

Thursday, 26 August 2004



Senate Select Committee on the
Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA 2600

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**Re: Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Commission Amendment Bill 2004**

The Association of Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Sector appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

The Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres (ANHLC Inc.) is the peak body for Victoria's three hundred and fifty neighbourhood houses and community learning centres.

The vision of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres is of just and empowered local communities in which our member organisations provide opportunities for people's participation and learning.

The mission of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres is to support and develop the movement of Neighbourhood Houses and Community Learning Centres as individual organisations and as a collective.

Neighbourhood houses and community learning centres are community managed non-profit organisations. The centres are managed by voluntary committees and operated by part-time staff and volunteers. The houses/centres provide a range of community support and adult learning programs. These services are developed in response to the needs and concerns of the residents in the locality in which they are based.

ANHLC believes strongly in community based management and governance by local communities. This enables flexible and responsive responses to local need at a local level.

In much the same way, ANHLC advocates for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination. Indigenous people must be given the means to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.



The current bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny this basic right. In reducing Indigenous involvement to an appointed advisory role, the Government will effectively remove the right of Indigenous people to meaningful involvement in decision-making affecting their lives and communities.

Indigenous Australians have endorsed the need for a National Indigenous Representative Body which reflects their values and aspirations, and which is open, transparent and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This body should have primary roles in representation and advocacy, be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to government, and have control over the provision of Indigenous-specific services.

The right of representation and determination of their own affairs have also been shown to be critical factors in improving the well-being of Indigenous Australians. Outcomes are significantly better where there is full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strong Indigenous organisations and governance, and appropriate cultural recognition within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions.

ANHLC has serious concerns about a return to mainstream service delivery. This type of service delivery does have an important role, however, this must be on the basis of being responsive to Indigenous community and cultural needs.

Finally, ANHLC believes any replacement for ATSIC must be determined in consultation and negotiation with Indigenous stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

Merial Clark

Merial Clark
Executive Officer

