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Inquiry into Indigenous Employment

Submission by the Department of
Employment and Workplace Relations

22 May 2006

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Acronyms

AES	Aboriginal Employment Strategy
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CYI	Cape York Institute
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
EDO	Economic Development Officer
FJNE	Fully Job Network eligible
HD	Highly disadvantaged
IBA	Indigenous Business Australia
IBSA	Innovation Business Skills Australia
ICV	Indigenous Community Volunteers
IEC	Indigenous Employment Centre
IEDS	Indigenous Economic Development Strategy
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
IS	Intensive Support
ISca	Intensive Support customised assistance
JNM	Job Network Member
MCA	Minerals Council of Australia
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
RAE	Remote Area Exemption
VET	Vocational Education and Training

1. Introduction

On 1 July 2004 the Australian Government made important changes to the administration of Indigenous affairs which took Australian Government policy and the delivery of services and assistance to Indigenous people in a new direction. The changes were based on: coordinating the provision of government programmes and services; governments listening directly to local Indigenous people; making it simpler for Indigenous people to deal with government agencies and programmes; and sharing responsibility for outcomes between governments and Indigenous people.

In response to the new servicing arrangements, DEWR has been undertaking major reforms to Indigenous employment policies and programmes.

There are already indications that Indigenous job seekers are accessing a wide range of services to assist them in finding work and that they are being placed into employment in increasing numbers. Job Network placed over 43,900 Indigenous job seekers in work in the twelve months to end April 2006, an 18% increase on the previous 12 months. This is almost double the 22,000 people placed in 2003-04. For the period 1 July 2005 to end April 2006, almost 9,400 long term (13 week) job placement outcomes were recorded for Indigenous job seekers.

In addition, between July 1999 and April 2006, over 54,000 Indigenous Australians were placed in employment and/or training through Indigenous-specific employment programmes.

This submission outlines changes to existing DEWR programmes and new initiatives which have occurred since DEWR's last submission to the Inquiry into Indigenous Employment. DEWR would also like to take this opportunity to clarify a number of issues which have arisen during the course of this inquiry.

2. Indigenous Economic Development Strategy

The Government's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy (IEDS) was launched in November 2005 and sets the strategic direction for increasing Indigenous economic independence.

The IEDS will increase opportunities, through reducing dependency on passive welfare and stimulating employment and economic development opportunities for Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

It recognises that no single policy or programme can achieve this aim and that a coordinated approach is required. Each initiative in the IEDS relates to and supports other initiatives to allow the flexibility to tailor solutions that meet the needs of each community and individual, while maintaining a focus on the national agenda. The strategy seeks a whole-of-government solution to supporting Indigenous Australians in achieving economic independence.

The strategy aims to increase levels of Indigenous employment, self-employment and business development and help Indigenous Australians gain and manage assets and participate in the broader economy through focussing on work and asset and wealth management:

Work:

- Local jobs for local people
- Targeted industry strategies
- CDEP Reform
- Employment service performance
- VET linkages
- Developing enterprise opportunities
- Business leader initiatives
- General business support

Asset and Wealth Management:

- Private sector involvement in home ownership and business development
- Coordinated economic development on land
- Investment rules to improve returns from trusts and encourage investment of income from land
- Skills to realise economic outcomes

The IEDS is being implemented in parallel with the building of community infrastructure and foundations, focussing on improved outcomes in health, housing, education and employment. It seeks to ensure that the range of support is accessible to individuals, organisations, families and communities in order for them to realise economic development outcomes.

A number of initiatives from the IEDS are now being implemented. Following is a brief description of each of the IEDS work initiatives and examples of localised projects and pilots.

2.1. Local jobs for Local People

The Local Jobs for Local People initiative aims to ensure Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote and rural communities, have the chance to compete for and win local jobs, which are often filled by people from outside the region or non-Indigenous Australians.

Local Jobs for Local People brings together members of the Indigenous community, employers, service providers and institutions to work together. They identify employment and business opportunities, plan training for individuals for these positions and ultimately match trained people to fill these job vacancies and business opportunities.

