

RECEIVED
22 DEC 2009

Submission No 48

BY: ATSIA

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL
AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

*Inquiry into the high level of involvement of
Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the
criminal justice system.*

Prepared by Asset Planning Services NSW 2460
on behalf of the Aboriginal Building Association Steering Committee

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission identifies a proposal for the establishment of an Aboriginal Building Association (ABA) in New South Wales (NSW) as a state wide not-for-profit organisation; and how it aims to address the issues in the terms of reference, that is, by providing sustainable employment security for Indigenous builders and associated disciplines in NSW.

The ABA Steering Committee believes that by providing education and employment pathways through the association's members, it will provide alternatives to being caught up in the criminal justice system.

The ABA will deliver services across NSW to Indigenous building and related companies. Companies and sole traders are required to become ABA members to access the services provided. Two offices will be established in northern and southern NSW as membership bases and shop fronts. The ABA will be an information hub to and from the NSW Indigenous construction industry.

Funds sought are estimated at \$2.243 million over three years including establishment costs. The Business Plan attached outlines the proposal in detail.

The terms of reference points addressed in this submission are:

- How the development of social norms and behaviours for Indigenous juveniles and young adults can lead to positive social engagement.
- Any initiatives which would improve the effectiveness of the education system in contributing to reducing the levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults with the criminal justice system.
- The effectiveness of arrangements for transitioning from education to work and how the effectiveness of the 'learn or earn' concept can be maximised.

BACKGROUND

In an attempt to build a positive future for NSW Indigenous construction industry workers and future generations, a Building Futures – Moving Forward Forum was held at Arrawarra in Northern NSW in November 2008 funded by the NSW Department of State and Regional Development.

The Forum resolved to set up an ABA that could speak for Aboriginal construction industry businesses and whose focus would be in five areas:

- Gaining more work for Aboriginal businesses and more Aboriginal employment in the construction industry;
- Building business capacity and leadership;
- Coordinating training and development;
- Managing a website to facilitate networking; and
- Fostering community development.

The ABA Steering Committee was elected at the Forum. The Steering Committee was assigned with undertaking a feasibility study on possible ways of establishing and operating a sustainable association of Aboriginal builders and trades people.

The feasibility study was completed in October 2009. The next step required by the Committee was to develop a business plan (BP) and proceed with applying for funding assistance to commence the association. The BP was completed in early December 2009.

The ABA will be formed as an independent body to maintain autonomy, credibility, impartiality and control of its own destiny to provide unhindered support to its Indigenous members. The vision is to "Level the Playing Field".

The ABA will be registered as a corporation under the *CATSI Act* and registered for GST. The majority of the board of directors and employees must be Indigenous to be eligible to register under the *CATSI Act*.

The ABA will act as a single point of contact for Indigenous builders and related services in NSW. Building firms and/or individual tradespersons are required to become members of the ABA to access the services offered. The ABA will conduct training, advertising and promotion of Indigenous builders and related trades.

There is significant growth potential, including the possibility of expanding the ABA to other industries and/or nationally if the NSW model is successful.

The objectives of the organisation in the short term are to grow member numbers, develop business capacities and practices, establish partnerships and strongly promote the ABA throughout NSW. This phase should position Indigenous businesses to take advantage of mainstream opportunities. The objectives of the business in the longer term are to consolidate activities, become self funded through membership fees and other means (such as training) and investigate expansion opportunities.

The establishment of an ABA will allow NSW builders to have a single voice and a lobbying platform to enable their message to be articulated at all levels of government, private and corporate sectors.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference are addressed as follows:

- How the development of social norms and behaviours for Indigenous juveniles and young adults can lead to positive social engagement.

Social norms, such as to have a career path, engage in life-long learning, contribute to society in a positive way, earn a living, support a family and live in a healthy and stable environment is something that Indigenous builders are striving to achieve for current and future generations.

