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**The House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Community Stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

Submission prepared by Samantha Devine

THIS SUBMISSION RELATES TO IBIS STORES THROUGHOUT THE TORRES STRAIT.

For matters of privacy I request that all people who have contributed to this submission and who do not wish to be identified by full name be identified by initials only. The committee will be provided with a list of names and contact numbers for those referred to herein.

Page numbers in parentheses relate to the written submission prepared by Richard Bowler, Chief Executive Officer, Island Industries Board which is available at:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/House/committee/atsia/communitystores/subs/Sub0028.pdf>

As I am sure the committee is aware there are a number of issues relating to the supply and sale of goods in the Torres Strait.

I would like to draw the committee's attention to the following:

OVERCHARGING OF GOODS WHEN SCANNED AT CHECKOUT

In late 2007 I was made aware of the gross overcharging at IBIS checkouts in relation to prices displayed on the shelf.

Overcharging was not by a few cents, but usually 40 cents to over \$1.00 extra per item.

Many items did not have prices displayed so it was impossible to tell if items were being scanned at the correct price.

Each time I noticed I had been overcharged I would approach a checkout person for a refund of the difference in shelf price displayed versus checkout price scanned.

The requests for refunds were met with a number of comments and below are just a small sample:
"The price at the checkout is the right price, not the price on the shelf."

"We can't change all the prices every week as lots of prices go up so you have to pay what the till says, not what's on the shelf."

"You can't have a refund today, it's Sunday, you'll have to come back tomorrow."

Each time I requested a refund I was treated as a very difficult customer. I tried very hard to be casual and polite about my requests as I realised it was a management issue not directly related to the staff on the shop floor, however I was treated rudely, with insolence and disdain by both local and non-Indigenous staff.

I requested to see the manager on a number of occasions to discuss this matter however no manager was ever able to see me.

I telephoned the Cairns IBIS office and explained the problem to the receptionist there. She said she would have someone call me back. I gave my work, home and mobile numbers (all of which have message facilities).

After three days of not hearing from IBIS I called again. Again I was told someone would return my call.

After a further three days with no return call from IBIS I contacted the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in Cairns, filled in a complaint form and began a long email relationship with Peta Ison (from OFT) who met with Richard Bowler who agreed to rectify the problems.

I needed to take this action despite Mr Bowlers claims that IBIS has an "Open door availability of CEO with 24/7 personal contact available to representatives of each community." (pg 14) If this had been the case the OFT would not have investigated my concerns.

After reporting this issue to OFT and keeping receipts and refund receipts (of which there were many) to support my claims I found that the Retail Operations Manager of IBIS, who had always been very friendly towards me – we even loaned books and DVD's to one another, would no longer talk to me nor look at me when I went into the store. This was very uncomfortable for me and extremely unprofessional of him.

The process of overcharging customers in this manner still occurs and I would suggest that IBIS' modest profit for the last financial year has been made, in part, at the expense of the community by IBIS engaging, either wilfully or through neglect, in such practices.

There is a culture of "shame" which exists in the Torres Strait and I know of a number of local women who, despite knowing they have been overcharged, will not ask for a refund due to their reluctance to call attention to themselves. And considering the shocking, rude and degrading 'service' I received it does not surprise me that others do not want to subject themselves to this treatment.

Because of the above consequences I no longer ask for refunds on overcharged items although the overcharging goes on as much as ever.

Mr Bowler's statement regarding customer service is that IBIS is "...committed to ensuring the highest possible quality of service to its customers and is not prepared to accept that...mediocre service delivery is acceptable in Indigenous Communities." (pg 12) I would suggest that IBIS is currently failing both its floor staff and the communities it seeks to serve in relation to this statement.

ISSUES WITH CEO TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE INQUIRY

I attended the hearing on Thursday Island hosted by the Community Stores Inquiry Committee. When questioned about the Complaints Policy at IBIS the CEO Mr Richard Bowler said although there was no formal Policy in place, complaints were all handled by him and dealt with in a timely manner.

This lack of a formal policy is in direct contradiction to Mr Bowler's written submission which states that IBIS has in place the "documentation of all processes across the organisation." (pg 17) If there is no Complaints policy the inquiry would do well to ask what other "processes across the organisation" have failed to be documented.