- The 17 communities of Cape York are involved in the Cape York Indigenous Employment Strategy.
- Fifty five communities in the Northern Territory are having job mapping undertaken under a contract between DEWR and the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory.
- In the Murdi Paaki Region in New South Wales, where the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial involves 16 communities, a regional approach is under development.
- In Western Australia, DEWR is currently working with key stakeholders to develop appropriate employment strategies to support local jobs for local people in the East Kimberley and the Pilbara regions.
- Jobs audits have been completed in many communities. Employment workshops involving community, government and employer stakeholders have also been held in some locations (for example Shepparton in Victoria). DEWR is working closely with other Australian Government and State/Territory Government agencies on implementation and local initiatives.

2.2. Targeted industry strategies

Targeted industry strategies aim to link job seekers in Indigenous communities with industries which operate within their region.

Employment and other service providers are supported to take on a more proactive role to prepare and connect Indigenous job seekers to fill emerging job vacancies.

The Australian Government is working with representatives of the pastoral, forestry, childcare, hospitality, manufacturing, construction and tourism industries to improve links between Indigenous communities and industries which operate within their region.

Minerals Council of Australia

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Australian Government and the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) was signed on 1 June 2005 and is an example of the work being undertaken.

The five-year MOU formalises a partnership between the Australian Government and the MCA to work together with Indigenous Australians to build sustainable, prosperous communities in which individuals can create and take up social, employment and business opportunities in mining regions.

The MOU commits the Australian Government to a whole-of-Government approach to service delivery for Indigenous Australians, which is consistent with its new arrangements for Indigenous affairs. MOU deliverables include increased employability, jobs and business enterprises for Indigenous Australians.

Implementation of the MOU is overseen by a steering committee comprising representatives of MCA member companies, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), DEWR, and

the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources. The steering committee is chaired by OIPC.

It has been agreed that initial activity under the MOU will occur in priority regions:

- The Pilbara (WA) – Rio Tinto, BHP Billiton
- East Kimberley (WA) - Argyle Diamond Mine (Rio Tinto)
- Western Cape York (Qld) - Comalco
- Wiluna (WA) - Newmont Mining Corporation
- Boddington (WA) - Newmont and Alcoa
- The Tanami (NT) – Newmont

Broome (Roebuck Plains) Employment Pilot

In another initiative, the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC), IBA and DEWR are working together to increase indigenous employment, through the development and implementation of pilot projects which bring together income support reform, CDEP reform and pastoral and tourism industry strategies.

2.3. Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Programme Reform

The CDEP programme continues to be a very significant component of the Australian Government's assistance for Indigenous job seekers. Ongoing reform to the programme, since our last submission to the Inquiry, is assisting to reduce welfare dependency and stimulate employment and economic development in Indigenous communities through reinforcing CDEP as the stepping stone to economic independence, not as a destination for participants.

The reforms made to the programme in 2005-06, as mentioned in our previous submission, have been very successful. As at the end of April 2006, nearly 2,900 Indigenous people have moved out of CDEP and into employment, an increase of 83 per cent from the full 2004-05 financial year. The numbers of non-Indigenous people in the programme have reduced from 2,230 to 1,591 over the same period, reducing non-Indigenous participation from 7 per cent to 5 per cent of participants.

As at 30 April 2006 there were 34,790 CDEP participants in the programme.

The 2006-07 Australian Government Budget included the provision that from 1 July 2006 all participants in urban and major regional centres will be required to register with Job Network. This will ensure CDEP participants benefit from the success of Job Network and will help more Indigenous Australians to move off CDEP and into real jobs.

Job Network can provide working attire for participants as well as training funds and transport to employment-related projects. Participants will gain work and training more quickly through early registration.

