

Re: Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

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BY: ATJIA

Introduction

As a manager of a remote community station store I would like to discuss several points in regards to your enquiry. I will endeavor to address issues such as price and variety of foods available, as well as how station stores are often more than just a place to purchase food. I will also mention Outback Stores, and my discontent with some comments I have read.

Submission

After reading some of things that have been written about station stores, I have to admit that I have taken offence. I manage a station store and it seems to me that it is all too easy for people to criticize station store owners and managers, claiming that they are in the store business merely to "rip off" Aboriginal people.

I know that not all communities are the same, but I believe that for the majority of station store operators they have provided their communities with the basics ie, food and clothing.- to the best of their ability for decades! While it is true that the prices in remote communities are more expensive than in city areas, this is understandable, surely. -anyone can see that stations have to cover costs, and freight is expensive!

Also, we don't have the buying power that bigger companies such as Outback Stores do. However, we do our best to pass on savings where we can, and we also try to stock a good supply of fresh produce. After all, it is not only the local community we are supplying, but we also have to eat, and like our customers we don't have the option of traveling into town to do our shopping, in order to take advantage of the "weekly specials" we see advertised on TV (which by the way are often cheaper than we can buy from our wholesalers!)

Some of my customers come from a neighbouring community that has an Outback Store, however they choose to travel and shop at my store because they prefer my variety of stock and prices. I also try to cater, to the best of my ability for those who have special dietary needs, and need items such as diet drinks, and sugar substitute. While I don't have the resources to stock large quantities, at least I am making a genuine effort.

Whilst the whole idea of a Outback Stores may originally have been a good one, I do question the way things have progressed. Why aren't Outback Stores subject to the same level of inspections that the average station or community store has to deal with. Whatever happened to the notion of Australia being a fair country?

It also seems quite interesting to me that people don't mention the other duties station store owner/operators perform within their communities.

For example, most stores are the contact point for their community when dealing with Centrelink.. Without such support what would happen? Who would help them register, lodge claims, fax forms, etc? Never once have I heard of anyone being reimbursed for performing these duties. Quite frankly, without the aid of Station Stores, many of the communities would simply starve!

The station store may not be a store which is run by the Indigenous people themselves, but it is run primarily for them. It is much more than a place to buy food and clothes, it is a meeting place for all of the community, and this includes station people too, because it's there community as well!

Joan Parton

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