

My name is Lynne Leigh; my family operate the Epenarra Store and also Murray Downs Store. This submission is based on my background and experiences with the Outback Stores model and the FAHCSIA store licensing process since it came to Epenarra.

Most Station Stores came to be as a result of need many years ago to provide a Store for our local people. For many years Station Stores have been assisting in the delivery of many services to our communities. I myself was a Centrelink Contact Person for 20 years (although no longer a contact, I still receive and assist to lodge Centrelink forms as there is no facilities within the community to do so), assist people with banking, tax services, register births, deaths and arrange funerals. These services to our local people have built relationships beyond that of a store. Our business has never had a dollar from any government and has always supported local ceremonial, sorry and sporting activities, through profits. We have grown to what are now 2 profitable stores thanks to our loyal and satisfied customer base.

The NTER has brought about many changes since its inception. Income Management and Outback Stores rolling into communities has been a big part of changes. Outback Stores had been trying with little success to access many communities until FAHCSIA came along and laid the foundations for Outback Stores to achieve their goals, along the way there has been many people, organisations and businesses swept aside, ignored by this partnership.

Income Management was introduced to Epenarra after Outback Stores set up, our Store was ignored. We obtained a 3 month temporary licence in May 08 from Centrelink and have operated with income management at our store since, trading in an indeterminate state with no idea of where our business is heading. We are still waiting for FAHCSIA licensing and have grave concerns given the current economic climate at Epenarra. At the moment both stores at Epenarra are 'doing it tough' due to a breakup of family groups in our community. It will take time for healing to occur. Outback Stores Wutunugurra (by its own admission) is losing money at present. However they can keep trading at a loss due to financial support of the Federal Government. (*Outback Stores website 27/1/09 'Outback Stores was given \$29.1 million to ensure they remained open and were providing good healthy food choices for the communities'*). We are still operating in profit, however if FAHCSIA decides not to licence our Stores, all Income Managed Funds will only be able to be spent at Outback Stores, thus creating a conflict of interest (given that FAHCSIA has funded Outback Stores) and an organised monopoly.

Outback Stores Wutunugurra (by its own admission) orders well over the communities consumption each order of fruit & veg so it is 'there', very admirable, but surely if it wants to promote fresh produce and new tastes a better idea would be to introduce new lines and educate people in their taste and uses, not intentionally create waste. Outback Stores have not brought anything new to Epenarra in terms of better product, food supply or quality and our prices are comparable. Our range of products from grocery items to household goods is larger than that of Outback Stores and on inspection FAHCSIA acknowledged our well stocked store.

Example - Both stores have the same fruit and vegetable supplier. A vegie pack containing 6 vegies at Epenarra Store costs \$5.50 a similar product at Outback Stores Wutunugurra costs \$6.50.

Outback Stores says it respects and builds strong relationships with the communities that it works with, but you can build relationships without destroying old ones. Trying to open dialogue with

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Outback Stores Management is like ramming into a brick wall or dealing with the bullies in the school yard.

The Outback Stores model looks good on paper and may be working well for some communities; however in many cases the implementation on the ground has been too narrow. A 'whole' community picture needs to be taken into account, as all situations are not the same. FAHCSIA and Outback Stores are not the only players who can bring about change and should be working with not against structures already in place. This needs to happen to create a true economy in remote locations, which will bring healthy competition, in turn give the consumer more choice and indeed better options to indigenous people.

Fairness needs to prevail to see small business not only at Epenarra but other locations is given the chance to be licensed and that small local business such as suppliers, transport operators and contractors are fairly considered for services to Outback Stores.

It is my hope that this inquiry finds that the Outback Stores model needs review in its set up practices and that their purchasing and procurement practices should be reviewed to ensure they are fair and equitable.

Lynne Leigh

20/2/09