



Minister for Community Services

Submission No 75

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Mr R Marles, MP  
Chairman  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
PO Box 6021  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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BY: ATIA [Signature]

Dear Mr Marles

I refer to correspondence you and Dr Anna Dacre, Committee Secretary, sent to me and to Ms Jennifer Mason, Director-General, NSW Department of Community Services, inviting the Department to make a submission to the inquiry into community stores in remote Indigenous communities.

The cost, quality and availability of fresh food are a major concern in remote communities in Western NSW. The availability of fresh food underpins much of the ante- and post-natal preventative work with mothers, infants and young children.

Communities, particularly in the Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area have very limited access to affordable fresh produce, milk and bread.

It is not surprising that in these areas take away food and soft drinks become staples very early in the lives of most children, when the nearest supermarket is over 100 kms away, if you have transport, and a truck stop or small general store selling those foodtypes is the only source of food. Even with access to regional centres the cost, transport and storage of bulk quantities of food is prohibitive.

There is also some evidence that when community transport – for example a health service bus - has allowed people to shop in regional centres local shopkeepers have openly discouraged this practice, sometimes coercively (videotaping people getting off the bus with shopping bags) or more passively by imposing surcharges on EFTPOS transactions.

The development of a network of cooperatives or community stores in conjunction with charitable organizations would provide an alternative to this parlous situation. The ability to access organisations and infrastructure such as Foodbank would assist to maintain affordability. The major cost driver is, obviously, transport.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Linda Burney  
Minister for Community Services