In addition, on 29 March 2006 Minister Andrews announced further changes to the CDEP programme. The changes further consolidate the *Building on Success CDEP - Future Directions* and include some across-the-board reforms as well as some that target specific locations. The key changes for 2006-07 include:

All locations

- to improve incentives for young people to complete their education youth participant rates will be introduced. Youth participant rates will apply to CDEP participants aged 20 or under who commence in CDEP, or re-commence in CDEP after a break of more than 12 weeks, on or after 1 July 2006. Participants aged 20 or under who are custodial parents or legal

guardians are exempt from youth participant rates and are able to earn the CDEP adult participant rate;

- CDEP organisations will continue to receive full funding for each participant and will be required to use the difference between the adult and youth rates to fund training for young participants;
- selected high performing CDEP organisations may be offered a one year extension to their funding agreement as a reward for achieving results and improving capacity. Relevant organisations will be notified prior to the 2007 –08 CDEP funding submission process;
- CDEP activity supervisors' wages will be funded from Activity Fees instead of CDEP Wages funds;
- reinforcing that organisations are required to demonstrate satisfactory governance and have appropriate insurance;
- reinforcing that full-time students in receipt of the ABSTUDY Living Allowance or other living allowances for study are not eligible to participate in CDEP; and
- community activities in CDEP must, in addition to meeting the needs of the community, lead to increased employment skills and improve the opportunities for participants to obtain a job outside the CDEP programme.

Urban and regional centres

- new participants and participants who have had a break of more than 12 weeks from CDEP will be required to register as job seekers with a Job Network member within four weeks of commencing CDEP;
- existing participants will be required to register by the end of September 2006; and
- new participants and participants who have had a break of more than 12 weeks from CDEP will be limited to a maximum of 52 weeks participation in CDEP in total.

Urban and regional centres are defined as locations where there is a permanent Job Network member.

Other locations

- CDEP organisations will develop participant plans with participants who are not required to register with a Job Network member. The plans will help identify a participant's level of work readiness and articulate a pathway to move into employment; and
- CDEP organisations may play a role in assisting unemployed people who previously had a Remote Area Exemption (from activity testing).

2.4. Employment Service Performance

This initiative aims to improve the ability of employment service providers to achieve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians, through Job Network services, Indigenous Specialist Job Network members and specially tailored services, such as Indigenous Employment Centres.

There are already indications that Indigenous job seekers are accessing a wide range of services to assist them in finding work and that they are being placed into employment in increasing numbers. Job Network placed over 43,900 Indigenous job seekers in work in the twelve months to end April 2006, an 18% increase on the previous 12 months. This is almost double the 22,000 people placed in 2003-04. For the period 1 July 2005 to end April 2006, almost 9,400 long term (13 week) job placement outcomes were recorded for Indigenous job seekers.

In addition, between July 1999 and April 2006, over 54,000 Indigenous Australians were placed in employment and/or training through Indigenous-specific employment programmes.

An important part of this initiative will be to ensure that all Indigenous Australians with the capacity to work are engaged in activities that will improve their ability to gain employment. As a first step, Australian Government departments, in consultation with State/Territory Governments are working together to remove Remote Area Exemptions (RAEs) from activity testing for income support recipients in remote communities, while making employment and other assistance available in their area, if it was not previously available.

A Budget initiative announced for 2006/2007 provides enhanced opportunities for employment and participation in remote communities and supports the removal of RAEs. This initiative includes funding for:

- increased Job Network capacity,
- the establishment of a DEWR implementation team in each State/Territory with RAEs to consult with communities and implement the initiative across Australia, and
- increased funding for Centrelink in recognition of the increased workload and travel related to this initiative.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is already working with other agencies to remove RAEs in approximately sixty communities as part of a phased approach to increasing employment and participation opportunities in remote communities.

RAEs were removed in seven communities as part of Phase I (consultations are continuing with two other communities from Phase I). Consultations are being undertaken with seventeen communities as part of Phase II. It is expected that RAEs will be removed in Phase II communities by June 2006. Approximately forty communities are included in Phase III. Consultations have begun in some of these communities. Other consultations under Phase III will commence soon, with RAEs scheduled to be removed in Phase III communities by the end of 2006.

RAEs are only removed where sufficient employment opportunities or appropriate participation alternatives are available and after consultations with the community.

In other areas of Australia, a person's capacity to participate is assessed before they are required to undertake activities under mutual obligation. Similarly, where people have their RAE removed, their capacity to participate will also be assessed. Where they are assessed as having capacity, they are required to enter into an activity agreement and participate in employment or employment-related activities.

