4

Food security in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Overview

4.1   The evidence to this inquiry indicates that the quality and variety of food that is available to many remote communities is commonly lower than in urban supermarkets. This lack of fresh healthy food options in many remote stores was a major concern to many of the contributors to the inquiry and to the Committee.

4.2   The evidence to this inquiry highlighted that food insecurity is not a new issue for remote First Nations communities and that diet-related and thus avoidable diseases are prevalent among First Nations people.

4.3   The *Stronger Futures Northern Territory Act 2012 (Cth)(Part 4)* defines food security in comparable terms, ie:

> … a reasonable ongoing level of access to a range of food, drink and grocery items that is reasonably priced, safe and of sufficient quantity and quality to meet nutritional and related household needs.[1]

4.4   The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has defined food security as 'the ability of individuals, households and communities to

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1   Monash University, *Submission 51*, p. 10.

acquire appropriate and nutritious food on a regular and reliable basis using socially acceptable means.'[2]

4.5   The Committee found evidence that healthy food policies operate in many remote stores and that healthy food is often available, but in some cases the breakdown of the cold chain and the long distances food travels compromises the quality of fresh food.

4.6   Where healthy food is available it may not be a desirable option as the foods may not be familiar and the necessary equipment and skills for food preparation may be absent.

4.7   These factors put many First Nations people living in remote communities at risk of food insecurity. Some of those factors became more acute because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Food security during the COVID-19 pandemic

4.8   Issues with food security for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities were exacerbated during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.9   Mr John Armstrong submitted photographic evidence to the Committee of a shop notice at the store in Gununa, Qld. Mr Armstrong told the Committee that for at least 3 months, the store featured the sign shown below in Figure 1.

2   Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), *Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities*, Commonwealth of Australia 2014, p. 11.

Figure 1   Notice previously given to customers in the community store in Gununa, Qld

Source   Mr John Armstrong, *Submission 6*, p. 2.

4.10   Ms Sophie Boland told the Committee that during the lockdowns, food security issues increased with people unable to travel into centres like Alice Springs to do a large shop.[3]

4.11   Mr Neville Power, Chairman of the COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board, told the Committee transport across state and territory borders caused confusion and obstacles:

> As the border closures came into place, there was considerable confusion as to what the details of those were and what was

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3   Ms Sophie Boland, *Submission 11*, p. 1.

allowed and what wasn't allowed. There were also some
significant delays at the borders.[4]

4.12   As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a Supermarket Taskforce was
        established by the Department of Home Affairs to work with the national
        COVID-19 Advisory Board. The Advisory Board was formed at the
        beginning of the coronavirus pandemic to assist the government with
        difficult problem-solving tasks related to COVID-19 and the restrictions
        introduced to deal with the pandemic. It worked with the Supermarkets
        Taskforce to help 'unblock supply chains and move food supplies to
        regional and remote areas and to navigate freight and transport
        challenges, including the movement of goods through the ports.'[5]

4.13   Also as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NIAA established a
        COVID-19 Food Security Working Group (Working Group). The Working
        Group aimed to provide high level expertise and develop solutions to
        food security risks arising from the pandemic. These solutions were to
        include strategies and practical measures to assist remote stores to
        maintain food supplies.[6] It also performed a monitoring function.

4.14   The Coordination functions of the Working Group and Supermarket
        Taskforce allowed these challenges to be managed. They resolved matters
        like: freight travelling across borders; the distribution of supplies that
        were donated by Coles and Woolworths; and the ensuring of reliable
        supplies for small independent stores and wholesalers.[7]

4.15   The Working Group has continued and is chaired by the NIAA and
        includes the following members: ALPA, CEQ, Outback Stores, Mai Wiru,
        TAH Northern Trading, Metcash, Sea Swift, PricewaterhouseCoopers
        Indigenous Consulting, AFGC, and representatives from the NT, SA, WA
        and Qld Governments.[8]

4.16   The roles of the Working Group, specified by the NIAA in its submission,
        include the following:

        ▪ share information and expertise to reduce the impacts of
           COVID-19 on food security in remote Indigenous communities

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4   Mr Neville Power, Chairman, National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board,
     Committee Hansard, 18 August 2020, p. 6.

5   Mr Power, Chairman, National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board,
     Committee Hansard, 18 August 2020, p. 6.

6   NIAA, *Submission 36, Attachment E*, p. 39.

7   Mr Sam Jeffries, Group Manager, Central, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2020, pp. 10-11.

8   NIAA, *Submission 36*, pp. 40-41.

- develop strategies and practical measures to assist remote stores to maintain supply and resupply of food, including through a focus on potential blockages in the food supply chain and distribution
- identify issues that might need to be elevated to the national coordination mechanism and potentially to National Cabinet
- develop and share guidelines for remote stores on minimising risks associated with the spread of COVID-19 in remote stores
- identify potential linkages and partnerships to support food security and
- undertake other priorities identified by the Working Group.[9]

4.17   The Working Group was an NIAA initiative and has been successful in addressing some of the key supply-related issues facing remote communities during the pandemic. NIAA stated:

> The Food Security Working Group brings together food and grocery sector, government and other stakeholders… This was primarily to prioritise supply to remote stores to address supply shortages and meet the significant increases in demand in remote communities… Some of the key successes that we had include having a broad range of the industry, from the growers and manufacturers with the Australian Food and Grocery Council [AFGC] to wholesalers and retailers. Sometimes those groups have natural prejudices against each other. In the sector, it's about how they do business. We were able to build a relationship quite quickly to overcome the issues around supply problems.[10]

4.18   The AFGC also commented very positively on the activities of the Working Group, of which it is a member:

> The group was meeting weekly. It had a very solid agenda-very structured. We very much focused on the problems and the resolution of those problems, to make sure that we could get food and grocery products to where they were needed. It was very collegiate and very collaborative.[11]

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9   NIAA, *Submission 36*, p. 39.

10   Mr Jeffries, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 October 2020, p. 10.

11   Ms Samantha Blake, Director, Industry Affairs, Australian Food and Grocery Council (AFGC), *Committee Hansard*, 23 September 2020, p. 33.

