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BY: ATSIA **Inquiry into developing Indigenous enterprises**

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is undertaking an inquiry into ways to develop Indigenous enterprises. The Committee is asking for submissions which provide views on any or all of the following terms of reference.

### Terms of reference

The Committee is inquiring into opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to grow small and medium-size business. This includes Indigenous controlled enterprises and business in which Indigenous people are joint venture partners.

In particular, the Committee is focussing on:

1. 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;

From my part and the feedback that I have received regarding current government, industry and community programs offered for enterprise support and services to Indigenous communities, is that the support does not extend beyond the contractual arrangements of service agreements. Once these contractual arrangements and obligations are met by the proponent, there is no follow up support through mentoring or coaching for business enterprises to continue the ongoing development of their business. Indigenous Business Australia, through the provision of the PSP (preferred service provider) facility does focus on the support, mentoring and coaching through the funded component of a government contract though is usually limited by timeframe and the completion of various goals/outcomes. Organisations such as the South East Queensland Indigenous Chamber of Commerce (SEQICC) are contacted by these proponents for ongoing support and advice. Although the SEQICC future services will include such support its current infrastructure including operational and human resources restricts the level of services provided by the organisation.

2. identifying areas of Indigenous commercial advantage and strength;

The establishment of Indigenous Chambers of Commerce (such as the SEQICC) will strengthen the Indigenous business sector though this is dependent on building the capacity of such organisations. Besides the SEQICC, other chambers such as the Victorian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce, the Mandurah Hunter Indigenous Business Chamber Inc and the establishment of the similar Chambers in Western Australia and the Kempsey region in New South Wales will ensure the provision of services and support to continue to better position Indigenous business.

3. the feasibility of adapting the United States minority business/development council model to the Australian context (a background document on the United States minority business council will be available on the committee website shortly); and

Any model to support minority business development will be welcomed in Australia.

4. whether incentives should be provided to encourage successful businesses to sub contract, do business with or mentor new Indigenous enterprises.

The programs that support economic growth in Australia for Indigenous communities in the past have centred on education, training and employment. Programs such STEP, NICP, New Apprenticeships and NIES were developed with a specific focus towards employment or self

employment. This is based on the unemployed, marginalised, disenfranchised Indigenous people. The Corporate Leaders of Indigenous Employment is one such program that attempts to build on the good will and commitment of national, state and regional corporations towards employment of Indigenous jobseekers into their foal. These programs are designed to capture information on employment commencements. Many of these corporations struggle to retain these staff in their workforce, who return to the welfare dependency or education and employment programs seeking alternative career aspirations.

The Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment program should be expanded to measure business relationships such as sub contract work, partnerships and joint ventures with Indigenous business. This type of activity will not only help build the capacity and develop economic growth but also influence the employment of Indigenous jobseekers by Indigenous businesses. An example we use a lot with the SEQICC is that if we have 60 Indigenous business members of the Chamber then potentially there could be at least 30 employment opportunities for Indigenous jobseekers if we are able to assist these businesses in their development. An advantage of this initiative would be the in build recruitment, retention, support and mentoring provided by these businesses.

A Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment and Business could be designed to measure and recognise the efforts of each corporation to not only employ Indigenous Jobseekers but also how the corporation helped influence employment through subcontract work, partnerships and joint ventures by building Indigenous business capacity.

Prepared by Charles Jia, owner of Karma Lifestyles and President of the South East Queensland Indigenous Chamber of Commerce.

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