-Indigenous average. The Prime Minister's commitment to closing the gap within a generation sets a high bar for achievement.

What we know, and what the bulk of the content of the attached documents highlight is that closing the gap is going to require sustained commitment and significant changes in the way governments do business with Indigenous communities in remote and regional Australia. Our **What Works in Indigenous Affairs** (Appendix A) distils learnings from a range of sources to compile a list of what has proven to be effective in producing results in Indigenous Affairs. In his Press Club address last year (Appendix B) Reconciliation Australia director Fred Chaney said that, knowing what works, "governments, and all of us involved, have no excuses left for failure." The findings of our broad-ranging Indigenous Community Governance Project (Appendix C) tell us that complex systems of government, duplication and red-tape are hindering the progress of Indigenous organisations in remote and regional areas. These findings also tell us that the key to addressing issues in remote and regional communities lies in the communities themselves. Solutions imposed from outside communities are unlikely to succeed. A detailed survey of the governance research is being submitted by our research partners, the Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research.

Last year Reconciliation Australia partnered with News Limited and Warlpiri Media on the Voices from the Heart of the Nation series (Appendix D), a fortnightly page in The Australian devoted to the thoughts and feelings of residents of Yuendumu in the Northern Territory. The interview subjects discuss their feelings about topics like the intervention,

education, grog and culture and provide a compelling insight into life in a remote Indigenous community.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, approaching solutions to these issues requires mutually respectful relationships as discussed by Reconciliation Australia CEO Barbara Livesey and Programs and Strategy Director Jason Glanville prior to the 2020 summit (Appendix E). Without these relationships and without the investment in the capacity of communities to address their own issues, the most admirable aims directed at improving outcomes in remote and regional Indigenous communities will achieve little.

We look forward to further opportunities to provide input to the committee throughout its regular reporting.

Regards

Barbara Livesey
Chief Executive

11 June 2008