4.19   The NIAA commented also that the Working Group was primarily about
        maintaining a food security pipeline and that its members are the main
        players in this regard.[12]

4.20   The NIAA also outlined the importance of the Working Group to manage
        the sudden increase in people returning to country due to the pending
        lockdown:

> Quite a significant number of people were returned back to
> country prior to the remote travel restrictions being put in place,
> and that put added pressure on stores to be able to provide for the
> increase in population—in some communities, an increase of 20 or
> 30 per cent. That would have a greater impact on the stores.[13]

4.21   ALPA also commented very positively on its membership of the Working
        Group in its submission and indicated that it could see benefit in it
        continuing post-pandemic. ALPA states that 'governed properly this
        group has the potential to combine buying power to achieve improved
        freight and base cost prices that could be passed on to consumers.'[14]

4.22   The University of Queensland (UQ) remarks in its submission that
        securing the food supply to remote communities during the pandemic
        was an impressive achievement by the Working Group.[15]

4.23   There were comments from AIG in its evidence that despite having a
        substantive market share, no independent stores were represented on the
        Working Group.[16]

4.24   NIAA noted in this regard however that this was an issue of having
        manageable numbers on the Working Group, and the fact that these stores
        do not have any kind of collective representation by the very nature of
        their independence.[17]

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12   Mr Griggs, CEO, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 October 2020, p. 4.
13   Mr Jeffries, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 October 2020, p. 10.
14   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 6.
15   UQ, *Submission 23*, p. 12.
16   Mr Steven Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Investment Group (AIG), *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 3.
17   Mr Griggs, CEO, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 9 October 2020, p. 4.

4.25   A number of submitters express the view that the Working Group should be continued post-pandemic as the supply and affordability issues will remain for remote communities. Apunipima submits that an enduring collaboration like the Working Group will be needed:

> Apunipima was pleased that this collaboration appeared successful in quarantining stock and ensuring adequate supply of food and essential goods reached remote communities when stock was limited nationally. However, food affordability and access issues are not only a concern during this COVID period, this is an ongoing concern and warrants ongoing commitment, investment and action across all sectors beyond the pandemic.[18]

4.26   The Law Council of Australia also submits that consideration should be given to continuing the Working Group in the longer term to address food security and pricing concerns.[19]

4.27   Similar supply chain issues to those that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic are commonly felt during situations of natural disaster or during seasonal weather changes, particularly in Northern Australia, as outlined in Chapter 2.

4.28   The COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board confirmed this view. They told the Committee there is existing fragility in supply chains which COVID-19 exacerbated:

> I believe that there were significant underlying issues in the supply chains which made those supply chains quite fragile, and the advent of the coronavirus disrupted them significantly.[20]

4.29   There is potential for some of the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic to be applied to ongoing challenges that are experienced annually.

4.30   When asked about their ability to assist remote communities in a post-COVID-19 environment in benefiting from Woolworth's economy of scale, Woolworths indicated they would be open to helping supply more remote communities through their wholesale operations. Mr Ian McDonald, Woolworths' General Manager for Wholesale, explained:

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18   Apunipima, *Submission 87,* p. 18.

19   Law Council of Australia, *Submission 67*, p. 12.

20   Mr Power, Chairman, National COVID-19 Commission Advisory Board, *Committee Hansard*, 18 August 2020, p. 7.

> We do have some wholesaling capability that we established
> recently which could provide the opportunity for us to supply
> some of the organisations that operate in the remote communities.
> That would probably be the key way we could assist... We have
> had conversations with organisations like ALPA and Outback
> Stores, and we have offered our services to them if they are
> interested. But we would be open to talking to other people as
> well.[21]

4.31   Rachel Elliott, Woolworths' Senior Manger Government Relations,
        explained further ways Woolworths was looking to assist:

> Some very early areas that we are hoping to explore further are
> around things that we are discussing today: leveraging our supply
> chain to reduce costs to remote stores, and working with the New
> South Wales land council—as I said, they are very early
> conversations—on providing guidance and advice to
> organisations who want to set up their own food security
> solutions. Another learning throughout COVID has been around
> supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brands to become
> Australian household names. These are the learnings that we have
> taken away. There's probably not too much detail yet,
> unfortunately, as it remains early days, but it's definitely on our
> radar.[22]

4.32   ALPA expresses a belief that collaboration with the various actors in the
        food supply space, could have beneficial impacts on the cost and supply of
        food to remote communities. ALPA states:

> Government, manufacturers, wholesalers and national
> supermarkets have the solution, it simply needs facilitation to
> reach the right outcome for Indigenous communities. If we get the
> right leaders around the table, no one will disagree, of that we are
> sure, but everyone needs to give a little to achieve the level
> playing field.[23]

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21   Mr Ian McDonald, General Manager, Wholesale, Woolworths Group, *Committee Hansard,*
     24 July 2020, p. 23.
22   Ms Rachel Elliot, Senior Manager, Government Relations and Industry Affairs, Woolworths
     Group, *Committee Hansard*, 24 July 2020, p. 26.
23   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 31.

The prevalence of food insecurity

4.33   Professor Jon Altman presents a stark picture in his submission of the prevalence of food insecurity among First Nations people:

> First people experience food insecurity and go hungry. This is something that is reported in the 2018–19 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey [NATSIHS] where 43 per cent of respondents reported that they had run out of food and could not afford to buy more in the last 12 months.[24]

4.34   Dr Markham and Dr Kerins also cited data from the 2018-19 NATSIHS and noted that the aforementioned figure of 43 per cent had increased from 37 per cent in the same survey conducted in 2012-13, suggesting that this 'increase in reported food insecurity is likely to reflect falling incomes over this six-year period.'[25]

4.35   CRANAplus provides some further data on the rates of food insecurity among remote First Nations people:

> National data (2012-2013) shows that more than one in five (22 per cent) Indigenous people were living in a household that, in the previous 12 months, had run out of food and had not been able to afford to buy more – compared with less than one in twenty (3.7 per cent) non-Indigenous Australian households that had gone without food. Indigenous people living in remote areas were more likely than those in non-remote areas to be living in a household that had run out of food and couldn't afford to buy more (31 per cent compared with 20 per cent).[26]

4.36   UQ emphasises data in its submission that '31 per cent of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported to be food insecure compared to 22 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 4 per cent of all non-Indigenous people.'[27]

4.37   UQ further states that these figures could be a significant under-representation and that, as an example, 62 per cent of First Nations people in remote Northern Territory communities have been reported to be food insecure.[28]

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24   Professor Jon Altman, *Submission 15*, p. 6.
25   Dr Markham and Dr Kerins, *Submission 30*, p. 4.
26   CRANAplus, *Submission 63*, p. 4.
27   University of Queensland, *Submission 23*, p. 3.
28   University of Queensland, *Submission 23*, p. 3.