After the RAE is removed activity tested income support recipients in remote communities are subject to the same rules and conditions as people in receipt of similar payments elsewhere in Australia.

As part of the removal of RAEs, individuals may be referred to a range of participation alternatives depending on what is available in their area, including Job Network, the CDEP programme, Work for the Dole or training.

The removal of RAEs in a community requires the combined efforts of communities and government agencies to establish sufficient and sustainable opportunities for people to participate and make a positive contribution to their community.

To support increased participation, the Australian Government is providing an integrated package of vocational training, labour market activities, CDEP programme and support for business development in remote communities in Australia.

RAEs are being removed from individuals in communities where sufficient work orientated activities exist for it to be reasonable to expect people to either work or undertake some other

sort of work related activity that will benefit the community and is likely to improve the individual's work skills.

Each individual in communities where RAEs are being removed is being assessed by Centrelink before their exemption is removed to determine their capacity to participate, as happens for all people receiving Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance everywhere in Australia.

The removal of RAEs has had widespread support from the communities in which it has been implemented. One measure of success in implementing the removal of RAEs is that word of the initiative has spread to other remote communities and DEWR has been approached by several communities who want to be included in future phases.

2.5. Vocational Education and Training (VET) linkages

The Vocational Education and Training linkages initiative aims to make better use of education and training providers to improve the skills of Indigenous Australians to match employer needs.

This will involve improving Indigenous participation in school-based New Apprenticeships, the CDEP Pathways to Employment Project, the Indigenous Youth Mobility Programme and ensuring CDEP participants aged 15-17 years have the opportunity to participate in education and vocational training as part of their CDEP participation requirements.

A number of VET Linkages projects have been established this year, including that associated with the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy.

Petrol Sniffing Strategy

The Petrol Sniffing Strategy, launched on 12 September 2005, represents a whole-of-government response to address petrol sniffing and associated issues in Indigenous communities in the Central Deserts region, which includes part of the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

The strategy consists of eight components which are being implemented at the national, regional and local levels using Shared Responsibility Agreements and Regional Partnerships Agreements.

DEWR is committed to working on a whole of government basis to address issues associated with petrol sniffing and has identified possible programmes and services that could be utilised to respond to specific issues associated with petrol sniffing. These programmes and services would be supported by other public, private and community sector services.

DEWR programmes and services largely have a participation, training and employment focus encouraging constructive alternatives to taking up petrol sniffing.

DEWR's initial efforts focus on the identification and creation of training and employment opportunities for local people in and around the Mutitjulu community in the Northern Territory.

In April 2006, a new Community Employment Development Project commenced in Mutitjulu. The new CDEP provides participatory activities for the people in this region that offer a positive alternative to conditions that result in people taking up petrol sniffing.

Although participation levels at the new Mutitjulu CDEP are still low, it is expected that the promotion of good outcomes from participation in CDEP activities will result in a growth in numbers of Indigenous people signing up to join this CDEP.

To improve training and employment opportunities, DEWR staff are continuing to negotiate with the Voyages Resort at Yalara to develop training programmes for regional Indigenous people.

There have also been discussions at the national level between DEWR and Department of Environment and Heritage around further employment opportunities associated with Parks

Australia. The aim of this work would be to develop a long-term employment strategy to ensure local people were managing the administration of the Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park well in advance of the end of the 99 year lease.

2.6. Developing Enterprise Opportunities

This initiative aims to develop Indigenous businesses, especially for the provision of services such as community stores.

Efforts will focus on areas of importance to individual communities. Business development is being encouraged in areas such as stand-alone businesses, use of franchise arrangements and setting up central businesses with satellite outlets, particularly in very remote areas.

The introduction of Indigenous Economic Development Officers (EDOs) are supporting this initiative. EDOs are identifying local Indigenous entrepreneurs and business opportunities at a regional level. The EDOs are also helping Indigenous people to access capital assistance and mentoring support through a range of business support programmes.

The Commonwealth is partnering with the Northern Territory Government to place four EDOs based in Darwin, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Alice Springs. Other locations where EDOs are being considered include Eyre Peninsula, Coffs Harbour, the Goulbourn Valley and Broome.

