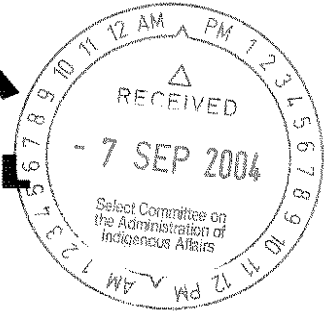




APUNIPIMA CAPE YORK HEALTH COUNCIL



Submission to the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs Public Hearing, Friday, 27th August, Cairns

As a community owned organisation, Apunipima Cape York Health Council strongly recommends that Government, in considering the future of ATSIC, ensure that it does not merely replace it with other departments that deliver with usual bureaucratic processes without reference to Indigenous sensitivities. That may be an impossibility – as the proposed agencies are not Indigenous in nature or substance. ATSIC at least possessed an Indigenous culture and context. I also believe we received good service from our Cairns based ATSIC offices. They were generally staffed by committed people who acknowledged their accountability and were focussed on a better future for our Cape Communities.

In light of the reality though, we urge that the Government in setting up the local Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs), ensure that they are empowered to cut through bureaucratic red tape, and other barriers to effective service that are erected by usual governmental process. Time is too short to simply re-start! There are people dying. The ICCs must be able to start getting runs on the board immediately.

The ICCs, at least in the Cape, should also be structured in a way that Indigenous input is not merely lip service but an effective influence and point of reference. There is significant and very capable leadership amongst Cape Indigenous people and these are the people who should be determining the future of their Communities, not people distanced by geography, bureaucracy or lack of culture.

Cape Community leadership and Indigenous Regional Organisational leaders have the capacity to make dramatic inroads into Indigenous disadvantage if they are not hampered by an inadequately informed and amorphous bureaucracy. A brief research can demonstrate the accuracy of the satirical viewpoint of “Yes Minister”. The Cape does not need that handicap on top of other disadvantage.

Apunipima urges this select committee to wield its influence to ensure that the future of ATSIC, or its alternative, be driven by a sense of urgency and empowered to act upon it, with minimum restraint.

The poor health profile in Cape York Indigenous communities will not significantly improve unless the nation and its Governments are prepared to adopt innovative thinking, risk taking and radically different approaches. Government needs to do this in order to enable Indigenous leadership and their people deal with their substance misuse holistically, in a context of social enterprise, educational reformation, employment and economic development and renewal of the freedom to restore Indigenous culture and Spirit. Health, and ramifications such as high suicidality, will not improve unless the personal wellbeing index of Indigenous peoples is raised to the national average or above. This is the business of Indigenous people – not merely of Government policy.

No more policies are needed, no more research is required, nor more delays can be afforded. These are luxuries bought at the expense of the physical and emotional wellbeing of our First Peoples.

Dr PD Ryan
A/Chief Executive Officer