4.38   Further evidence on the high incidence of remote Indigenous food
        insecurity is provided by the submission from Research Institute for the
        Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University (RIEL), which
        indicates that 67 per cent of First Nations adults experience food
        insecurity.[29]

4.39   The Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration contends
        that 'the true picture of food insecurity in remote and very remote
        communities is unknown'.[30]

4.40   The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) states in this
        regard that:

> The prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Australia is not
> routinely measured. Food charity organisations report an
> incidence of 18 per cent of food insecurity across Australia. They
> also report high and increasing demand for food relief in remote
> areas, and say that they are currently unable to meet this
> demand.[31]

Causes of food insecurity

Overview

4.41   The higher food prices in remote First Nations communities, explored in
        Chapter 2, are a key driver of food insecurity in these regions. There are
        other causes however that require careful consideration and that are
        discussed in this chapter.

4.42   As outlined in Chapter 2, evidence was given to the Committee about the
        severe impact of seasonal weather patterns on food supply and therefore
        pricing. Stores often struggle to guarantee stock. Gidgee Healing shared
        photos with the Committee of a supply truck badly bogged in mud during
        the wet season and bare shelves in supermarkets caused by annual floods
        that cut off the lower gulf from other parts of the country. Their
        submission states:

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29   Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University (RIEL),
     Submission 18, p. 2.
30   Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration, *Submission 94*, p. 4.
31   Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), *Submission 90*, p. [3].

> During COVID-19, a mass shopping event and the stripping of the stores gripped the nation. People were shocked at the inability to buy fruit, vegetables and toilet paper. For those living in our region, this is an annual occurrence.[32]

4.43   ALPA supplied the Committee with similar photos of roads destroyed in Ramingining during the 2011 wet season. The communities of Ramingining and Gapuwiyak were cut off from sea, air and road freight due to weather conditions.[33]

4.44   Other factors that contribute to food insecurity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living remotely include lower incomes, lack of access to food, no access to transport, house overcrowding, and a lack of food preparation skills, cooking facilities and fridges.

Remote First Nations communities have poorer access to food

4.45   As indicated earlier in the report, remote First Nations people typically rely on one community store, and possibly one additional takeaway business for food. Some lack the means to travel elsewhere due to the large distances involved. TAH Northern Trading notes in its submission in this regard that 'sourcing food from an alternative store is anything from a 20 km walk, to an expensive charter flight to the next community.'[34]

4.46   The Centre for Rural and Remote Health (CRRH) notes that higher income earners in remote areas who have the means to travel, such as teachers or health professionals, will often shop in the larger towns or can afford to have food delivered. CRRH further states that this 'creates a vicious cycle of revenue shifting to outside economies making it difficult for remote stores to provide adequate food variety and availability to the local community.'[35]

4.47   NTCOSS also emphasises that travel for remote First Nations people out of their communities is very problematic, particularly due to a lack of public transport options:

> A higher proportion of Aboriginal people in remote and non-remote areas have less access to a motor vehicle compared with non-Indigenous Australians. The logistics of the public bus

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32   Gidgee Healing, *Submission 64*, p. 6.
33   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 9.
34   TAH Northern Trading, *Submission 115,* p. [2].
35   CRRH, *Submission 100,* p. [6].

systems in regional centres (where available) are often a barrier, through infrequent services and short operating times.[36]

4.48 Tangentyere Council comments on food insecurity for the Aboriginal residents the Alice Springs town camps, including public transport issues, stating:

> Given that 89 per cent of Town Camps [14 camps out of 16] are located more than 500 metres from a supermarket, it is easier for Town Campers to access unhealthy food outlets compared with healthy food… at a much higher cost, of up to $200 per shop.[37]

4.49 Tangentyere Council further stated at a public hearing that town campers cannot access food deliveries from supermarkets, principally because of the stigma surrounding the camps.[38]

4.50 NSWALC identified the problem of communities sometimes having no food retail outlet at all:

> The lack of supermarkets in many remote towns in NSW is a principal barrier to food security for many remote Aboriginal residents. … In three towns (Brewarrina, Goodooga, and Ivanhoe) there are no commercial supermarkets at all. In Walgett, the only supermarket in the town burnt down over a year ago, and until recently when a pop-up shop was opened, community members had to make a two-hour round trip to Lightning Ridge to shop for food.[39]

4.51 Gidgee Healing, an Indigenous health organisation that operates in the Mount Isa and lower gulf areas of Qld, states simply that there is no public transport of any kind throughout its regions, which is a major barrier to food access for the remote communities living there.[40]

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36 NTCOSS, *Submission 56*, p. 7.
37 Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 26*, p. 10.
38 Ms Maree Corbo, Social Services Co-Manager, Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 37.
39 NSWALC, *Submission 14*, p. 2.
40 Gidgee Healing, *Submission 64*, p. 5.

Food preparation and storage is challenging in remote communities

4.52   The inability to store adequate supplies of food and the lack of cooking facilities to prepare healthy meals at home was identified in the evidence as one of the key barriers to food security.

4.53   Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) and Cancer Council Australia comment in their joint submission that house overcrowding is a major cause of this:

> … among Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory, more than half (53 per cent) live in overcrowded houses… The AIHW [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare] performance framework presented in 2017 found that in remote communities homes without areas for food preparation and storage had increased from 5 per cent in 2002 to 8 per cent in 2015. Furthermore, 20 per cent of homes in very remote areas do not have facilities to prepare food.[41]

4.54   Dietitians Australia concurs that this is an important issue for remote communities stating that 'housing and basic essential amenities (eg, electricity and water) must be considered as part of any strategy to improve food insecurity' and are 'required to improve the nutritional health and wellbeing of Indigenous people.'[42]

4.55   Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation expresses the view that house overcrowding also promotes the consumption of less healthy food:

> A family, which anecdotally is more likely to have a freezer rather than a fridge, will elect to purchase non-perishable food in order to counter the limited shelf-life of fresh produce. With multiple family groups living in one home, the household will further choose pre-prepared food to account for the lack of nutrition hardware to cook for the number of people sharing the meal that day.[43]

4.56   AMSANT commented in its testimony that access to whitegoods such as a fridge is variable in remote First Nations communities and can lead to a greater reliance on unhealthy meal options:

> If they don't have access to that [a fridge] then obviously their ability to make healthy meals is dramatically restricted, and

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41   PHAA and Cancer Council Australia, *Submission 69*, p. 12.
42   Dietitians Australia, *Submission 31*, p. 10.
43   Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 91,* p. 5.