The Department hosted eight business development workshops in 2005 to link emerging Indigenous entrepreneurs with economic development opportunities. Over 700 people attended these workshops. The workshops also highlighted and celebrated successful Indigenous businesses.

The Department is currently researching and developing a number of alternative business models.

A comprehensive stocktake of community stores is due to be completed in May 2006. This information will be an essential element in the development of the community stores arrangement that is the subject of a new Budget initiative. One element of the stores initiative is local employment.

2.7. Business Leader Initiatives

This initiative is helping Indigenous entrepreneurs with training and assistance and builds aspirations among Indigenous communities by showcasing and promoting successful Indigenous businesses and business people.

This initiative involved working to ensure emerging entrepreneurs are linked with appropriate mentoring, business and financial support and industry experts to help them with the development and implementation of their business ideas.

In addition, business hubs are being set up in several locations to help with the start-up of new or expanding Indigenous businesses.

Through hosting of the eight business development workshops, the Department has published case studies of successful Indigenous enterprises. A resources guide developed for the workshops will be published on the Department's Workplace portal shortly (www.workplace.gov.au).

The Department and Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV) are working together to promote the use of ICV services through existing business programmes.

Support will be provided through financial literacy training, which has been identified as a major barrier to Indigenous Australians engaging with the mainstream economy.

IBA, DEWR and DEST are progressing a joint initiative with Innovation Business Skills Australia (IBSA) to improve access to training for Indigenous Australians to acquire business skills. In the first phase of the project IBSA will map available business programmes and identify gaps in the current suite of training. In the second phase, IBSA will develop accredited training modules to fill identified gaps. In the third phase IBSA will promote newly developed training modules to training providers to ensure it is delivered.

2.8. General Business Support

There is a range of business support services, both Indigenous and mainstream, to assist the development of enterprise. They provide a toolkit of flexible resources to address individual business needs.

Through IBA staff in State and regional offices and DEWR Solution Brokers in ICCs, regional and State Offices, access to business development in the toolbox is being made easier. This helps Indigenous people to act on business opportunities and start up businesses.

The Department has recently provided updated information on our Indigenous employment and business development programmes for posting on www.business.gov.au; these updates will soon be made live.

IBA is working with DEWR to revise applications and assistance guidelines for business development programmes in order to improve consistency between IBA and DEWR and thereby streamlining service delivery.

IBA is to develop a new micro-finance product and will work closely with DEWR to utilise existing programmes to complement the new product.

3. Welfare Reform

Cape York pilots

On 26 April 2006, Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough announced that the Cape York Institute would commence work to map out a new direction for Indigenous people receiving welfare. The Cape York Institute believe that a major change in the welfare support systems backed by strengthened institutional supports will result in significant improvements in outcomes within five years and transform communities within a generation.

The Cape York Institute study will involve designing, in consultation with communities and with the guidance of government officials, a new approach to welfare reform in four Cape York communities – Aurukun, Hopevale, Coen and Mosman Gorge. \$3 million has been earmarked by the Australian Government to support this study. The Government will consider whether to implement any recommendations once the study is complete.

This project will build on initiatives such as lifting Remote Area Exemptions and reform of the Community Development Employment Projects programme.

4. Payments for Employment Services

The Australian Government provides a wide range of services to assist Indigenous job seekers prepare for, find and keep employment and to improve economic opportunities for Indigenous Australians. These services operate in complementary ways to maximise successful results for Indigenous Australians. Funding for the services reflects the variety and diversity of these services.

Job Network is the largest provider of employment services to Indigenous Australians. Job Network provides a continuum of employment service to job seekers referred for assistance because they are receiving eligible Commonwealth payments or have volunteered for Job Network help.

Job Network assistance increases in intensity based on job seekers' duration in unemployment and level of disadvantage, with immediate access to the most intensive services for job seekers identified as Highly Disadvantaged because they are at risk of long term unemployment. Services include the provision of initial and ongoing job search support and the preparation of a vocational profile for matching to available vacancies; Job Search Training; referral of job seekers to activities to satisfy any Mutual Obligation requirements; up to two six-month spells of Intensive Support Customised Assistance; ongoing contact and support; and provision of tailored goods and services through the Job Seeker Account and Training Account. From 1 July 2007, Job Network will also deliver Welfare to Work Employment Preparation and services to very long term job seekers including the new Wage Assist initiative.

