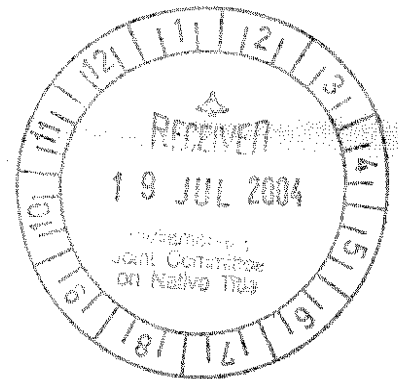


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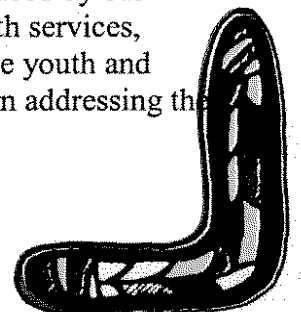
Senator Trish Crossin
Chairperson
Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Senate Wing
Level 1
Room 107
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Trish,

I am the Co-ordinator of Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council. The Aboriginal Community, like the wider community, has needs in housing, health, education, and employment. Currently the government (both state and federal) is unable to fully address these needs for the wider community. Part of the reason for this is their self denial that the problem is growing and wide spread, this of course means that community needs are under funded. In this world there will always be youth, elderly, unemployed, sick and disabled, not to mention all the other divisions of our community. While ever we have these divisions it is a fact of life there will always be a need to address housing, health, education, and employment issues. No matter how many promises or task forces the government makes there will always be unemployment, housing short falls, poverty, disabilities and cultural differences, as well as the extra needs of our elderly and youth. These needs will continue to grow as our community grows and as we advance technologically and industrially. Another part is that they fail to recognise or take seriously the cultural needs and differences of Aboriginal people. In their attempts to be non cultural they actually make it harder for many of those with cultural differences to access services, education and employment. As a Local Aboriginal Land Council part of our role is to assist in addressing these needs and ensuring the best possible out comes for our people. Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council is dedicated to the role of ensuring that Aboriginal people who live within our boundaries, have somewhere to live, get access to the health services they need, have their educational requirements met and have the best possible opportunity at gaining meaningful employment. We are also dedicated to protecting the environment and cultural resources sites and objects of the land and water ways contained within those same boundaries.

How do we achieve this? We do not have the answers to address all the problems faced by our community. What we do know is that in this area there is not enough housing, health services, education, or employment for Aboriginal people. On top of that are the needs of the youth and elderly, as well as the cultural needs of the Aboriginal community. We know that in addressing the



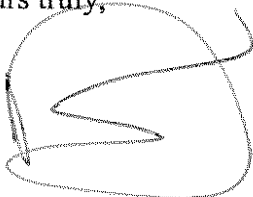
education and employment needs will reduce the pressure on the housing and health services but it will not remove those needs completely.

Currently we rely on ATSIC and the regular grant funding we can access through them for us to continue to run the few programs we run now. These programs are aimed at improving education, health and employment prospects. We need to offer culturally appropriate services to the Aboriginal Community in an environment they are comfortable in. Sure there are main stream organisations which deliver these services, but if they are able to do such a great job, why is it that in this area alone Aboriginal people make up 2% of the population but 10% of the unemployment? Why is the death rate higher and at an earlier age? Why are there higher juvenile arrests? Because main stream services are not culturally appropriate and do not..... cannot... understand the nature of Culture. The sheer nature of their systems and how they operate is a discourager for the Aboriginal people. Main stream services are also under funded. A few dollars is not going to make them more culturally appropriate nor change how they operate. To make this funding main stream will be to make life more difficult than it already is for many of the community, it will increase Aboriginal unemployment, Aboriginal juvenile crime and Aboriginal death rates.

We are but one small service in a small town. ATSIC is a federal body it looks after and funds thousands of small services like ours, in an attempt to take care of our people. Main stream services have been around a lot longer than ATSIC if they could do the job there would never have been a need for it in the first place. Now when it is starting to actually make a real difference the government want to take it away. They accuse ATSIC of "not doing its job" the job that belongs to the government and the government has failed and continues to fail in doing. Sure ATSIC has its problems and it could work better, but it is not anywhere near as big a failure to Aboriginal People as the current government has been and is.

In this current climate of reconciliation it is vitally important that the Government be seen by the Aboriginal Community as accepting the Aboriginal Culture as an important part of the Australian Community to be promoted and fostered. ATSIC is our democratically elected body, elected by us to represent us. If it is not working for Aboriginal People as a whole then it should be up to us to change how it works. Our community, and we believe Aboriginal People as a whole, do not want to be "integrated" into the white community because we are Aboriginal not white. We are not ashamed to be different, we are proud of our culture. We are not main stream and we have needs that cannot be addressed by mainstream if we don't we give up our culture. Why should we be expected to change who we are why should we be expected to toss away our culture? We have fought long and hard to try and resurrect our identity and to have our cultural values recognised and respected. We do not want it taken away yet again to the same old bigotry and fear that jealousy and contempt breeds.

Yours truly,



Noel Downs
Co-ordinator

7/7/04