



**House of Representative
Standing Committee on Aboriginal
And Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

April 2003

Inquiry into...

Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, chaired by Mr Barry Wakelin MP, is holding an inquiry into ways of building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to better manage the delivery of services to their communities at the local and regional level.

The issues that the Committee will examine are described in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry. The Terms are listed on the right.

The Committee encourages any person, group or organisations with views on the matters in the Terms of Reference to write about them to the Committee ('a submission'). Details on how to make a submission are provided on the last page.

The Committee hopes to hear from people living in urban areas as well as from those in communities in rural and remote regions.

Terms of Reference

The Committee will inquire into and report on strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the Committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

Why have the inquiry?

Governments now acknowledge that their efforts to reduce Indigenous disadvantage are more likely to be successful if Indigenous people have a central role in the design and delivery of government services.

Governments also recognise that they need to ensure that they and their agencies coordinate funding and service delivery between themselves as well as with Indigenous people.

Service delivery is most effective if communities themselves control or strongly influence local and regional funding priorities and service delivery. That is why governments are increasingly using Indigenous organisations to deliver government funded services.

This means that the effectiveness of the Indigenous organisations themselves can influence whether the government services they deliver can make a positive difference to individuals, families and communities.

Being in partnerships with governments places additional responsibilities on communities. They require effective local leaders and decision making processes that are relevant and deliver improvements for community members. Communities also need stable and viable organisations and councils which have competent staff, adequate infrastructure and which can deliver effective corporate governance and financial accountability.

National comment and overseas evidence also suggests that access to natural resources (including land) and finance can be less important for community development and economic growth than effective governance at the community and regional level.

Governments, ATSIC and others support a number of initiatives to allow Indigenous people to improve their communities through more effective governance.

The Committee wishes to discover the extent to which Indigenous communities wish for greater involvement in service planning and delivery and how this can be best achieved. The Committee also wants to discover whether governments and their agencies are building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups and whether they are leading to improvements in communities.

Some terms in use

There are several terms frequently used which are relevant to this inquiry. The following descriptions are expressed in the context of the inquiry and are not definitive, but they may help stimulate discussion.

Service delivery, among other things, provides and maintains physical infrastructure (such as roads, sewerage, power, housing, communication) and provides professional services for some or all in a community (such as education, health care, aged care and policing). These services are funded by governments, even if they are delivered by others (including Indigenous organisations). The private sector also funds and delivers services, such as stores and banks. The inquiry is also interested in the impact that the availability of welfare services to individuals and families has on community strength.

Governance refers to the values, processes and structures of community management. How are leaders chosen; are they respected;

are they accountable; how are decisions made in a community; are community councils and organisations stable, well run, accountable to the community and others, and do their staff have the necessary skills and resources? Most importantly, what makes good governance?

Community capacity building refers to helping individuals and organisations within communities to gain the skills and tools to achieve, or successfully engage others to help achieve community (or regional) goals.

A whole-of-government approach means that different government agencies coordinate policy development, service delivery and may pool funding. Such an approach may include agencies from different governments – Commonwealth, state, territory and local.

Issues to consider

The Committee has not yet formed views about the issues raised in the Terms of Reference and is interested in finding answers to the following questions:

- What is good community leadership, how important is it for communities, what qualities do good leaders have, what more needs to be done to support leaders and encourage new ones?
- What do Indigenous people think makes a well run community, what do governments and the wider community expect of well run communities?
- How important is community capacity building to the communities themselves, how do Indigenous people believe their communities can be strengthened (in urban as well as regional and remote areas)?
- How best can community and regional organisations do business and make decisions in traditional ways while meeting wider governance and accountability standards, what can governments do to help more Indigenous organisations remain, stable, well managed and successful?

- How successful are regional structures of Indigenous governance? Should there be fewer community based organisations and more regional ones? Or are there other and better structures of governance?
- What additional skills and resources do community members and organisations think they need in order to run their communities more effectively?
- To what extent are the governments and their agencies building genuine partnerships with Indigenous groups, are these partnerships leading to better services and improvements in communities?
- How well are governments coordinating their work at the community and regional level, does it make a difference?

Good practice

The circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people vary from place to place and island to island. Therefore the problems and solutions will vary too.

As well as hearing about problems, the Committee is looking for success stories – strong communities, effective organisations and true partnerships with governments at the local and regional level. If you know of some, let the Committee know.

Steps in the inquiry

After the Committee has received written submissions, Members will visit different places in Australia to talk first hand to people and organisations about the issues arising in the submissions to the inquiry.

Members want to hear from individuals as well as organisations, and people will be able to talk to the Committee individually.

The Committee will then write a report on its findings which will be presented to Parliament. The report will contain recommendations to the Commonwealth Government.

How to make a submission

The Committee welcomes written submissions from all people and organisations interested in the inquiry.

Submissions can be of any length – from a letter to a major paper – and should discuss one or more of the terms of reference.

The Committee usually makes copies of submissions available to people who ask for them. Submissions are also usually put up on the Committee's internet website. If you want a submission to be kept confidential, you should say so clearly at the top of your submission.

Submissions should be sent to the Committee by 30 August 2002.

About the Committee

The Committee is made up of ten Members of Parliament from the House of Representatives in Canberra. There are members from the Government and the Opposition

The Members of the Committee are:

Chairman

Mr Barry Wakelin MP

Deputy Chair

Ms Kelly Hoare MP

Members

Mr John Cobb MP

Mrs Trish Draper MP

Ms Julia Gillard MP

Mr Barry Haase MP

Hon Dr Carmen Lawrence MP

Mr Jim Lloyd MP

Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Mr David Tollner MP

If you have any questions about the inquiry or making a submission, you can contact the Committee secretary:

by telephone on (02) 6277 4559;
by fax on (02) 6277 4827; or
by email at atsia.reps@aph.gov.au

Post your submission to:

**The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600**

Or email it to:

atsia.reps@aph.gov.au