> they're often then reliant on those quick and easy meals from
> takeaway stores or 2 Minute Noodles type things, which we know
> are not healthy and can lead to long-term health issues.[44]

4.57   PHAIWA comments in its submission that an additional issue facing
        remote First Nations households, from the perspective of adequate food
        storage and preparation, is an unreliable electricity supply and the need to
        use and top up the credit on 'power cards' to maintain this supply.
        PHAIWA notes that these households may not have the funds to keep
        these cards in credit and can therefore be without electricity for some
        time.[45]

4.58   Aputula Aboriginal Corporation, from the southern part of the NT, also
        outlined the problematic nature of the household electricity supply for
        remote First Nations families:

> We have a power box on the side of a house, and it works on
> credit like a ticket machine. We buy power cards worth $10 each
> from local stores and insert them into the box, and our lights and
> power come on. When we run out of money, power goes off. If our
> power goes off because we run out of money, we then go to
> another family house that has power to keep our food good and to
> keep our children warm or cool depending on the time of year…
> Power is very expensive. The environment which is our home is
> extreme. In the deepest winter it can be under zero, and in
> summer over 50 is not uncommon.[46]

4.59   Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) comments in its submission
        that 'too often, programs which are sound in theory fail to match the
        priorities or reality of communities, for example healthy eating programs
        delivered in the absence of the infrastructure (utensils, affordable food,
        electricity and food storage and preparation).'[47]

4.60   A lack of 'food literacy' among remote First Nations communities was also
        flagged during the inquiry as a contributing factor to food insecurity and a
        number of contributors stressed that education and support for food
        literacy is therefore vital.

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44   Mr Pike, AMSANT, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 21.

45   PHAIWA, *Submission 101*, p. 23.

46   Ms Susan Doolan, Chairperson, Aputula Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*,
      24 July 2020, p. 8.

47   Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), *Submission 102*, p. 3.

4.61   Foodbank WA defines food literacy as the 'ability to budget for and plan nutritious meals, choose nutritious foods to cook into the nutritious meals and enjoy the social aspect of eating.'[48]

4.62   Foodbank WA emphasises in its submission that although 'food literacy minimises the risk of becoming food insecure' it is very difficult to achieve in remote communities:

> Regrettably, our willing participants cannot replicate, adopt or even adapt these behaviours while living in remote communities because the barriers they face cannot be overcome, even by the most motivated of participants. For them there is no way to achieve their 'two and five', even though they do know how to.[49]

4.63   The Qld Government comments in its submission that 'food literacy programs that have targeted First Nations people living in remote areas have reported success when they respond to local needs, values and experiences.'[50]

Healthy and nutritious food options in remote communities

4.64   Food Ladder comments on a number of factors that contribute to a poorer availability of nutritious food in remote community stores:

> Single supply sources, stock management practices, carrying capacity of the store, delivery delays, consumer demand, road conditions and weather all impact on availability. The long delivery distances mean the shelf life of fresh vegetables is often as short as two days, making them lower in nutritional content and an unappealing purchase.[51]

4.65   Dieticians Australia also remarks that longer delivery cycles make it 'untenable for store managers to keep a wide range of fruit and vegetables on display and in acceptable condition for the length of the delivery cycle.'[52]

4.66   Takeaway options can often be more desirable in remote communities for the reasons indicated in the previous section. Bawinanga Aboriginal

48   Dr Roslyn Giglia, Nutrition & Food Security Manager, Foodbank Western Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 18 August 2020, p. 44.

49   Foodbank WA, *Submission 96*, p. 1.

50   Health and Wellbeing Queensland (Qld Government submission), *Submission 54*, p. 13.

51   Food Ladder, *Submission 25*, p. [7].

52   Dietitians Australia, *Submission 31*, p. 5.

Corporation remarked at a public hearing, however, that this takeaway food can often be both poor in quality and expensive:

> Unscrupulous commercial business owners, through very private deals with traditional owners, set up food businesses such as fast food, takeaway and convenience stores that sell poor-quality food and offer poor choices at inflated prices.[53]

4.67   AMSANT commented in its testimony that when dieticians and nutritionists are available in remote communities, they are often working closely with stores to improve the quality of the takeaway options.[54] AMSANT further stated:

> There are lots of barriers to making those improvements, such as the skill level of cooks in the takeaway stores and the infrastructure that those takeaways have to be able to cook and prepare healthy meals. But I do know from experience that, when you are working in a store that makes those healthy meals, they are the first thing that sells.[55]

4.68   Issues around the sale of high sugar products, particularly sweetened beverages, were raised on a number of occasions during the inquiry and were of interest to the Committee.

4.69   The Australian Medical Association (AMA) cites data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) 2018-19 indicating that among remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 15 years of age '42 per cent consumed the recommended number of serves of fruit per day, and 24 per cent regularly consumed sugar-sweetened beverages.[56] The AMA expressed the view that these figures are not surprising given the limited availability of nutritious foods in remote stores.[57]

4.70   The AMA further comments in this regard:

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53   Ms Ingrid Stonhill, Chief Executive Officer, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2020, p. 41.

54   Mr Pike, AMSANT, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 21.

55   Mr Pike, AMSANT, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 21.

56   Australian Medical Association (AMA), *Submission 12*, p. 2.

57   AMA, *Submission 12*, p. 2.

> Research has shown that the daily energy intakes of many
> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people come from nutrient-
> poor, energy-dense foods.[58]

4.71   The Committee heard that healthy food policies and programs are in place
        in many remote communities. Outback Stores, Mai Wiru. CEQ and ALPA
        all have healthy food policies in place that guide the supply and
        merchandising in their stores.

