

**Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation** (ICN 1838)  
**Trading as NYANGATJATJARA COLLEGE**  
(ABN: 15 993 442 008)

**Corporation:**  
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**Our Ref:** 10.1

3 May 2009

Senate Select Committee on  
Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities  
P O Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

ATTENTION: Toni Matulick

Dear Committee Secretary

**INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

I refer to your letter of 26 February 2009.

Enclosed please find a Submission to the above Inquiry.

I note submissions were due on 1 May 2009 and apologise for being overdue.

I stress that the comments and observations outlined in the Submission are my own personal views for what they are worth which I have quickly put together as a result of personal observations and discussions with local Indigenous Community members.

I raised the Submission with several Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation (NAC) Board Members who generally expressed the view that it was just another inquiry and nothing would come of it. They were not particularly interested in developing a NAC submission per se.

I have to admit that I can understand the attitude adopted given the number of Inquiries and Reports in the past with relatively few positive outcomes from the Indigenous perspective.



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However as your Committee would well be aware, Indigenous disadvantage is a complex issue which is varied and widespread across many locations in Australia. I respectfully suggest there is no one solution or answer while what may work in one location will not necessarily work in another. A 'horses for courses' approach needs to be adopted where possible and involving the Indigenous community each step along the way.

I wish the Committee well in its endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Mike Collins  
Acting Chief Executive Officer



**SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**Comments on Term of reference a) – the Northern Territory Emergency Response**

**Background**

I have worked in Indigenous Affairs in a wide range of areas since 1975 as a Commonwealth Public Servant in Western Australia, Northern Territory and Victoria/Tasmania, a State Public Servant in Western Australia and since 2003, as a Consultant.

Since mid December 2008, I have been working with the Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation (NAC), Yulara, NT, as the acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO) pending the appointment of a new CEO who is to take up duty in mid June 2009.

NAC whose membership comprises residents of Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara (Docker River) Central Australian communities, has had a chequered history since its establishment in the 1990's. It initially operated a number of commercial enterprises and established a secondary school for students in Central Australia which included three Community Campuses together with a boarding facility located at Yulara.

In 2006, the then Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations placed NAC under Administration due to poor administrative practices and suspected insolvency issues. The Administration was lifted in August 2008 with NAC having been restructured separating commercial activities from those of the Corporation under a separate Company structure leaving NAC to concentrate solely on the provision of educational services.

Briefly, NAC operates Nyangatjatjara College which is now the primary function of the Corporation. However as an Independent School, it has struggled to provide a consistent and satisfactory education service due to a number of factors – the inability to attract staff, poor (apart from the Yulara campus) and limited facilities, lack of funds together with a general lack of community support.

The Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has provided constructive and positive support during the Corporation's restructure resulting in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being reached between DEEWR and NAC. One condition of the MOU is that NAC contracts Yirara College of the Finke River Mission Inc to provide educational services. Yirara College is located in Alice Springs and is operated by the Lutheran Church. Yirara College currently provides educational services under contract to NAC.

I would stress that the following comments are my own personal observations resulting from my experience here and in other locations and from discussions with local community members i.e. residents of Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Docker River.

## **Comments**

### **General**

- The word “Government” refers to Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments.
- Many if not most people do not understand why the Intervention Program was introduced. In fact, it would be fair to say in many instances there is some resentment. However, it should also be stated that some community members see the action as eroding their own ‘power base’. They see little or no benefit resulting from the placement of government officers and/or Police in their communities while physical aspects in the communities have changed little.
- The Government has not “sold’ the concept particularly well. People are unsure exactly why it has happened. Some feel their rights have been eroded. Others state it is just another example of Government “telling people what to do and knowing what is best for them”. To date they see no tangible benefits part from more jobs for ‘whitefellas’.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been little decrease in drug and alcohol abuse despite the presence of additional officers. I am unable to comment on child abuse issues.
- Community members have enquired what do “Community Business Managers” do in their communities. They see their appointments as simply being another bureaucrat being located in their midst to report on them. They query why they are there and what are they supposed to do. They see little or no benefit to the community development, community lifestyle and/or infrastructure.
- Community members express concern that significant funds have been expended to establish Government officers in their communities while community infrastructure remains neglected. They do not think the Government is ‘fair dinkum’ about improving facilities and lifestyles.
- Some express the view that the Government has taken away their community’s power to have a say in and make decisions. This is reinforced by the abolition of the local “Community Councils” having been replaced by the larger MacDonnell Shire Council.

- There remains a chronic need for better housing, improved health services, infrastructure development while employment opportunities are extremely limited due to the location and nature of the communities.
- Governments have a poor track record. Communities are aware of this and indicate they have heard it all before – “all words and no real action”. Community members have become quite cynical about enquiries and their outcomes.

## **Education**

- Education is perhaps one of the keys to future progress but its development is hindered by a large number of factors some of which are:
  - elders/parents constantly say their children must go to school, yet they do not ensure their children attend school. They continue to insist this is the Government’s responsibility;
  - NAC’s Board Of Directors strongly support education being provided for secondary students yet they too say it is not the responsibility of parents to make their children attend. Rather they see attendance as being a Government responsibility as well as that of the locally based teacher[s].
  - Many children do not wish to attend boarding facilities. They wish to remain in their home communities where they can attend school when and as they like;
  - English is generally the second language of children which may inhibit learning;
  - Cultural factors also interfere with schooling. People travel to attend ‘business’ and are sometimes absent for several weeks; having mixed gender classes can also be an issue which is a factor affecting attendance at the Yulara boarding campus.
  - Schools have to be made attractive to attend. They must have good equipment and facilities. This is generally not the case at Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Docker River communities where facilities are limited while only limited numbers can be catered for even if all children want to attend classes. Recreational facilities for out of school activities are either non existent or limited. This is particularly so at the Yulara boarding facility where there are modern boarding facilities and substantial classrooms (which are not conducive to good learning by the way) but very limited recreational facilities for out of school hours which are essential for after school care. Currently, the boarding facility is not in use because children do not wish to attend Yulara;
  - Better classrooms and equipment are essential to provide a more attractive and better teaching and learning environments;
  - Accommodation for teachers is limited in remote communities. It is sometimes of a poor standard making it difficult to recruit and retain suitably qualified staff.

NAC is attempting to address many of these education issues and it is hoped the appointment of the incoming CEO, Professor Robyn Jorgensen, Griffith University, Queensland, who is a renowned academic who specialises in education for lower socio-economic groups, will inject new ideas and approaches into Nyangatjatjara College's operations.

Mike Collins  
A/Chief Executive Officer  
Nyangatjatjara Aboriginal Corporation.

3 May 2009