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Submission No 16

BY: ATSI

Submission regarding the Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Terms of Reference - The Committee shall inquire into and report on the operation of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with a particular focus on:

- food supply, quality, cost and competition issues;
- the effectiveness of the Outback Stores model, and other private, public and community store models; and
- the impact of these factors on the health and economic outcomes of communities.

Submission:

In November 2008 I visited the Fregon (Kaltjiti) Indigenous community in Northern South Australia.

I visited the community store which was closed. I was advised that during the week the store is open on weekdays 9.00am-12.00pm, again 2.30pm-5pm, Saturdays 9am-12pm and closed Sundays.

I returned when the store was open. I was appalled by the range, quality and cost of items on offer. Some examples which I remember distinctly were \$3.40 for 1 litre of milk, \$6.50 for 2 litres, and a can of Rexona deodorant for over \$11 which I later priced in a Sydney supermarket to be less than \$6. I walked up and down every aisle, amazed at what I was seeing, including broken items still for sale at full (already inflated) prices.

I am told that the reason goods cost so much is because it costs so much to transport the goods to remote areas. I find it hard to believe that justifies the kind of mark-up I saw in this store. I have travelled extensively throughout Australia to many remote locations and have not experienced the kind of mark-up or lack of quality that I saw in this community store. This sort of practice is quite simply not accepted by the general public. Why should the Indigenous communities be forced to accept it.

I was also shocked by the attitude of some of the staff towards the Indigenous residents of the community, I found them to be quite rude and contemptuous.

The store has a Plasma on the wall which I am told shows movies during store opening hours. Whilst there I saw a quite violent and graphic film on the screen which I didn't think was appropriate given there were children wandering in and out of the store.

We are constantly bombarded with the statistics of the poor health of Indigenous people in remote communities, but with the limited choices that the people obviously have, what else can be expected. It doesn't matter how many programs are implemented to educate communities on the benefits of healthy eating/living, when they only have one store in the community, and it has poor quality, highly priced stock, how can we expect any less than the statistics we continue to see year after year.

Quite obviously, in this instance at least, the community model is not working. I have heard similar stories from many people from many Indigenous Communities scattered throughout Australia. As usual the Indigenous communities are being exploited and taken advantage of.

Any new initiatives into improving the health and wellbeing of the residents of Indigenous communities must look at the community stores as a starting point. Without stores being run ethically, providing quality, fresh food at reasonable prices, any programs are a waste of time and money.

Kind regards,

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16 February 2009