

The Future

- 9.1 Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders living in urban areas face major disadvantage in comparison with other Australians when measured against nearly every social or economic indicator. The Committee acknowledges the magnitude of the task to enable Indigenous people to participate as equals in Australia's community and economic life. However, the Committee believes that there is a common awareness of the need and now, increasingly, the mechanisms in place, to successfully redress these disadvantages. The Committee congratulates those governments which, in the last decade, have shown leadership and initiative in addressing the needs of Indigenous Australians. However there is much more to be done.
- 9.2 As has been indicated through the report, there is an expectation that the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be met primarily through accessing mainstream services. As a backdrop to the rest of the report, chapter three outlined, in a generic way, some of the barriers Indigenous people face when accessing mainstream services. At the same time, the last half dozen years or so have seen a shift in the way government services have been delivered to Indigenous people. There is a far greater emphasis on agencies working together with each other and with Indigenous groups to provide coordinated support in a holistic way to individuals and communities.
- 9.3 The Committee has noted a willingness now for many Commonwealth, state and territory agencies to adopt community based initiatives and tailor solutions to the needs of people rather than rely on the approach that 'one size fits all'. The example given in chapter three of the partnership between the Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs and the Department of Family and Community Services, Centrelink and the Westpac Bank to link services in a 'one stop shop' is a case in point.

However, there is still much to do before all agencies offer flexible services that truly meet the needs of Indigenous people.

- 9.4 When talking with Indigenous people at hearings and informal meetings, Members were struck by the quiet determination of many to deal with the issues confronting them. The Committee is confident that many Indigenous communities have clear ideas of possible solutions and that they only need assistance and encouragement to put them into practice. In chapter four the Committee has discussed some of the community capacity building strategies that have been adopted to help build stronger families and communities. The Grannies Group in Adelaide provide a striking example of 'grass roots' action by families to help each other and their community.
- 9.5 The Committee was also encouraged by a number of mainstream and Indigenous initiatives to help young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Without doubt there is an urgent need to address the alienation suffered by many young Indigenous people if the cycle of disadvantage is not to be repeated in the next generation. However, as the Namatjira Working Party in Dareton demonstrated, it is possible to successfully engage disaffected young people, in this example through sport.
- 9.6 In chapter six, the Committee seeks to dispel any myth that Indigenous people in urban areas have somehow lost their 'Aboriginality' and that 'real' Aboriginals only live in the outback. The Committee found city people with a strong sense of their 'Aboriginality' and proud of a cultural heritage that remained very relevant to their day to day lives.
- 9.7 Members see economic independence as a key to resolving many of the disadvantages affecting Indigenous people in urban areas. In chapter seven the Committee has described some innovative approaches to help Indigenous people enter the workforce and to create better pathways into the workforce for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The willingness by the Government and the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business to try innovative strategies to increase Indigenous employment is an example of the new approaches to service delivery. As a Departmental representative told the Committee:

Basically, ministers have been keen to test innovative measures and have given the flexibility to adapt programs as necessary so that we can get the best outcomes... our ministers have been open to suggestions about changes to the existing elements [of programs]. If we learn as we go that something is not working and is not as effective as it might be, then we have been encouraged as

a department to come forward with proposals to change that to better hit the mark.¹

- 9.8 Indigenous organisations and the private sector are also integral contributors to the partnership with government that should open job opportunities for Indigenous people. Employment will allow wealth creation and reduce the adverse impacts of disadvantage and long term welfare dependence. Importantly, the realistic prospect of employment should raise the hopes and expectations of young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.
- 9.9 Chapter seven also identified the important role of vocational education and training in encouraging young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to remain at school and in helping Indigenous people of all ages to find employment. The Committee sees it as vital that governments in partnership with Indigenous individuals and families place a higher priority on participation in school and adult education and training as a means to lift their skills base.
- 9.10 In the last chapter, the Committee addressed the housing needs of Indigenous people in urban areas. Members see the best long term solution to meeting these needs as being affordable home ownership. Members also acknowledge that many Indigenous people in urban areas will need to continue to rely on public rental housing and to a lesser extent community rental housing. Members believe that public housing authorities are now generally more responsive to the needs of their Indigenous clients, although the authorities still struggle to keep up with the demand for appropriate housing stock. The bilateral Indigenous housing agreements offer the best mechanisms for identifying housing needs and meeting them in the most efficient way possible.

Funding Requirements

- 9.11 The Committee recognises that a number of its recommendations will require additional funding to implement. In many cases the extra funds will be found within programs through greater efficiencies. In other cases, the implementation of the Committee's recommendations will require additional appropriations from governments. It is also clear that to comprehensively meet Indigenous and non Indigenous needs, particularly in the housing area, will require substantially greater funding by

1 Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, *Transcripts*, p. 546.

governments. The Committee does not have the resources to cost these recommendations or the costs of meeting broader Indigenous disadvantage, but encourages governments to meet the extra needs progressively, noting again that some funds can be sourced from the benefits achieved through efficiencies.

Partnerships and the Right Attitude

9.12 Members believe that there is no valid reason why cooperative approaches and good will between Indigenous people and governments cannot overcome the structural impediments to Indigenous advancement. The priorities are to clearly identify Indigenous needs, with the benefit of nationally consistent and comprehensive data, and then focus on meeting those needs and reducing the impediments facing Indigenous people accessing services.

9.13 The Committee has given examples of successful partnerships between communities, governments and other Australians to highlight the progress that is being made to meet the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Goodwill and cooperation are the key to achieving results, as an Indigenous representative recounting an experience demonstrated:

if you go into a meeting with a fair amount of goodwill you can achieve anything. We left all our baggage out the door – about whether we were Commonwealth, state, ATSIC... or whatever – and came in and sat around the table, and within six months we achieved the signing of a bilateral agreement.²

And as another noted as a caution:

attitude. That is a thing that you cannot design. You cannot buy it. You cannot sell it. If there is not a healthy attitude on both sides of the fence, then it does not help to find solutions...³

2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Western Australia, *Transcripts*, p. 84.

3 South Australian Government, *Transcripts*, p. 325.

- 9.14 The Committee is optimistic that the right attitudes exist to address the many problems faced by Indigenous people. However, in order to achieve real solutions for all Indigenous people wherever they live in Australia, there needs to be continuing cooperation, collaboration and consultation between all levels of government, Indigenous Australians and the wider community.

The Hon Lou Lieberman MP

Chairman

August 2001

