

Senate Community Affairs Committee
COMMUNITY HEADS GROUP STATEMENT – FAR WEST COAST SOUTH
AUSTRALIA
07/09/2015

Seated along side of me today are Community Head Leaders representing each Aboriginal community across our region including Wayne Miller, Indigenous Community Engagement and Governance Officer employed at CAC.

They are:

1. Corey McLennan – CEO of Koonibba Aboriginal Community Corporation
2. Greg Franks – CEO of Yalata Community Council attending via Video link
3. Peter Miller – Chairperson of Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation
4. Michael Haynes – CEO of Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation

Community Heads Resource:

1. Wayne Miller – Indigenous Community Engagement and Governance Officer (CAC)

Apologies:

1. Peter Clark – General Manager of Oak Valley/Maralinga Community Council-family crisis
2. Mima Smart – Chairperson of Yalata Community Council-attending funeral in Tjuntjunjarra Western Australia
3. Robert Larkin – CEO of Scotdesco Aboriginal Community

I deliver this statement as the nominated spokesperson for the Far West Community Heads Group to support a Cashless Debit Card Trial in Ceduna.

The proposed trial is also endorsed by our Chairpersons and respective Boards governing each community.

This statement is in response to the current inquiry into the Social Services Amendment (Debit Card Trial) Bill 2015.

Over the last few months we have met, consulted and negotiated with all key and relevant stakeholders in relation to Ceduna becoming a trial site for the Government's Cashless Visa Debit Card.

The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday 5th August 2015 to introduce a Cashless Debit Card Trial in Ceduna and surrounding areas marks a significant step in addressing a number of key issues in each of the respective communities we represent.

Across our region we have lost far too many of our people due to the low life expectancy rates for Indigenous people in our Communities. We want to build a future for our younger generation to aspire to and believe we cannot do this if our families and youth are caught up in the destructive cycle of alcohol or drugs that not only destroys our culture, but our lands and the communities we live in.

As Community Leaders we have hope that the introduction of the Cashless Debit Card will move towards restoring individual self-esteem, family values, building stronger communities, restore our culture as well as improve educational and employment outcomes for our children and youth.

This trial will involve everyone who is of working age receiving a Centrelink payment; and we are unanimously confident that the trial will bring many benefits not only to the people we serve but also to the wider community in general.

We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to work with both Local and Federal Government's to help shape what we believe are adequate measures to ensure our people's entitlements are not misused in manners that continues to be detrimental to themselves and families.

As local leaders we also want to champion the cause for the betterment of our people, and believe this will benefit the region as a whole.

It is also through our intensive negotiations with the Government, that we wish to advise that all targeted recipients under this trial will still receive their existing entitlements, but with implemented changes on their spending habits to assist in reducing expenditure on alcohol, substance misuse and gambling products.

At the heart of this reform, is a change that is being shaped specifically to meet our local needs. It has been a true collaboration to ensure that we can give our people and our Communities every chance to create real and genuine change in their lives.

We have and will continue to work with all levels of Government to ensure the needs of our people and our Communities are fairly represented on key issues which have plagued our communities for well over 40 years.

We understand the introduction of this trial is not the "silver bullet" to solve all of our issues but strongly believe that it provides part of an overall plan aimed at reducing easy access to alcohol, drugs and gambling addiction.

As Community Leaders we are very much aware of the social consequences of sitting back and not doing anything. We are at the forefront of alcohol and drug related violence, families going without food and children not attending school including other social issues which impact on the general health and social well-being of our people.

In the past measures to address alcohol fueled violence, chronic alcohol misuse contributing to the premature deaths amongst our people have been tried, tested and failed.

It is our belief that as a first trial site amongst a possible 3 across Australia we now have an opportunity to make some positive change in the lives of our people.

We also look forward to a fulsome analysis and review of the trial's impact to inform further community based consultations and strategies to reduce the impact of alcohol, substance abuse and gambling on our communities.

Collectively we seek the support of this inquiry to understand the pain and grief many families have had to endure over many years at the loss of loved ones who have struggled with alcohol addiction; alcohol related violence or premature death attributed to sleeping rough or health related disease caused by excessive drinking.

As Leaders, this is not a path we want our people to continue down but a path of reform to improve the overall health and well-being of our people, provide opportunities in real and meaningful employment as well as improve early school attendance rates amongst our young people to enable them to move on to higher educational achievement.

We have grasped this initiative; we have helped shape this initiative; and we are confident that this initiative is for the betterment of all people living within our region.

Thank you.