4.72   ALPA has a subsidy system in place for their pricing so that the cost of
        freight is removed from fruit and vegetables and is instead applied to less
        healthy options. Long term price discounts are applied to bottled water
        and healthy prepared food lines.[59]

4.73   CEQ has the promotion of healthy food as one of its core goals. CEQ also
        cross subsidises fresh and healthy food with other less healthy foods.[60]

4.74   Mai Wiru was established particularly because of nutrition concerns and
        its nutrition policy guides its operation in every store.[61]

4.75   ALPA have trialled a number of healthy food initiatives including the
        'Healthy Choice Reward Scheme' in Aurukun, a consumer food subsidy
        scheme utilising a voucher system to reward people with fruits and
        vegetable vouchers for purchases they make.[62]

4.76   ALPA comments in its submission that its Board of Directors 'passed 29
        new nutrition policies that were informed by current nutrition research
        and our sales data which highlighted opportunities to curb unhealthy
        food consumption.'[63] ALPA further states:

> Our new policies also focused on supporting customers to make
> healthy food and drink purchases and limit unhealthy purchases
> through modifications to the store environment, and the way
> products are promoted. We tested some of these bold nutrition
> policies through Healthy Stores 2020 (HS2020), a randomised
> controlled trial co-designed by ALPA, Monash University,
> Menzies School of Health Research and others in response to
> community leaders' requests to curb sugar consumption… It

58   AMA, *Submission 12*, p. 2.
59   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 9.
60   CEQ, *Submission 19*, p. 7.
61   Mr Bate, CEO, Mai Wiru, *Committee Hansard*, 6 November 2020, p. 8.
62   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 14.
63   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 17.

resulted in a 2.8 per cent (statistically significant) reduction in total free sugars sold, which is equivalent to 1.8 tonnes less free sugars being purchased. A massive achievement - over 12 months that equates to 7.2 tonnes less sugar going into 10 communities.[64]

4.77   Licencing of stores in the Northern Territory is also driving greater health outcomes. Among the essential criteria for a store to be licensed in the Northern Territory is the requirement to 'have good quality, healthy food available including fresh fruit and vegetables.'[65]

4.78   Sugar reduction strategies are being implemented by Outback stores and other store group operators. Outback Stores noted in its testimony that over a period of 10 years it has considerably reduced the volume of sugary drinks sold in its stores:

> If you go back about nine years ago, 80 per cent of drinks purchased in Outback Stores managed stores were full-sugar drinks. At the back end of this year we'll be pushing that below 50 per cent, down to about 49 per cent. Some of the strategies that we've put in place across the journey have seen some remarkable outcomes for the health and wellbeing of community members from 80 per cent from 10 years ago to below 50 per cent.[66]

4.79   NIAA noted in its testimony that sugary drinks are not sold at all by stores in the APY lands.[67]

4.80   While nutrition policies are in place in many stores, some contributors commented on the lack of coordination of nutrition policies for remote stores.

4.81   Apunipima states in its submission that although some stores have nutrition policies, and store groups such as ALPA and Outback Stores employ nutritionists, 'there is no longer a consistent, coordinated or workforce supported approach to support healthy remote food supply.'[68]

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64   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 17.

65   NIAA, *Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities* <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/health-and-wellbeing/food-security-remote-indigenous-communities#licensing>viewed 19 November 2020.

66   Mr Borg, CEO, Outback Stores, *Committee Hansard*, 18 June 2020, p. 6.

67   Mr Griggs, CEO, NIAA, *Committee Hansard*, 11 June 2020, p. 8.

68   Apunipima, *Submission 87*, p. 15.

4.82   Monash University expresses the view that the First Nations knowledge of food and nutrition will be essential to address food insecurity in the future:

> Creating a food system that protects from food insecurity, is resilient to shocks, and has self-determination at its governing core, requires recognition of the food and nutrition knowledge of First Nations Peoples and their capacity for intergenerational knowledge transfer.[69]

The consequences of food insecurity

4.83   The consequences of food insecurity in remote communities were highlighted in multiple submissions and included poor health outcomes, particularly higher rates of various chronic illnesses, and also other forms of social harm.

Poor health outcomes

4.84   The AMA submitted there is a direct link between food insecurity among remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their higher rates of chronic disease:

> There is no doubt that food insecurity is inextricably linked to the much higher rates of chronic disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. The leading contributors to the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their non-Indigenous counterparts directly relate to diet - obesity, high blood cholesterol, alcohol consumption, high blood pressure, and low fruit and vegetable intake.[70]

4.85   The National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) states in its submission that the 10 year lower life expectancy for First Nations people is due principally to higher rates of chronic diseases, for which dietary intake is a key promoting factor. NHRA states that 'there is significant research and evidence linking food insecurity to a range of diseases, chronic health conditions and illnesses, child development issues and other health risk factors.'[71]

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69   Monash University, *Submission 51*, p. 3.
70   AMA, *Submission 12*, p. 1.
71   National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA), *Submission 32*, p. [5].

4.86   The NT Government also commented on the poor health outcomes
        associated with food insecurity stating:

> Food insecurity is associated with general poor health, and may
> worsen other health inequalities that are apparent in
> disadvantaged groups such as chronic disease, primarily heart
> disease, cancer and diabetes, [that] accounted for almost 80 per
> cent of the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mortality
> in 2014-18 (Productivity Commission, 2020).[72]

4.87   In addition to poor health outcomes, other forms of social harm are
        reported in the evidence to arise from the high prevalence and persistence
        of food insecurity in remote communities.