Mr Bowler further stated his business cards were available in stores for customers to take should they wish to contact him. I have lived in this area for over four years and have never once seen a card in any of the TI stores. I have also visited IBIS stores on Yam Island, Masig, Murray, Poruma, Warraber and Boigu and no cards have been displayed in any visible manner in these stores either. My husband, who has visited every IBIS store throughout the Torres Strait, has not seen this practice in a single store.

If Mr Bowler were under oath at the inquiry on Thursday Island, his statements and his integrity must surely be called into question.

FAILURE TO DISPLAY PRICES ON SHELVES

While IBIS has recently introduced Fruit and Vegetable 'specials' whose prices are displayed, they still fail to display the price of 'non-special' fresh food and other goods.

I purchased a number of fresh fruit and vegetables recently (all on special) but could not find a price for cauliflower. At the checkout I asked the price of the cauliflower which scanned at \$10.69. My groceries that day came to a little over \$31.00, had they come to a little over \$41.00 I would not have questioned this, however paying over \$10.00 for a cauliflower is not something I would chose to do. I did not purchase the cauliflower.

Another community member, CT, recently reported a similar experience. CT purchased a number of fresh items on special and also purchased a small red cabbage. On arriving home CT looked at the store docket and was dismayed to see the cabbage had be priced in excess of \$11.00.

Are prices deliberately being omitted from expensive items such as this to compensate for the "specials?" Surely all items need to be priced?

In his report Mr Bowler acknowledges many people living in the Torres Strait are "...low income earners with special health and wellbeing needs." Yet despite this IBIS still fails to correctly display the prices of goods it sells.

Many goods on the shelf are still not priced at all (no ticket price is displayed), the TI Main Store also displays goods on the shelf, that upon reaching the checkout, are not "in the system" and the staff are unable to sell these goods.

So even when it looks like there is a choice, this is limited by being unable to purchase the item you have chosen. This happened with a particular brand of toilet paper which when I tried to purchase the same brand again around six weeks later, it was still "not on the system", and yet it was still on the display, merely giving the illusion of choice.

I am also regularly charged for an entire cabbage or cauliflower when I only buy a half. This information can also be checked with MT, who has lived on the island for about seven years as she has similar experiences with this.

SELLING OF FOOD AFTER USE-BY (NOT "BEST BEFORE") DATE

Items of food are regularly reduced in price after the Use By date has passed. I have photographs of salami which has had its Use By Date crossed out with black texta and sausages where this has happened and a new date inserted.

POOR QUALITY OF FRESH PRODUCE

One would wonder how as individuals we can order fruit and vegetables from Cairns and have them arrive on TI in a fresh and edible condition. Other stores – See Hops on Thursday Island and previously the Fruit Barn on Thursday Island were also able to achieve this yet IBIS, who also source their fruit and vegetables from Cairns, sell black onions, rotten tomatoes, wet mushrooms, dried up ginger and juicy lettuce mix covered in brown slime.

Island and Cape stores which operate on some of the Outer Islands have far better quality fresh produce than IBIS is able to deliver and yet transportation times and methods are exactly the same.

There must be a need to look at IBIS' storage and/or handling practices or the quality of produce they are sourcing as other local stores manage to sell far superior quality fresh goods which all also travel here by barge.

This week CT went into the Main Store on Thursday Island to buy fruit & vegetables that were advertised as "On Special". CT intended to buy rockmelon, however all of the rockmelon displayed was rotten.

CT asked if there were other rockmelons in the storage area as the ones on display were rotten. A staff member brought her a rockmelon out, but no attempt was made to remove the rotten fruit and replace it with that of better quality.

In his written testimony Mr Bowler states: "...IB provides a service essential to the health and wellbeing of the communities of the Torres Strait and NPA."

It would be difficult to see how Mr Bowler can make this claim when rotted or rotting produce is sometimes all that is available to customers, when meat is black rather than red and when milk, smallgoods and dairy products are sold after their Use-By date.

