



Cairns and District Regional Councils submission to the Senate Select Committee
Into the management of Indigenous Affairs.

Preamble.

The Regional Council expresses our strong objection to the way the Prime Minister made his Governments announcement to abolish the A.T.S.I.C.

We believe his statement to be knowingly misleading in that the responsibilities for the portfolios of Health, Education and Employment reside with Ministers in his Government of which he is aware and if he is not then some consideration by his Parliamentary colleagues needs to happen immediately about his suitability to sit as the Prime Minister of this country.

Regional Council express concerns that the Government commissioned a Review of the A.T.S.I.C. which contained 67 recommendation and cost the tax payers over \$1 million but the Government in their wisdom set the report aside and took a decision which is nowhere to be found in any of the recent reports that have been done i.e. Social Justice Commissioners Report, Productivity Commissioners report and the A.T.S.I.C. Review Report.

Regional Councils Position.

Council believes in, and supports, the ideal of elected representation.

The Cairns and District Regional Council believes it is essential to give due consideration to all the above named reports and the recommendations they contain given they are a result of speaking with and receiving submissions from people across this country, the time, effort and resources gone into developing these reports requires due recognition.

Council believe that any programmes constructed to address the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People has to be owned and delivered by Indigenous People through our community based organizations.

This Council believes in accountability and in the transparency of our decision making processes.

This Council disassociate ourselves from a number of the decisions of the Commissioners such as the decision to withdraw the “delegations” of the then C.E.O. Wayne Gibbons, the decision to take High Court action against the Government when there were negotiations going on with the Minister over the Review Report recommendations and we disassociate ourselves from a number of Commissioners as individuals where it was clear that a “conflict of interest” and in some cases a “pecuniary interest” resided with particular Commissioners.

As a Council we support, and work with, Good Governance (separation of powers), our Council has adopted policies that reflect this and require Directors of organizations to attend a registered Good Governance course possibly through the T.A.F.E., we also require they develop an employment strategy which is as much about engaging in the educational process to develop capacity within our people as about the end result.

We do not support the protection of anyone who is found to have breached provisions of accountability, conflict of interest, pecuniary interest, or any other breach that has the potential to bring the A.T.S.I.C. into disrepute.

Regional Council have sought to have all national programmes devolved to the regional level and become subject to the Regional Councils Strategic planning process and policies, we don't support any national programme being based in Canberra and being run by Commissioners or by senior bureaucrats.

We do support a role for Advocacy and Monitoring at the national level.

Cairns Regional Council believe the issue of self determination is paramount in addressing disadvantage suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, we are more than a little concerned with the decision to mainstream indigenous specific programmes.

We have first hand knowledge of mainstreaming, this has been a sad history, one of neglect and deprivation, currently we see the A.M.A.s Report on the \$452.5 million a year shortfall in primary health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Health is a mainstream portfolio and the Minister responsible; Mr. Tony Abbott has done nothing to execute an allocation from the \$8 billion surplus in the Budget to address this shortfall in primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, let alone our needs in specialist care.

A RESTRUCTURE.

Regional Council would welcome the discussion on a reconfiguration of regional representation which might include representation from the elected Boards of organizations sitting around the table as part of the Regional Council.

There could be some discussion on an accommodation of a two pronged approach to the composition of regional representation, an elected rep from each community based organization plus a regional election to elect a number of "community" reps there is always some problem with this consideration in that people coming from the organizations are not elected by a general election, their voting base is restricted to the membership of the organization.

This configuration may bring with it a conflict of interest where the organizations sitting around the table are also the recipients of government funding which raises a conflict of interest question.

There is some scope for the consideration for a number of configurations that would work suitably.

Our clear preference is to adopt the recommendations from the Review Report.

National Representation.

We believe there needs to be national representation, the Government identifies this themselves by looking to appoint a national Indigenous Advisory Body, we don't believe that appointments are an option; we believe this situation will see the government seek advice on their policy rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People develop our own policies and construct our own formula for service delivery, which reflects community needs and aspirations.

The need for independent representation is a must, part of their role would be to ensure that Governments address international human rights standards as they put in place legislation in response to the changing geo political dynamics that are happening in this world, as this is happening there needs to be a solid base of

respectful legislation that reflects the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in our domestic situation.

There is much to be achieved in our fight against poverty, Regional Council believe that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to be free of poverty there has to be a change in the way Governments do business with us and the broader population of Australia, we have to be part of the wealth generation rather than recipients of Government welfare.

Governments would be well advised to embrace Native Title as an opportunity to develop partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the one hand and on the other there would be Local, State and Federal Governments, Industry, Financial Institutions and the other pieces of the jigsaw that goes to make up the economic dynamic of Australia.

Our position is one of co-existence, we seek to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples interests recognized and respected by the different layers of Government and for these governments to be considered in the way they draft their laws to the extent that our peoples are not given secondary consideration but in the first instance, this will only be achieved by our involvement through a freely elected representative body.