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Wanghatjungha Community,
Via Fitzroy Crossing
W.A. 6765.
24/08/09.

The Select Committee on
Regional And Remote Indigenous Communities.
Dear Honourable Senators,

I hope you accept a submission from me. I am doing so as a resident of a remote Community. Kurungul Council Inc is the administrative body of the Communities of Wanghatjungha, Ngumpun and Kupertiya. They lie to the East of Fitzroy Crossing some 110, 90 and 130 km away respectively.

On Wanghatjungha I run the Home and Community Care programme. Being married to a local woman I am eligible to be an elected member of the Wanghatjungha Council as well as being a Delegate to the Kurungul Council.

I came from Queensland 1988 to be Principal of the Kulkurraya Community School, Noonkanbah and its associate schools - Millijudee and Woorumbah. Since coming here (WA) I have lived at Noonkanbah, Wanghatjungha, Derby, Eight Mile Community (Fitzroy Crossing), Fitzroy Crossing and, since April 2005, back again at Wanghatjungha. In that time I have witnessed many things which enable me to put pen to paper and comment with some knowledge.

I am 66 this year.

EDUCATION

In 25 years of Teaching in Queensland in remote schools as well as a city I was not prepared for the standards I saw here. By any measurement they were appalling and in many areas there has been no improvement.

As a Staff Teacher at a city State School I was also Boarder Master at a private school in the 70's. Even there one Palm Island young man became Head boarder and many Aboriginal and Torres Strait youths and young men were able to perform, academically, to a main-stream standard. Through teaching and tutoring, voluntarily here, I have met few people of a comparable standard.

I have met some fine, dedicated Principals and Teachers. A few have had experience with Aboriginal children. Sadly the majority are young teachers who have hardly ever been to the country, do not speak Kriol or know the demands of teaching Kimberley children. E.S.L. Studies as well as a B.Ed. (Dip Teach Ab. Ed) should be compulsory with long-duration, pre-service Practice sessions in Kimberley schools.

The most literate people I have met here were Mission-educated in a Teacher-focused chalk and talk style. Aboriginal learning is observing and doing. The discovery style learning of current B.Ed courses pre-supposes a level of literacy which the majority of children do not possess.

In places where Law and Culture are strong the young people are better behaved. Sadly this can have a negative result in that some boys are being educated to Yr 7 level, being initiated and then have to be "children" again in Secondary School. There is a need for segregated classes i.e. boys and girls streams, with all male teachers for the boys i.e. "tribal men" in Secondary School.

The drop-out rate of males is cause for alarm. A positive is the increasing number of females going on to Yr 12 and beyond as well as the women enrolling in Institutions such as Batchelor College and Curtin University.

My wife is 63, she was "stolen". Why no one knows as she had a forge, strong family and was not of mixed race as were so many others. She was educated to Yr 7 standard sent to work on a Station but, to her credit, enrolled in Tertiary Study at Curtin and graduated in 1995 and received a Vice-Chancellors Award for her excellent results -

She was appointed to the Senate of Murdoch University by Sir Ninian Stephen in 1991, became Wanghatjunga Chairperson in 1989, is the current Chairperson of Kurungul and serves on many organizations' Management Committees, Kimberley-wide.

Alcohol

I choose to be a Teetotaler. Sadly there is a Kimberley-wide problem and here the problem was so acute. My wife was one of the

leading advocates of the current liquor bans which have led to Wonthatjunga being proclaimed under Section 175 of the W.A. Act as a dry area in 2008.

The lack of support from the State has been perplexing. There has been no training for Wardens, no pay for such even though vigilance must be kept, even late at night and early morning to keep liquor out and no proclamation of any warden's rights and responsibilities in policing the "grog-free" status has been done.

Things have improved greatly here and the lot of women, children and the elderly has improved immensely. The ban, in my personal opinion, is not the long-term solution. On-going education is needed and in 20 years here I have not seen one "Living With Alcohol" Programme. All prohibition brings corruption and people prepared to do sly-grog runs, charging exorbitant prices. By this I mean from Broome and Derby to Fitzroy Crossing.

Adult Education

Since 2005 there have been 5-6 Governance reviews. All have advocated Visitor Accommodation for visiting J.A.F.E. and similar instructors. At least one building is being refurbished but, in the past Councillors have been upset by the lack of response by visiting J.C.C. personnel for the need for such a facility.

Korriyiti is a recognized training body. A Consultant for them strongly recommended,

in 2007, that an Annex / Campus be set up here but nothing has been done.

It is only this year that J.C.C. is showing any urgency as regards vocational training. The indifference of certain J.C.C. personnel and their lack of true warmth and supportiveness would lead to their low scores if Communities or outside advocates were allowed to set Key Performance Indicators for them.

HOUSING

Wanghatjungka has 34 houses. 9 new ones were built in 2006, 9 more in 2007 and the 9 to be built in 2008 were not provided for various reasons. Visitors told us things such as the not signing of the Commonwealth - States and Territories Triennial funding agreement until mid 2008 and, in our case, the change of W.A. Government were to blame.