Fruit and vegetables that are past their best are also not reduced to ensure quick sale. They merely remain on the shelf until they are woefully, obviously too vile for anyone to consume, whereupon they are taken to the dump. Surely reducing the cost and possibly selling the items would have to be preferable to dumping fresh produce which has been freighted to the island. This would at least ensure some money was earned from the delivery of such goods.

COMMENTS FROM COMMUNITY MEMBERS

In the course of my work I also have regular contact with community members throughout the Torres Strait and have sought permission to detail some of the issues people have raised with me.

In December 2008 I discussed the following with KT, from St Paul's Community, Moa Island:

The price of Fuel at Badu Island IBIS bowser is: \$1.60/litre, price at Kubin bowser is \$2.29/litre, price at St. Paul's \$57.00 for 20 litre drum (\$2.85/litre). Kubin and St Paul's are both located on Moa Island, yet the price of fuel varies substantially. Why?

St. Paul's community members were unable to buy fuel from the bowser as it had been broken for some time before December.

KT approached Retail Operations Manager about fixing the bowser and was told IBIS doesn't want to sell fuel any more.

KT reported feeling annoyed by this as many people in the community rely on fuel for fishing and his thoughts were along the lines of if IBIS doesn't wish to maintain the bowser, they should let the council know so someone else can take it over and the community can have a proper fuel service again.

The bowser was eventually fixed in March 2009.

In April 2009 I discussed the following with JN from St Paul's Community, Moa Island:

A further issue had arisen with the fuel bowser following the closure of the St Paul's supermarket due to a rat infestation.

JN reported that the bowser at St Paul's had been disabled from taking the cards community members purchase to buy their fuel from the bowser.

JN travelled to the Kubin IBIS store (also on Moa Island) to buy fuel at the bowser and thus access the cheaper price.

JN found the Kubin bowser had not been filled with fuel thus forcing those who needed fuel to pay the drum price of \$2.80/litre.

Although purely speculation JN reported the view amongst the community is that they are being punished by IBIS for drawing attention to the vermin issues as community members have successfully dealt with their own rat problems and believe the problem could be brought under control at the IBIS Store.

JN said he had been trying to contact John Smithies (Operations Manager) and Richard Bowler (CEO) but calls were not answered and messages not returned. Again refuting Mr Bowlers claims that IBIS has an "Open door availability of CEO with 24/7 personal contact available to representatives of each community." (pg 14)

I also talked again with KT about this same issue.

KT described IBIS as unscrupulous operators who don't care about the people and asked if their licence could be revoked and an operator sought who could provide the services needed by the community.

KT and JN asked for the following to be noted:

- The rat problem at the St Paul's store dealt with
- The St Paul's store be reopened (or opened by an alternative operator)
- Access to fuel at bowser prices, when the bowser is out of action
- Contact from John Smithies and/or Richard Bowler as per Richard Bowlers submission to the enquiry regarding the management of customer complaints

Regarding a further incident I spoke with Sandra Edwards, Director of Rebel Marine Pty Ltd (ph: (07) 4069), a ferry company operating on Thursday Island. Ms Edwards recently held a stall at the monthly markets on Thursday Island where she sold fresh fruit and vegetables. This stall was well received by the community.

About two weeks after the market and directly after the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee had visited Thursday Island Ms Edwards was at Horn Island Wharf and noticed Mr Bowler and his fiancée

(the HR Manager for IBIS) in a bus waiting to leave the wharf. Ms Edwards went to say hello to Mr Bowler. Once she got close to the bus she realised Mr Bowler was "white with rage".

Ms Edwards reports Mr Bowler and his partner had dined at the home of Ms Edwards and family on many occasions the two families had socialised together and they considered the Bowlers as family friends.

Mr Bowler stated "you have betrayed us" and Ms Edwards reported he appeared to be very angry. Ms Edwards asked what had happened; what she had done, but Mr Bowler did not offer a reply.

Mr Bowler (who had previously always used Ms Edwards ferry service) said "if you don't support our business, we won't support yours." Ms Edwards again enquired as to what the issue was, but did not receive an answer.