Within Job Network, there are specialist providers that focus on servicing Indigenous job seekers. In addition, all Job Network providers provide individualised service to all job seekers, including Indigenous Australian job seekers. Job Network providers accept and service all eligible job seekers referred to them, meet with their job seekers at specified intervals (as a minimum) and, for job seekers who are subject to activity tests, report on job seeker attendance where applicable. Just over half of Job Network revenue is paid in respect of successful placement of job seekers, particularly disadvantaged and long term unemployed job seekers, into sustainable jobs that last at least 13 or 26 weeks. Post programme monitoring by the department also measures longer term positive outcomes for job seekers beyond these points.

Other complementary employment services are also funded by the Australian Government to assist Indigenous Australians job seekers who volunteer to use them.

Among these are Indigenous Employment Centres (IECs) that are run by some CDEP organisations to assist their participants into off-CDEP employment and the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES). IECs and the AES provide flexible services to job seekers within an overall service fee paid when they commence an eligible volunteer into service and also earn fees for placing job seekers initially into work and when employment is sustained for the longer term. IECs and the AES also have access to a quarantined pool of funding for additional training or assistance for their job seekers.

It is not accurate to draw simple comparisons between funding for the various services or to accurately conclude that Job Network funding is more generous than for other services.

Where payment arrangements differ, this reflects differences between the services as well as differences between the mix of up front service fees and 'at risk' outcome payments. The AES, for example, receives an up-front commencement fee, whereas the Job Network is paid progressively as job seekers start in successive service phases. Outcome fees for the AES are set for each of initial job placement and 13 weeks and 26 weeks in employment, while Job Network has a sliding scale of payments for these events which are lower (for most job seekers) but higher for some job seekers than the AES contract, depending on the individuals' level of disadvantage. The Job Network must service all job seekers, including the most disadvantaged, whereas AES may select participants from among interested volunteers and has traditionally targeted the "middle third" of job seekers. These differences among job seekers support differences between

respective funding arrangements. Both the Job Network and the AES funding model (which is similar to that in use since 2002 for Indigenous Employment Centres) are well established.

The department understands that evidence has been put, in particular, that the Job Network is able to claim Outcome payments for job seekers placed into employment by other services simply because Centrelink advises that a person has ceased receiving income support for 13 or 26 weeks. This is incorrect. It is a condition for payment of an Outcome fee under the Job Network contract that the employment placement has been recorded no later than 28 days after it takes place: a Job Network member who first becomes aware of a job seeker's payment because of Centrelink advice of 13 or 26 weeks off benefit will not usually meet this requirement. Indigenous job seekers are, however, encouraged to follow the widest possible range of job leads, and both the Job Network and AES contracts reflect that a job seeker may source a vacancy from another service, so long as the result is a successful and sustainable job.

5. Conclusion

In the twelve months since the Inquiry into Indigenous Employment began, the Committee has read and heard a lot of positive information on what the Australian Government is achieving in improving the employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Government is committed to taking a focussed approach to the needs of individuals, individual communities and the issues identified to reduce the welfare dependency and levels of disadvantage currently faced by Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous job seekers are accessing a range of services to assist them in finding work and that they are being placed into employment in increasing numbers.

- Job Network placed over 43,900 Indigenous job seekers in work in the twelve months to end April 2006, an 18% increase on the previous 12 months, almost double the number placed in 2003-04.
- For the period 1 July 2005 to end April 2006, almost 9,400 long term (13 week) job placement outcomes were recorded for Indigenous job seekers.
- In addition, between July 1999 and April 2006, over 54,000 Indigenous Australians were placed in employment and/or training through Indigenous-specific employment programmes.
- As at the end of April 2006, nearly 2,900 Indigenous people have moved out of CDEP and into employment, an increase of 83 per cent from the full 2004-05 financial year.