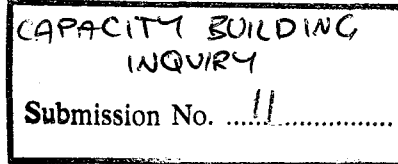


Enquiries: Michele Emmerson
Your Ref:
Our Ref: A00586



30 August 2002

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

Dear Sir/Madam

Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities

The City would like to submit the following as a submission to the Standing Committee's current inquiry.

Local government is ideally placed to model a respectful and productive partnership with Aboriginal people. The City of Mandurah has developed an Aboriginal Reconciliation Advisory Committee to determine strategies to work towards this goal. Although the Committee has been in existence for some time, it has recently been reconstituted to allow for broader participation and a clearer, action-based focus. The Committee has equal numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members (currently eight of each).

Working together in this way builds the capacities of the members of both cultures and assists in building shared understanding and joint visions.

A focus of the Committee is to demonstrate recognition and respect of Aboriginal people. To this end, the Committee recently held a successful Reconciliation Breakfast with a respected speaker, which attracted broad attendance across the community and included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community leaders and workers. In addition, the Aboriginal Flag is now proudly flown on an ongoing basis alongside the Australian flag in the centre of the City's Cultural precinct.

Amongst the tasks defined for future months are the development of a comprehensive Reconciliation Policy for Council and the implementation of a Cultural Awareness campaign, initially for Council members and officers and perhaps encompassing other community members in the longer term. In the myriad of responsibilities that local government has, support and resourcing for this vital work is seen as a priority.

A number of key reports about local Aboriginal issues have identified domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, gambling and anti social behaviour as the most critical issues.

Quality local

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through a

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service.

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Housing

Appropriate housing is a key issue in all of the above problems that face Aboriginal people. Any effective intervention programs cannot begin to take effect without the issue of accommodation being dealt with.

Housing issues should be dealt with through government policy that interfaces with the needs of individual communities, taking into account social, geographical and community expectations. Housing needs to be allocated with great care, allowing families in crisis to have space and opportunities to modify behaviour and improve their circumstances.

A more consultative and inclusive approach to developing options for housing Aboriginal people at the local level by the Department of Housing and Works would be important and beneficial. Tenancy management and support for Aboriginal families is also most important. These initiatives may necessitate both increased resourcing for the Department as well as appropriate culturally sensitive training in consultation with Departmental officers. Inclusion in the development of relevant problem-solving strategies would assist local Aboriginal people to build confidence and assist with skills transfers and capacity building.

Successful Programs

A number of existing programs are producing excellent results and should be seen as priorities for support. These include:

- Support and funding for "Best Start" – type programs (these are proven successes)
- Support and funding for "Bingy-busters" and similar programs for women as well as programs for married men and younger men. These programs teach self care and build self-esteem and capacity on an individual level.

Other issues/areas requiring priority support

- The promotion of cross-cultural learning
- Resources for locally based officers to assist/mediate with family difficulties and local feuding, local art and cultural programs.
- Support and funding for learning experiences on indigenous culture within school curriculum.
- Support and funding for indigenous health/nutrition issues.

We regret that due to constraints of time and only recent awareness of the Committee's inquiry, these comments are necessarily brief. We would be delighted to discuss any of these suggestions in greater detail and/or assist the Committee's work by utilising the Council's Advisory Committee and other networks to develop them further, or to provide comment on the Committee's report.

Yours sincerely



Ian Hill
Director Community Development