4.88   The NT Government states in its submission that food insecurity has
        impacts on child safety and family wellbeing:

> Food insecurity can disproportionately impact on both children
> and older members of Aboriginal communities who rely on other
> family members for food and meals… Where food is not available
> at home, children are more susceptible to neglect and some
> incidents of youth crime can be attributable to young people
> breaking into properties and dwellings in search of food due to
> hunger.[73]

4.89   The NRHA comments on the broader economic impact of food insecurity
        in Australia, although notes that this has not been calculated specifically
        for remote First Nations communities:

> A recent available estimate of the financial cost of poor diet and
> nutrition… for the total cost to Australia of poor nutrition was
> more than $5 billion per year, including direct healthcare costs of
> $3 billion per year. The cost of poor diet or overweight/obesity in
> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has not been
> estimated.[74]

4.90   The NRHA contends that the economic costs of food insecurity among
        remote communities, including its impacts on health, education,

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72   Northern Territory Government, *Submission 52*, p. 1.
73   Northern Territory Government, *Submission 52*, p. 7.
74   NRHA, *Submission 32*, p. [10].

employment and economic productivity, should be calculated to determine the benefits of reducing it.[75]

Options for increasing local food production

Overview

4.91   The possibility of increasing local food production to improve food security in remote First Nations communities through the use of market gardens to grow fruit and vegetables, through seafood, meat and bread production, and also through traditional hunting and gathering, was raised throughout the inquiry.

4.92   The evidence indicates mixed success for market gardens.

4.93   Other avenues for local food supply can be limited by food safety regulations and licences which local producers may not have the knowledge to navigate. Scale and reliability of supply is also a challenge.

4.94   However, many contributors to the inquiry expressed a belief that with the right assistance, there are avenues by which local food production could grow and help resolve some of the challenges facing remote communities.

Market gardens

4.95   NSWALC notes in its submission that 'the lack of locally produced food in remote areas in Australia has been recognised for years but attempts to address this situation have not been particularly successful.'[76]

4.96   NSWALC further states in this regard that 'initiatives to establish market gardens often rely on volunteers, may lack technical support or have unrealistic aims.'[77]

4.97   The Queensland Government in its testimony before the Committee stated that market gardens are 'dependent on the people that are in the community that are driving it and that they need to be adequately

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75   National Rural Health Alliance, *Submission 32*, p. [10].
76   NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC), *Submission 14*, p. 6.
77   NSWALC, *Submission 14*, p. 6.

resourced and supported to be able to do that'[78]. The Queensland
Government further commented that 'there needs to be some succession in
terms of growing the local capacity to be able to do that so it's not just the
sole responsibility of one individual.'[79]

4.98   The NIAA notes in its submission that it has invested in initiatives related
        to community garden, traditional food and farming projects, which were
        linked to Recommendation 17 from the Committee's 2009 inquiry into
        community stores. NIAA states, however, that:

> This experience highlights that market gardens are not a quick fix,
> but take time to develop and meet the unique challenges of
> growing fresh produce in remote locations. Such initiatives should
> be supported only where it is demonstrated that long term
> sustainability can be attained.[80]

4.99   The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) submits that 'police in some
        locations report attempts by locals to develop market gardens and grow
        their own fresh produce, which is often of a very high quality, only to see
        those attempts undermined by other community members.'[81]

4.100   EON Foundation, which provides training and capacity building to First
        Nations schoolchildren around food production and nutrition, has had
        success in establishing gardens and training local people in food
        production. However they acknowledge that a challenge remains in
        maintaining these sorts of projects after their support finishes. Of the 37
        communities they have previously worked in, they are not able to
        determine how many of the communities are still growing their own food.
        EON Foundation explained to the Committee why so many market
        garden enterprises have not worked:

> So it's about ownership by the whole community. It's not a
> whitefella thing. I've had it said to me, 'The Army went into the
>
> NT during the intervention and they built all these gardens. As
> soon as they left, they died. Well, what were they expecting?' That
> was a whitefella government project. That wasn't their project.

78   Dr Simone Natalu, Principal Lead, First Nations Communities, Health and Wellbeing
     Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2020, p. 3.

79   Dr Natalu, Health and Wellbeing Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 12 August 2020, p. 3.

80   NIAA, *Submission 36*, p. 25.

81   Police Federation of Australia (PFA), *Submission 39*, p. 5.

> They didn't know what to do with it. So I think the ownership, the invitation-only, has to be their idea.[82]

Meat and seafood

4.101   Other avenues for local food production that were discussed in the evidence to the inquiry included seafood and meat production.

4.102   Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University (RIEL) states in its submission that:

> … culturally-aligned fisheries and aquaculture businesses on Aboriginal owned and managed land and sea are recognised as an important element of Indigenous socio-economic advancement in Australia. In coastal regions of northern Australia this is possible due to the relative abundance of Indigenous owned natural assets and the cultural, social and practices, knowledge and connections to country developed over thousands of years of habitation.[83]

4.103   RIEL further states however that 'until recently, Aboriginal Traditional Owners and their families have had limited engagement in the mainstream commercial coastal fisheries sector.'[84]

4.104   Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation describes its own seafood venture that commenced in 2016 in its submission, stating:

> We believe that running a seafood enterprise brings very significant benefits to the community in terms of nutritional health and wellbeing. It provides access to a nutritious, diverse and culturally significant food supply at an affordable price. Having the option to fillet the fish so it can be sold to community organisations and take-away stores is also a key element of improving nutritional outcomes for community members.[85]

4.105   RIEL expressed the view that 'developing and running a fishing business in a remote Aboriginal community is no easy task… there is a great need

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82   Ms Caroline De Mori, Executive Chair, EON Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, 8 October 2020, p. 3.

83   Research Institute for the Environment and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University (RIEL), *Submission 18*, p. 2.

84   RIEL, *Submission 18*, p. 2.

85   Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, *Submission 24*, p. 5.

for innovative approaches to support logistical and infrastructure needs in communities… to support and maintain locally produced seafood.'[86]

4.106   Yothu Yindi Foundation notes in its submission that some remote communities can access fresh meat supplies from cattle herds.[87]

4.107   Seisia Community Torres Strait Islander Corporation runs a small herd of cattle from which it supplies the local council supermarket.[88]

4.108   The Hon Bob Katter MP contends in his submission that there are existing meat production resources in remote communities that should be utilised to supply remote stores and recommends 'the installation of small abattoirs for cattle, the farming of wild pigs and the utilisation and support of fisheries which already exist in locations like Normanton, Karumba and Mount Isa.'[89]

Licences and food safety regulations

4.109   The Committee heard the presence of fishing licences and food safety regulations can be an obstacle to local food production developing at a sufficient rate to become a source of local supply to stores.

