



OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR CHILDREN



VALUE CHILDREN NOW

**Patmalar Ambikapathy
Commissioner for Children**

Phone: (03) 6233 4520
Facsimile: (03) 6233 4515

Our Ref: 681
Mr Peter Hallahan
Secretary
Legal and Constitutional References Committee
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Hallahan,

Re: Submission on the Inquiry on the Progress Towards National Reconciliation

I refer to the above and to the question put to me by Senator Bolkus on the LSAC Study today. I enclose herewith the following that indicates the position adopted in our Submission in that LSAC will not be a representative sampling of Aboriginal children in Australia:

1. Letter dated 27th November 2002 from Karen Wilson of the Department of Family and Community Services;
2. Notes on a Project Plan-Feasibility Study on Data Needs for Indigenous Children.

Please note that it is stated in the first paragraph that:

"Expert Advice is that the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is not the best vehicle to generate meaningful data on Indigenous children. It is important that reliable data is collected to inform policy development in a way that benefits Indigenous people"


I also enclose herewith a copy of a letter dated 3rd Feb 2003 written by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs where in the second paragraph he states:

"This sample size means that reliable Tasmanian estimates will not be available from LSAC, although it will provide some interesting general information for Tasmania".

Please note that both these letters were received after our submission dated 15th November. I had already come to the conclusion (stated in my submission) from the information that I had gathered, that LSAC "will not produce results that are statistically reliable estimates of the disadvantaged position of Aboriginal children". These letters simply confirm my analysis.

I wish to put on record that I am surprised at the manner in which Senator Bolkus questioned my submission, as both my Advisor and I formed a view that he queried the factual basis of our submission. I am also concerned that Indicators have still not been produced although this was commissioned after a COAG Meeting in April 2002. I would be most obliged indeed if a draft copy could be remitted to me, as soon as possible, so that we can scrutinise and assess it. Thank you very much for the opportunity to make a further oral submission.

Yours sincerely,


Patmalar Ambikapathy
Commissioner for Children
Encl.

LEVEL 5/99 BATHURST STREET HOBART TASMANIA 7000

EMAIL: tasmanianchildrenscommissioner@dhhs.tas.gov.au <http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au>



**THE HON LARRY ANTHONY MP
MINISTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AFFAIRS
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR RICHMOND**

The Hon Duncan Kerr MP
Member for Denison
GPO Box 32A
HOBART TAS 7001



Dear Mr Kerr

Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 3 January 2003 on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner for Children in Tasmania about the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). LSAC has been designed to provide comprehensive, national longitudinal data on Australian children and their families, to inform government policy in areas concerning young children, specifically child care, early childhood education and schooling, parenting and family relationships, and health.


The sample will be representative of all Australian children and selected proportional to the population. It is expected that around 120 children from Tasmania will be in each cohort of LSAC. This means that for the first wave of data collection in 2003, approximately 120 children aged less than 12 months and 120 children aged between four and five years will be selected from Tasmania to be part of LSAC. This sample size means that reliable Tasmanian estimates will not be available from LSAC, although it will provide some interesting general information for Tasmania. Findings from LSAC can be generalised across states/territories as is done for Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) surveys.

The identification of differences in child outcomes between States and Territories is not one of the research objectives for LSAC. Funds have not been allocated on a state-by-state basis but for the project as a whole. LSAC will be useful as a national data set that can be used to generalise to particular sub-groups. For example, if you are interested in a sub-group of the population in your state such as sole parent families, then the national data set could provide information on sole parent families Australia-wide that could be used to inform policy issues in relation to sole parent families in Tasmania.

You may find ABS surveys produce the sort of data that the Commissioner for Children is interested in. The ABS produces detailed data relating to young children and their families, including data from the 2001 Census, the Child Care Survey, the Family Characteristics Survey and the National Health Survey. Some statistically reliable estimates at the state and territory level are available from these collections, particularly the 2001 Census. Where these collections do not produce reliable estimates at the state and territory level, analysis and policy development may be based on national estimates.

Once again, thank you for writing. LSAC is being designed to produce data that will be widely available for research and I am sure that Tasmanian children and families will benefit from the study.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Anthony". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "L".

Larry Anthony

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facs making a difference

Box 7788 Canberra Mail Centre
ACT 2610
Telephone 1300 653 227
TTY 1800 260 402
Facsimile
E-mail
www.facs.gov.au

Your ref: 615

Ms Patmalar Ambikapathy
Commissioner for Children
Office of the Commissioner for Children
Level 5, 99 Bathurst Street
HOBART Tas 7000

Dear Ms Ambikapathy,

Thank you for your letter of 2 October 2002 about the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC).

