

Additional comments of the Australian Greens

1.1 The Finance and Public Administration's inquiry into the Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) tendering processes is an important step in understanding failures in Government policy and process, and making recommendations to improve to it. The evidence to the inquiry shows that the IAS process was chaotic and flawed. It involved cuts to services, and multiple significant implementation problems. As noted in the report, these problems include:

- Major gaps in service delivery
- A lack of consultation
- Rushed processes with poor transparency
- Cutting the number of funding areas created significant challenges, with many programs not captured by the reduced funding areas
- Challenges for smaller organisations without the capacity to develop applications in the time frame, or resources to employ consultants to develop applications, and
- Significant uncertainty for providers, with a very unclear and non-transparent process.

1.2 The IAS implementation was deeply flawed, and had very real, negative impacts for communities across Australia. The Australian Greens support the report and recommendations of the committee, however we recommend that the Government take additional action.

Reinstating funding

1.3 In addition to the multiple significant implementation failures, the IAS was a significant cut to funding services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programmes. The initial cut in the 2014-15 Budget was \$534.4 million,¹ and in subsequent budget updates there were further cuts.²

1.4 These cuts to funding occur in a context where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia experience systematic disadvantage. The latest Prime Minister's *Closing the Gap 2016* report shows little progress on many of the indicators.³

1 'Indigenous Affairs Programmes – rationalisation' in *Budget 2014-15, Budget Paper No. 2: Budget Measures*, Part 2: Expenses Measures, Prime Minister and Cabinet. Available at: www.budget.gov.au/2014-15/content/bp2/html/bp2_expense-20.htm.

2 \$17.8 million in cuts to indexation, and redirection of \$21.1 million from the IAS to the Women's Safety Package. See Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2015-16, Appendix A: Policy decisions taken since the 2015-16 Budget. Available at: www.budget.gov.au/2015-16/content/myefo/html/11_appendix_a_expense.htm.

3 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2016*. Available at: http://closingthegap.dpmc.gov.au/assets/pdfs/closing_the_gap_report_2016.pdf.

1.5 Funding cuts represent very real gaps in service for communities. A reduction in funding to a community centre or legal service can have a very significant impact. Given the significant challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face, the Government should not be removing funding for services.

Service gaps

1.6 A consistent theme in evidence to the inquiry was the significant gaps that occurred as a result of the IAS. Evidence to the inquiry shows that these persist even after PM&C has attempted a gaps analysis.⁴

1.7 These gaps reflect the need for appropriate analysis of community needs. The Australian Greens support the committee's recommendations that future tender rounds be based on a strong understanding of the services available, and community needs (Recommendations 2 and 3).

1.8 Funding and service gaps have very real world impacts. Unfunded legal and community services, and other programs, represent a loss of support to struggling communities.

The Australian Greens recommend that:

- **The Government reinstate the funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' programs cut by the Abbott/Turnbull Government.**
- **The Government address the remaining funding gaps from the IAS funding rounds, including funding legal services in the Barkly region.**

Senator Rachel Siewert

⁴ Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee, *Report on the Inquiry into the Commonwealth Indigenous Advancement Strategy Tendering Process*, 16 March 2016, pp 43-44.