



Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
IndigenousAffairs.reps@aph.gov.au

24th June 2020

RE: Feedback on Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities.

AMRRIC (Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities) is a national not-for-profit organisation that works with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve the health of their companion animals. In doing so, we are helping to create healthier, safer and happier communities. AMRRIC is founded on a deep respect for the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We promote a One Health, One Wellbeing model, developed over years of dialogue and engagement with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where companion animals are recognised as being intrinsic to the fabric of the community; their health and wellbeing is inseparable from that of humans.

AMRRIC applauds the government for taking action to better understand the challenges experienced by many remote communities in regard to food affordability and accessibility, but encourages the Committee to focus not only on food and essentials specifically for humans, but also supplies that are essential to maintain pet health and welfare. While it may sound a trivial suggestion, pet dogs and cats are widely recognised as important members of the family in remote Indigenous communities across Australia^{1, 2, 3, 4}, and companion animals' health and welfare impacts on peoples' physical, mental and emotional health^{5, 6}. As such, AMRRIC advocates that the inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities should be broad in its scope, and not exclusively consider human-focused products.

All too often in our work in remote Indigenous communities, AMRRIC has encountered extremely inflated pricing for pet food products, far beyond the available budget of residents. AMRRIC's experience is supported by Australian and International research which also identifies expensive dog food as a contributing factor to animal health and management challenges, which in turn erode community social capital and increase community tensions^{7, 8}. Further, despite AMRRIC's advocacy, in remote community stores we have often observed stocks of animal health products that are considered out-dated, ineffective, difficult to administer and potentially dangerous to people if inadvertently exposed. These days, there are numerous over-the-counter animal health products that are effective, easy to administer and safe for people and animals. As part of AMRRIC's advocacy work, we have negotiated agreements with pharmaceutical companies that manufacture these products, to supply remote community stores at prices affordable for community residents. As part of the inquiry, we would welcome the opportunity to explore extending the reach of these products, to ensure communities nationally have access to effective and affordable animal health products locally.

We know that community members want to take responsibility for the health and welfare of their animals, however, unless remote community stores are stocking quality products at affordable prices,

community residents are left with extremely limited options. Ensuring that remote community stores are affordably catering to the whole family – pets included – will improve animal health and welfare, improve responsible pet ownership and improve community health and wellbeing.

We have reviewed the Inquiry's Terms of Reference. As drafted, we feel that they are appropriate and sufficiently broad to enable consideration of the availability and accessibility of essential animal food and over-the-counter health products such as anti-parasitic medications, alongside human-focused food and essentials.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further feedback as the Inquiry progresses. Please do not hesitate to contact either myself, or AMRRIC's CEO, Dr Brooke Rankmore, for further discussion. We can both be reached on info@amrric.org or 08 8948 1768.

Sincerely,

Dr Bonny Cumming (BVSc, MVS)
AMRRIC Program Manager – Strategic Delivery | AMRRIC

References:

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8. Baker, Tessa, et al. "Indigenous Community Perspectives on Dogs in Northern Canada After 10 Years of Veterinary Services Indicated Improved Animal and Human Welfare." *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* (2020): 105061.