In previous correspondence David Hazlehurst referred to Indigenous children in order not to exclude Torres Strait Islander children. A copy of the draft Project Plan - Data Needs for Indigenous Children is attached for your information. The results from this project will inform FaCS of what sorts of data should be gathered about and for Indigenous children from around Australia. We welcome your comments on the draft project plan.

You also asked whether extra funding could be provided from the Commonwealth for an increase in the sample size in Tasmania. FaCS asked AIFS to prepare a paper to advise FaCS on options to rephase funds no longer being used to develop the sample frame. The paper included an option for oversampling the smaller States and Territories, as well as options on an overall increase the sample size and increasing the amount and type of data collected on children. That options paper was circulated for comment to the LSAC Steering Committee and to State and Territory governments (Vicki Rundle represents Tasmania). Comments have been received and will be considered by the FaCS executive.

This issue was also raised by the ACT at the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council meeting in New Zealand. I understand that the ACT will be writing to the Commonwealth about this issue.

Yours sincerely

for Karen Wilson
A/g Assistant Secretary

27 November 2002

Project Plan – Feasibility Study on Data Needs for Indigenous Children

Purpose:

To undertake a feasibility study that determines the best way to gather/use information about the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children. Expert advice is that the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is not the best vehicle to generate meaningful data on Indigenous children. It is important that reliable data is collected to inform policy development in a way that benefits Indigenous people.

The feasibility study should:

- 1) identify (through consultation with relevant organisations) the research questions that need to be addressed for Indigenous children
- 2) review the current data collected about Indigenous children and identify the data gaps in addressing the research questions
- 3) consider the methodological options for collecting new data or using existing data to address the research questions. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of these options, the support from stakeholders for these options and the costs involved
- 4) make recommendations to FaCS on:
 - how best to address the research questions
 - what data needs to be collected and why
 - what would be the best methods to collect new data or use existing data.

Background:

Throughout the development of LSAC, including at the consultation workshops in late 2000, and many steering committee and stakeholder meetings, the need for LSAC to provide useful data on Indigenous children was raised.

As a group, Indigenous people are disadvantaged relative to other Australians with respect to a number of socioeconomic factors, and these disadvantages place them at greater risk of ill health and reduced wellbeing. Information about health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians is, according to the ABS, “limited by the quality of identification of Indigenous people in administrative data collections, by uncertainties in the estimation of the size and composition of the Indigenous population, and by issues related to the collection of individual and household survey data about Indigenous people.” (4704.0 1999)

Therefore, it is important for government to have available reliable data on how Indigenous children are faring in order to inform policy and intervention. The random sample of Australian children assembled for data collection in LSAC would not allow reliable analysis of the Indigenous child population. In order to produce statistically significant results, LSAC would need a much larger sub-sample of Indigenous children.

In meetings with ATSIC officers, a desire for 'comparability' of the data collected with the national sample, as well as the possibility of some special content, was suggested. However, also within these discussions about the development of LSAC, certain barriers to surveying Indigenous children and families were identified. Among these are 'research fatigue', the requirement for extensive community consultation (and hence long lead times), and practical issues to do with remoteness of (some) communities and the extent of mobility within the Indigenous community.

The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (developed through the TVW Telethon Institute for Child Health Research) offers a model for a comprehensive study of the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children. This survey required extensive planning and community consultation. The first feasibility meetings were held in February 1997 and the Pilot survey commenced in September 1999. The WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey is a highly ambitious undertaking, which will assist the development of programs and services to improve the health and developmental outcomes of Indigenous children.

Two other surveys, in the ambit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, should also be taken into account: The National Health Survey, currently in the field, has an Indigenous component; and the Indigenous General Social Survey is expected to be in the field between July and December 2002. However, these surveys do not collect data on children.

In funding the LSAC, the Commonwealth indicated that the study was intended to inform government policy in the areas concerning young children, specifically child care, early childhood education and schooling, parenting and family relationships, and health. The LSAC is particularly charged with identifying opportunities for early intervention and prevention strategies. It was also intended that LSAC would provide comprehensive, national longitudinal data. Government did not request the over-representation in LSAC of specific subgroups of Australian children (such as Indigenous, DCALB, or children with disabilities).