The ABA will assist in this process by building business capacity, developing strategic partnerships, engaging with community elders and educationalists,

conducting industry forums and expo's to promote Indigenous builders, showcase success stories and promote role models to Indigenous youth.

- Any initiatives which would improve the effectiveness of the education system in contributing to reducing the levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults with the criminal justice system.
- The effectiveness of arrangements for transitioning from education to work and how the effectiveness of the 'learn or earn' concept can be maximised.

The ABA proposes to develop pathways in partnership with educationalists to encourage Indigenous youth to seek trades careers in the construction industry early in their school development. It is also proposed to address issues of low participation rates and how existing education programs can be modified to engage youths encouraging them to take up pre-vocational studies or continue and complete a full trade qualification. High profile Indigenous role models will be used to promote trades training and business ownership careers at school and post school levels. Former students may also be used to talk to those yet to decide on a career pathway.

The membership of the ABA will provide real opportunities for youths to try their hand in different construction disciplines before committing to long term training commitments that they may not complete.

The ABA will assist to transition students into the mainstream labour market and provide employers with more opportunities to expand their businesses. This in turn will create more jobs as member businesses will have confidence to grow and employ more Indigenous staff. It is important that businesses currently reliant on Indigenous programs evolve to build their capacity for the larger more lucrative mainstream market. Only then will the Indigenous building sector be able to have the confidence to foster the next generation of skilled workers.

The ABA will build community capacity by providing services to the Indigenous building and construction industry across NSW. Services to members will include mentoring, tender identification, newsletters, community engagement, liaison and planning with elders and training service providers, promotion, advertising, sponsorship opportunities, forums, building business capacity, business training, funding models and partnerships.

There is a strong belief in the Indigenous building community that mainstream building companies and potential clients perceive Indigenous builders as being unreliable and/or having poor work standards. This has a high impact on the success or otherwise of Indigenous companies tendering for work in the mainstream building sector.

Indigenous building companies and individuals wish to compete in the mainstream market to compete on equal footing, expand their businesses, create real job opportunities for other Indigenous people, foster community, reduce the gap between mainstream and Indigenous unemployment statistics (employment has a flow on effect to other things such as health, self esteem, quality of life, acceptance within the mainstream community), and showcase success stories through expo's and other mediums.

It is important to note that the BP (attached) is the initiative of Indigenous builders in NSW who are trying to establish a foundation for future generations of

Indigenous youths in the construction industry. The shared vision is not just for the present but for the next generations to ensure they have a voice and that the industry is strong and supportive. This ultimately translates to less dependence on welfare and rebuilds confidence and self esteem.

While the BP is self explanatory the message is that there is a high degree of uncertainty in the building industry. The Global Financial Crisis has contributed to this as well as the uncertainty of regular government work which in some remote parts of NSW is all that is available. Importantly, there is a perception that Aboriginal builders need to 'level the playing field' as they believe they are stereotyped and considered in some instances as a last resort, or only used to comply with government Aboriginal participation guideline requirements. While governments at all levels are genuinely endeavouring to aid this segment of the building industry, the 'drip fed' nature of some building programs does not provide any long term security to Indigenous builders.

There is a strong desire and a need to build confidence, continuity of work and long term security allowing Aboriginal businesses to:

- Grow their own capacity
- Employ additional staff
- Employ additional trainees and apprentices
- Target mainstream projects
- Form partnerships and target projects on a larger scale
- Show case examples of good businesses and work practices
- Present role models and mentors
- Be less reliant on government work

The views expressed in this submission are generated from forums, steering committee meetings and concerned Indigenous business owners who were involved in developing the BP for the ABA. The general consensus is that Indigenous people want to see a real future for current and future generations to steer them in a positive direction.

APPENDICES

1. Aboriginal Building Association- Business Plan
 - A. List of Indigenous Building and Trades Related Businesses
 - B. Organisation Chart
 - C. Establishment and Three Year Expenditure Projections