4.110   ALPA gave evidence to the Committee about work that they are doing to support the revitalisation of local fishing industry in Galiwin'ku and Milingimbi. ALPA states:

> The first challenge is the access to the necessary licenses required to be able to catch fish for commercial sale, next are the regulations required regarding the processing of the fish if it is going to be sold in a store retail environment. To date these small businesses have not evolved to a point where they can process their catch to food safety standards for sale within the ALPA stores. They are however able to sell whole fish to the community unprocessed which is generating some income and providing a new source of food...[90]

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86   Associate Professor Natasha Stacey, Communities and Livelihoods, Charles Darwin University, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 8.
87   Yothu Yindi Foundation, *Submission 22*, p. 7.
88   Mr Arthur Wong, Chief Executive Officer, Seisia Community Torres Strait Islander Corporation, *Committee Hansard*, 19 August 2020, pp. 8-9.
89   Hon Bob Katter MP, *Submission 65*, p. [10].
90   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 29.

4.111   ALPA also trialled a commercial Food Ladder in Ramingining and found that it succeeded in providing fresh food but could not sustain a scale that was commercially viable or that met consumer demand.[91]

4.112   Mai Wiru also identified scale as an obstacle to local food production, but identified reasons other than food licencing and regulations as the barriers to scale:

> We sell their oranges and mandarins when they have them in season. But, for the volume that we use in our stores, we haven't come across any organisation or group that can provide the amount that we need, and obviously it comes with its own issues about freighting the goods, from wherever they are, from their orchards to our stores in time to meet our trucks to go to other stores. They often have trouble getting pickers to get the gear off the trees. There are a whole range of issues and problems.[92]

4.113   CEQ identified some similar challenges. CEQ states in its submission:

> Difficulties that CEQ has faced in the past dealing with local business include:
>
> ■ No formal certifications for examples Hazard and Critical Control Point (HACCP) certifications on food stuffs;
>
> ■ Business structures of vendors not being suited to commercial trading terms, for example not registered for GST;
>
> ■ Small business adherence to labelling requirements; and
>
> ■ Quantity and Quality of supply, for example small quantities and uneven quantities.[93]

4.114   Apunipima notes that 'traditional foods or other locally produced meat or seafood could be linked or sold through the store' but cautions however that:

> … there can be many barriers for stores in stocking and selling locally produced food. Some common barriers include local businesses having no Hazard and Critical Control Point (HACCP) certification or having business structures that limit commercial trading terms or business being unable to provide consistent quantity and quality.[94]

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91   ALPA, *Submission 106*, p. 29.

92   Mr Bate, CEO, Mai Wiru, *Committee Hansard*, 6 November 2020, pp. 12-13.

93   CEQ, *Submission 19*, p. 10.

94   Apunipima, *Submission 87*, p. 17.

4.115   HousTorres Strait Regional Authority believes Commonwealth legislated
         quarantine zones establish a buffer in the Torres Strait for security reasons
         but this also limits the creation of larger scale market gardens because 'in
         some areas, produce can only be sold across neighbouring islands.'[95]

4.116   Despite these challenges, many expressed a view that local food
         production at a large scale is a viable pathway to pursue, if the right
         support can be put in place to overcome the obstacles that currently exist.

4.117   CEQ stated a firm belief that there is demand for locally produced food
         and that it has the ability 'to provide a channel to market for such goods.'[96]

4.118   NSWALC recognised the potential for bush foods to be viably produced at
         scale, giving the example of the Northern Australia Kakadu Plum
         Alliance. They told the Committee that the bush food market is currently
         valued at $20 million annually, but it is estimated that Aboriginal and
         Torres Strait Islander people make up only 1-2% of the market.[97]

4.119   Woolworths told the Committee their experience in the Supermarket
         Taskforce has made them aware of the need to support Aboriginal and
         Torres Strait Islander food production initiatives. Woolworths stated:

> Another learning throughout COVID has been around supporting
> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brands to become Australian
> household names.[98]

4.120   Apunipima expressed a belief that in order to make local food production
         more feasible, large-scale initiatives rather than small scale community
         gardens should be explored. They recommend engagement with primary
         industry, small business development and all levels of government to
         explore the feasibility of such initiatives with a solid economic and
         business foundation.[99]

Traditional foods

4.121   The potential role of traditional foods in helping to addressing food
         insecurity in remote communities was also raised. A number of

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95   Torres Strait Regional Authority, *Submission 53*, p. 7.

96   CEQ, *Submission 19*, p. 10.

97   NSWALC, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

98   Ms Elliot, Woolworths Group, *Committee Hansard*, 24 July 2020, p. 26.

99   Apunipima, *Submission 87,* p. 17.

contributors have expressed the view that they have an important role from both a nutritional and a social perspective.

4.122   The Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration places a strong emphasis on the role of traditional foods in addressing food insecurity:

> Access to traditional foods is an important safety net to deal with food insecurity in addition to being significant in cultural connections to country, health and wellbeing. An estimated 51 per cent of First Nations peoples aged 15 and above participated in harvesting locally sourced food in the last 12 months, which increases to 76 per cent in remote Australia.[100]

4.123   Professor Altman notes in his submission that 'Indigenous people in remote Australia have increasingly struggled to access bush foods and this has contributed to food insecurity.'[101] Professor Altman further expresses the view that the current working hour obligations under the Community Development Program (CDP) limit the capacity of First Nations people to self-provision on country.[102]

4.124   TAH Northern Trading comments that 'most people in communities still have skills to hunt and gather but again this is not always successful as any fisherman will tell you.'[103]

4.125   NSWALC states in its submission that Governments can assist in rebuilding the capacity of communities to supply their own foods by returning land and fishing rights to Aboriginal people. In their submission they state the NSW Government could support cultural fishing by:

  ■ commencing Section 21AA of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*,

  ■ removing restrictions on Aboriginal cultural fishers and cultural fishing activity, including for example regulations relating to size, gear, method and closure, and

  ■ placing a moratorium on prosecuting Aboriginal cultural fishers.[104]

100 Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration, *Submission 94*, p. 12.
101 Professor Jon Altman, *Submission 15*, p. 6.
102 Professor Altman, *Submission 15*, p. 7.
103 TAH Northern Trading, *Submission 115*, p. 2.
104 NSWALC, *Submission 14*, p. 5.