Over-sampling of subgroups was discussed extensively by the LSAC steering committee, whose final advice to FaCS was not to over-sample. The advantages of over-sampling were noted, however, the disadvantages and concerns include adding complexity to the sample design (of particular concern when establishing a longitudinal study), and impact on the design effects (and hence increase in sampling error). Another important concern is the impact of over-sampling on the budget for the study.

The study is intended to assist the development of government policy in all areas concerning young children. The model developed for LSAC focuses on risk and protective factors in the lives of young children. The study was designed to be comprehensive and representative of the Australian community – not just children at most risk – in order to find out what works, as well as what doesn't: to describe the pathways that lead to poor outcomes, and those that are associated with good outcomes and resilience.

It was acknowledged that providing for over-sampling of Indigenous children and managing a consultative design and development process would require additional funding and additional time that would impact on the national study. The advantages of delaying development of an Indigenous longitudinal survey, until the results of the WA survey were known, was another important consideration.

It might be possible to extend or recreate the WA survey in other states and territories. In addition, it was agreed that the learning of researchers in Western Australia, in terms of development of culturally appropriate instruments, processes of community consultation, and in respect of recruiting and training Indigenous field agents and actual data collection, should be taken into account, before any substantial investment in an Indigenous longitudinal study was made.

Therefore, it was decided by FaCS that potential tenderers for the study would not be asked to include provision for over-sampling of Indigenous children in their proposals. However, in the Request for Proposals issued in July 2001, proponents were asked to note that in the term of the first contract they may be asked to 'contribute to a feasibility study on possible strategies for collecting national estimates on Indigenous children' and were asked to indicate their expertise in relation to this area in their Proposals.

In light of the concerns raised by the Northern Territory Government in July 2002 oversampling of Indigenous children was again considered by the LSAC Steering Committee, assisted by ATSIC advisers, on 1 August 2002. The Committee re-endorsed their original approach not to sample in remote areas and supported the development of a feasibility study on the best way to collect data on Indigenous children.

The Proposals for Realigned LSAC Funding paper was circulated to the LASC Steering Committee and to State and Territory governments for comment. There was strong and unanimous support for the feasibility study.

Process and Outcomes

The Feasibility Study will comprise 3 stages:

Stage A - Research

1. Identify draft research questions that need to be addressed based on the questions from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and previous consultation.
2. Map the current data collected about Indigenous children and their outcomes through both a literature review, and consultation with relevant researchers and agencies (such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics). The review should identify current data sources, their coverage and breadth.
3. Identify gaps in the current data collected and develop options for improved data collection. These options should follow NHMRC guidelines and acknowledge that any project must be developed in consultation with Indigenous people and that any research should improve the circumstances of Indigenous people.
4. Develop a paper as a basis for consultations. The paper should identify the research questions, current data, and data collection options, (including from whom any data should be collected, from where in Australia, how and how frequently). The paper should also identify links with LSAC.

Stage B - Consultations

The aim of the consultations is to gain a better understanding of the research needs, and research questions to be addressed, data gaps and methodological options available.

The consultants and FaCS officers should consult with Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and Agencies as well as Indigenous people as represented by peak organisations.

C Final Report on consultations to FaCS

The report to FaCS should identify research questions for Indigenous children and make recommendations for the best ways to answer them. The report should summarise the outcomes of the consultations and identify what data needs to be collected or how existing data could be used to address the research questions. The report should examine methodological options and costs and recommend the most appropriate way of gathering/using data to improve the circumstances of Indigenous children.

Timing

What	Where	When
Project Plan	Out for consultation and feedback ¹	First week in November
Comments from stakeholders	Received by FaCS	Mid November
Project Brief developed	Consultants asked to bid	First week December
Consultants engaged		Mid February
A Research (+ set up B)	Including development of consultation paper	Mid Feb to Mid March (4 weeks)
B Consultations		April and May
C Final Report		End June

Resources

What	Allocation
Tender/contract legal fees	\$10,000
Consultants fees	
Project manager for 20 weeks (120k pa)	\$45,000
Research Assistant for 4 weeks (50k pa)	\$ 4,000
Administrative assistant .5 for 20 weeks (30k pa)	\$11,500
FaCS Admin cost (.5 EL1 for 20 weeks)	\$30,000
Travel	\$15,000
Administrative (telephone, printing, postage)	\$ 4,500
TOTAL	\$120,000

¹ FaCS reference group, LSAC Steering Committee, DIMIA, ATSIC, OATSIH, state and territory governments