



Developing Indigenous enterprises - the road to economic independence

Strategies to develop Indigenous enterprises are the focus of a new inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

While the Indigenous unemployment rate fell from 20% to 16% between 2001 and 2006, unemployment for Indigenous Australians remains more than three times the non-Indigenous unemployment rate.

The Chair of the Committee, Richard Marles MP said “Developing Indigenous enterprises can reduce unemployment rates and assist communities in achieving economic independence. As well as providing employment, successful Indigenous businesses and enterprises can develop ideas and skills and provide role models for others.”

He added “Indigenous enterprises can enable Indigenous communities in all locations from Sydney to Kununurra to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities. The Committee is interested in looking at programs and models of assistance which have been successful, both here and overseas.”

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has asked the Committee to inquire into and report on opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to grow small and medium-sized business. This includes Indigenous controlled enterprises and businesses where Indigenous people are joint venture partners. In particular the Committee will focus on:

- whether current government, industry and community programs offering specific enterprise support programs and services to Indigenous enterprises are effective, particularly in building sustainable relationships with the broader business sector;
- identifying areas of Indigenous commercial advantage and strength;
- the feasibility of adapting the US minority business/development council model to the Australian context; and
- whether incentives should be provided to encourage successful businesses to sub contract, do business with or mentor new Indigenous enterprises.

The Committee is particularly interested in exploring whether the model of a minority business/development council model would assist in the development of Indigenous enterprises in Australia.

The Committee will accept submissions until **Friday, 18 July 2008**. Further details on the inquiry, including the complete terms of reference, background documents, and advice on making submissions can be obtained on the Committee's website at www.aph.gov.au/atsia or by contacting the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4559 or emailing atsia.reps@aph.gov.au.

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Mr Richard Marles on 02 6277 4330.

For background information, contact the committee secretariat on (02) 6277 4559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au