Whatever the reason it means that there are 16 Houses which were shoddily-built and poorly-designed in the 1970's being used still. Our house is one such. Visiting tradesmen can only do curatory jobs as there is no sense in doing costly repairs on houses to be demolished. We live in one such house. The roof leaks and, with Christmas, rain-water gets into the walls and I have to tape over power sockets to prevent electric shocks.

Contracts are signed which allow for on-the-job training of local men. This is the ideal. However the Government insists upon

such a hasty completion of the houses that no formal qualifications can be awarded. The men are just short-term builders labourers.

GOVERNANCE

Communities are designated as autonomous areas. This is hardly the case. It is hard to find a group of people with the skills or willingness to be Council Executive Members or Councillors. The same small group run Councils, serve on outside Advisory Boards or Committees and hold down full-time jobs. The demands of all this lead to much "burn-out" of the most capable.

My wife and I and the white Administrator and her Essential Services Officer / Housing Officer husband are on call 24/7. The unpaid work we do is immense. One example is Hospital trips. The Clinic is open Monday - Thursday 10.30 am til 2 p.m. Making a trip to Fitzroy Crossing hospital from 10 pm until 3 am + does not allow for much meaningful work next day.

The Council Executive should be paid. This might mean the amalgamation of Community Councils into larger areas to be sub-sets of existing Shires - at present a few of us are doing so much Government Agency work gratis.

Councils do not perform as they should. Co-ordinators should be there to educate Councillors. At present J.C.C. seems

to be encouraging them to behave in an interventionist way. True self-determination is not being prepared for. I do not advocate a return to some of the displayed abuses which discredited A.S.S.C. However, I do despair that through no education in meeting procedure, general governance, submission-writing and financial responsibility and reporting procedures which under recurrent and special grants, Wangkatjunga locals will never run the Council or Office effectively.

H.A.L.C.

I am the Supervisor with a staff of three local women. We serve 20 clients a meal each Monday to Friday. As well I prepare meals on evenings and weekends for 2 frail-aged, 3 elderly and 7 people on Disability Support pensions, with physical and/or mental problems.

The building we use is old and decrepit although Kimberley Aged Care Services is in the process of providing a kitchen which has been built into a ship's container. A Health Inspector told me that the Derby-West Kimberley Shire would not allow a commercial enterprise to work out of such a building in Derby or Fitzroy Crossing.

As well as meals, I am to monitor houseyard cleanliness, internal cleaning, client transport, outings at the Centre and beyond, do laundry as needed and be on

call 24/7. I choose to do this but am on only \$34000 per annum. I used family cars from 2005 until the Lotteries Commission bus was provided in July 2008. I still use my 4WD as the bus is standard and, with the wet season, the 20 km to the Highway can be very troublesome in such mud.

I help Community members with problems with various Government forms, Banking problems, letter writing and reading, contacting the Justice Department and in many other areas. All this is unpaid after after-hours.

There is a need for an Administrator to fulfil I.C.C. requirements. However there is a great need for a multi-government portfolio-funded position to carry out this social work. Reviews have advocated this as well as the building of a Police Station as Wanghatjungha has 10 Communities in a 70 km radius. Fitzroy Crossing Police Station is short-staffed and it is not able to respond to problems in a timely manner.

Each Christmas H.A.C.C. clients had to be taken away for care because of neglect. Since 2005 none have had to be done so. I provide meals all over the holidays. There is a large number of people dependent on H.A.C.C. More elderly, living away would like to return. Sadly the Clinic would have to have a full-time worker. There is no accommodation, ~~really~~ and the Clinic person is based in Fitzroy Crossing and commutes in and out daily. A doctor visits the

second Wednesday of every fortnight. With an increasing aged population the Community is not geared to look after these numbers with the current infrastructure and personnel.

HEALTH

Clinical health is being addressed. Environmental health is a problem. The Community has a dump about 500m away but can not get machinery to tender it. Because of a flies problem the dump is set on fire. Thus a pall of plastic particulates falls over sections of the Community. This would not be allowed in the outside world. As well the existing dump truck needs replacing but no monies can be sourced for this.

INCARCERATION

There is a high incarceration rate for victimless crimes such as driving under the influence, driving without a licence or reckless driving. There is no social stigma in going to prison. In fact it is now a rite of passage. People of greater intelligence than mine must design an appropriate Justice system that takes so many un-addressed factors into consideration.

CONCLUSION

I enjoy living on W anghatjungkā because of my wife and her relatives and some truly wonderful people. However were Governments to expect

a similar number of (of) non-Aboriginal people to live in such poor conditions with the same level of service provision they would have open revolt. At present I have not encountered any ill-feeling to non-

Aboriginal people by people 30 years +. However, I am experiencing an increasing level of radicalization and disrespect to both locals and outsiders by some younger members. This includes a lack of awareness of the personal and property rights of others.

To address this the Community needs a Swimming Pool, Sports Facilities and a multi-function building to be used by Men's and Women's Groups, Teenage girls and boys, the elderly and children in separate areas. Most problems arise from the constant boredom through lack of such infrastructure.

Yours faithfully,

(WARREN KNIGHT)