Remote community stores as an essential service

4.126   Various contributors to the inquiry expressed the view that a remote store
         should be regarded as an essential service in its community in the same
         way as health, education or other social services.

4.127   The Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration argues in
         its submission that 'as community stores are the main and sometimes the
         only provider of food in remote community they should be considered an
         essential service rather than a business.'[105]

4.128   WACOSS comments that 'many of the stores servicing remote Indigenous
         communities of less than 100 people operate more as an "essential service"
         than as a "viable business".[106] WACOSS further states:

> This is reflected by community ownership of these stores, rather
> than as privately-held businesses. The challenges these retailers
> experience stem from remoteness, lack of population density,
> issues with food supply transport logistics, and multiple and small
> disparate communities.[107]

4.129   Outback Stores points out that many services in remote communities are
         considered essential, such as housing, health, education, power and water,
         and are therefore directly managed and funded by government, but
         comments that:

> Remote community retail stores and the provision of food security
> in remote communities, whilst considered by many as an essential
> service, are neither directly managed nor receive any direct
> ongoing funding for the provision of services from the different
> levels of government.[108]

4.130   PHAA and Cancer Council Australia also state that remote stores operate
         in vastly different circumstances from their counterparts in urban areas,
         are often the only food store in their community, and should be viewed as
         an essential service.[109]

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105   Australian Household Food Security Research Collaboration, *Submission 94*, p. 4.

106   WACOSS, *Submission 90*, p. [4].

107   WACOSS, *Submission 90*, p. [4].

108   Outback Stores, *Submission 85*, p. 4.

109   PHAA and Cancer Council Australia, *Submission 69*, p. 4.

4.131   AMSANT concurred with this view in its testimony:

>   The Australian government must acknowledge that remote
>   community stores are not just local businesses but provide critical
>   social services to remote communities. Vulnerable people rely on
>   them to get healthy food and other essential items. Nobody else is
>   expected to provide such an essential service in a remote area and
>   also make a profit.[110]

Committee comment

4.132   Based on the available evidence, the prevalence of food insecurity in
         remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has not
         improved since the Committee conducted its 2009 inquiry into remote
         community stores.

4.133   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote communities
         in Australia experience high levels of diet-related chronic disease. The
         committee believes that this persistent problem requires a more
         coordinated response.

4.134   The instability of the cold chain supplying many remote communities
         outlined in Chapter 2 is also a matter that needs to be addressed. The
         ability to ensure produce can arrive in communities unspoiled is essential
         to ensuring food security for people in remote communities.

4.135   The successes of the COVID-19 Food Security Working Group was of
         great interest to the Committee as they emphasised the value of a
         collaborative approach by the key actors to addressing food security issues
         for remote First Nations communities.

4.136   Remote First Nations communities were facing many food supply
         constraints prior to the pandemic and will continue to face them when the
         pandemic is over if nothing changes. The Committee believes that the
         Working Group should remain in place post-pandemic and continue to
         assist the Government to improve food pricing and food security in
         remote First Nations communities.

4.137   The Committee would also like to see the major supermarket chains play a
         greater role in the post-COVID world in helping to guarantee food

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110 Mr Pike, AMSANT, *Committee Hansard*, 23 July 2020, p. 16.

security to remote communities. The Working Group should be expanded to include input from the major supermarket chains.

4.138   The Committee would like to see an increasing role for local food production as part of the solution to food insecurity, it is clear that this will not be successful unless it involves community leadership and is at sufficient scale to provide a reliable source of produce for whole communities. The Committee is therefore not recommending new government investments in market garden programs or other similar initiatives where they are not locally led.

4.139   The Committee is, however, recommending that support be given to local food production initiatives to help them negotiate the food safety and other regulations that can make it difficult for them to grow their enterprises and enter the supply chain of store operators such as CEQ and ALPA.

4.140   The Committee would also like to see a competitive grants program introduced for remote communities to facilitate more reliable electricity supply and better storage infrastructure for remote stores, and to foster local food production schemes developed within these communities. It will be essential that these activities be driven by the remote First Nations communities themselves.

4.141   The Committee acknowledges that remote stores provide a critical service to their communities and cannot just be regarded as a retail business like any other. The Committee is therefore recommending that remote stores be eligible to apply for any Government grants that are earmarked for other essential services in remote communities.

4.142   The high cost and intermittent nature of the electricity available to many remote communities is clearly not conducive to food storage or the preparation of healthy meals in First Nations households.

4.143   The Committee is also concerned that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents in town camps cannot receive food deliveries from urban supermarkets in their vicinity. The Committee would like the NIAA to address this issue with the relevant businesses and devise solutions to ensure that such deliveries can be made.

Recommendation 10

4.144   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in partnership with the States and Territories and First Nations people, develop a strategy for food security and nutrition for remote First Nations communities.**

Recommendation 11

4.145   **The Committee recommends that the Food Security Working Group that was established during the COVID-19 pandemic be maintained and tasked with:**

- **identifying improvements to the logistics of food and grocery supply into remote communities**

- **assessing the viability of warehousing greater volumes of food and groceries in more remote parts of the supply chain**

- **identifying ways to improve the replenishment cycle of food and groceries in remote community stores**

- **ensuring food supply during pandemics, natural disasters and seasonal changes**

- **identifying ways which the major supermarket chains can help play a role in driving down food prices and guaranteeing supply for remote communities**

- **identifying ways in which Outback Stores might assist independent community stores with the supply of food and grocery stock.**

Recommendation 12

4.146   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support local food production in remote communities to meet food safety standards and other regulations in order to encourage the greater use of locally sourced food.**

Recommendation 13

4.147 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce a remote community competitive grants program, with a focus on:**

- **access and continuity of power**

- **improving cold and dry storage in communities**

- **promoting and supporting local food production schemes such as mobile abattoirs, fishing enterprises and community gardens.**

Recommendation 14

4.148 **The Committee recommends that community stores be eligible to access and apply for any grants that might be available to other essential services in remote communities.**

Recommendation 15

4.149 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government consult with the relevant State and Territory Government agencies to develop solutions to deliver reliable electricity to remote communities.**

Recommendation 16

4.150 **The Committee recommends that the NIAA consult with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents of town camps can receive food deliveries from supermarkets in their vicinity.**

Julian Leeser MP
Chair

24 November 2020