

Re: Invitation to submit to Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee inquiry into the Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Extend Family Assistance to ABSTUDY Secondary School Boarding Students Aged 16 and Over) Bill 2019

RIPA National Response

REMOTE INDIGENOUS PARENTS AUSTRALA – National Indigenous Corporation (RIPA National - ICN 8596)

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Introduction:

REMOTE INDIGENOUS PARENTS AUSTRALIA (RIPA National) was registered with the Office of the registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) on 5 April 2017 as Remote Indigenous Parents Association. The name was changed to from 'Association' to 'Australia' on 18 September 2018.

Attachments:

*WHO WE ARE (1)

**RIPA Brochure v2(7)

***RIPA Implementation Plan 2019-2021

RESPONSE:

Given that RIPA is still in its early stages of development and is not yet able to connect with remote Indigenous Communities on a national level, we provide this response with a view to bringing attention to the need for a genuine 'grassroots' capacity for Indigenous parents and families to have an independent 'voice' on matters that affect them. When RIPA is fully established as planned, it is envisaged that the RIPA Board will be able to facilitate an effective response on such matters through the RIPA online network connecting RIPA Contacts in remote Indigenous Communities around Australia. This will provide an invaluable point of entry into remote Indigenous communities that safeguards and respects the rights of Indigenous parents and families.

Whilst in general terms RIPA supports the notion of increasing ABSTUDY support as recommended in the 2019 Bill (the Bill), RIPA has much to say about the bigger picture issues affecting immediate and long-term interests of Indigenous students and families in remote Indigenous communities across Australia. The apparent assumption in the Overview of the Bill: that 'education' and 'higher education' referred to in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESRC) means the same thing for people in remote Indigenous communities as it does for 'mainstream' Australians is a moot point. It seems to be premised on the idea that Indigenous people should move away from their communities and seek a 'mainstream' existence elsewhere.

RIPA proposes that there is a huge disconnection at every level in terms of the local school, community, family and ultimately residential experience where the real issue is buried in the noise. Abstudy is not really the problem but rather a symptom of a much wider problem, lack of engagement. As one of our RIPA Board member puts it: *'If you are not sure what you are looking for then you are never likely to find it!'*

RIPA submits the following points for discussion and further consideration:

RIPA focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A grassroots voice for Indigenous Parents and families
Fair Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative Principles of Engagement (RPE) - terms and conditions of engagement that allow Indigenous peoples to be respected and protected from hidden 'mainstream' agendas • RPE that listens to what Indigenous peoples are seeking in terms of education
Education for Indigenous Australians in remote communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is important for them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ cultural identity ○ ceremony to adulthood ○ language, music, art, dance, etc. ○ family (belonging) ○ preserving Indigenous history
Both ways learning	<p>The diagram illustrates the concept of 'Both ways learning'. It features a horizontal rectangle divided into three sections. The left section is yellow and labeled 'What's not negotiable?'. The middle section is green and labeled 'A Shared Third Space'. The right section is blue and labeled 'What's not negotiable?'. Above the rectangle, the text 'School or Boarding Experience' is written. Below the rectangle, the text 'What is negotiable?' is written in red. Two blue arrows point from the text 'What's not negotiable?' to the yellow and blue sections of the rectangle.</p>
Issues for students and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homesickness • New norms – different from the Community • Exposure to peer group pressures (alcohol, smoking, relationship issues, social media, bullying, etc) • Not coping - shame job (mainstream education, age) • Isolated from countrymen • Labelled - set up for failure. Prejudice, stigma and discrimination that extends to family and community reputation
Family Tax Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ age factor (is 16-19yo sufficient?) ○ year 13 and beyond
Transition Process from/to Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition support (Focus on entry point with little thought to exit point) • Scholarships

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening for exclusion rather than profiling for inclusion • Cherry picking
Employment pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ? Opportunity in remote communities
Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student not finishing year 12 - went home to go fishing/hunting; he had no problems with money (royalties) • Scholarship funding - CEO comment “Get them out of the Community; why would they want to go back to community?” • Young adults sitting around in community - went to boarding school and don’t fit in. Nothing for them. They have a new world view, values and expectations
Outsiders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic expectations • Inadequate and/or appropriate levels of support and encouragement • Doing thing TO or FOR people, rather than WITH them • Widen the circle to include Significant Others • Both ways learning - Venn diagram (shared space; non-negotiables) • Listening to insiders (parents, ex-boarders, current boarders, RIPA Contacts)
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is this measured? • Who decides what is important? • This is where RIPA can assist • Retention and completion rates for residential indigenous students are heavily influenced by student and family/community engagement. Therefore the effectiveness of Abstudy (value for dollars) should be linked to the quality of the engagement experience of students and parents
RIPA partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSU – NT Government • RIPA Advisory Panel
Areas for further research and evaluation of interest to RIPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tiwi College experience - the relational quality of the boarding experience • Community/Parent Engagement • RPE Ambassadors delivering RPE in culturally appropriate ways, in language, etc. • Research on the quality of the residential experience, including student exclusion and suspension rates • Detailed 'template' that describes an ideal residential experience and what it takes for this to happen