Ms Edwards reports being upset and much shaken by this altercation as she was unable to engage Mr Bowler in a rational discussion. Ms Edwards can only surmise that Mr Bowler acted in this manner due to the market stall.

Ms Edwards faxed Mr Bowler an IBIS receipt from about three days prior where she had spent close to \$400.00 at the Main Store on TI and indicated to Mr Bowler that she did indeed support IBIS and would be open to talking about whatever made him so angry. Ms Edwards has not received a response to her fax. Ms Edwards is now pursuing this matter through the Board of IBIS.

Again, I wonder that Mr Bowler describes himself as "a retail management specialist with over 40 years experience in the retail industry..." and yet appears unable to conduct himself in a professional manner within a small community where maintaining cordial relations with customers is of paramount importance.

CHOICE OF PRODUCT

Choice of products is a continuing issue within IBIS stores. I have lived in the Torres Strait for four years and during this time IBIS has continued to sell the same flavour and same brands of goods.

When travelling on the mainland it is remarkable to see the choice afforded to customers there.

I realise the size of customer-base affects what can be stocked, but four years of Jalna Vanilla yoghurt is wearing thin. Just to have some variety some times, a different flavour, a different brand would do much to improve the community's view of IBIS.

Community members do not have the option of purchasing energy efficient light globes through IBIS who only stock the old, inefficient style of bulb.

CENTRALISED ORDERING ISSUES

Many islands go for extended periods without access to oil, even if IBIS has supplies of fuel available.

This means that people are unable to run their dinghies for fishing, travelling to other islands as they are unable to purchase oil to mix with their fuel.

I have received reports from Darnley, Badu, St Paul's and Kubin regarding this issue.

If IBIS employs the centralised method of ordering as described by Richard Bowler to the Committee, how can fuel and oil run out? Surely as it is sold this would be recorded and an order automatically

placed for the goods purchased. The centralised ordering method sounds fine in theory, but evidently it is not working.

The centralised ordering method also does not take into account how many items were not purchased due to them being sold out. If IBIS stocks 20 bottles of cordial in a store and these all sell in four days 20 more are ordered. This does not mean that only 20 were required.

A further 20 people may have wished to purchase that particular brand but were unable to due to lack of stock. There does not seem to be any way to allow for this which thereby reduces IBIS' potential profits even further and further denies communities choice and availability of particular goods.

I believe "Exception Reports" are an important data set in grocery retailing. The report shows how quickly a particular product line sold out. The person interpreting the data is then aware that increased stock needs to be ordered until the level of stock carried by a store reaches the correct amount. It would appear, from the lack of goods available regularly at many stores either that IBIS does not have the capacity to extract this data or there is no one monitoring this type of report.

In Mr Bowler's written statement he asserts "...all stores now showing very high stock levels at all times..." (pg 8) This is absolutely not the case; other than when the Inquiry came to town the shelves are so often empty, particular brands or flavours of goods are out of stock until the next delivery day, or sometimes for weeks on end.

Mr Bowler also states "... all stores hold four weeks supply of products that are not subject to limited date coding..." again this is not evidenced by shopping at IBIS - tinned goods, cordial, crispbreads, cleaning products and many, many other items are just not available to purchase and there will often be a 'blank space' on the shelf where the product should be.

If the stores really carry this level of stock I would suggest it needs to come out of the stock room and onto the shop floor to allow its purchase by customers.

ADVERTISED SPECIALS

IBIS advertises its weekly specials in the Torres News; these are on both fresh and dry goods. The price for the week is displayed, however the original price is never indicated so consumers do not know if they are saving two cents, twenty cents or two dollars on a particular item.

Advertised 'specials' are not so special on the outer islands however, as stores there often charge more than the advertised price even though all communities receive the Torres News and are aware of the prices advertised.

In the Main Store on Thursday Island the "Special" fruit and/or vegetables are regularly unavailable to purchase. Kiwi fruit were recently on Special, but no kiwi fruit were in store to purchase. This information can be verified by CT.

Some goods are also advertised as a "Special Buy" in-store using handwritten display tickets placed over the original price. The issue here is that when these items are no longer a "special buy" the tickets remain on the shelves thus hoodwinking customers in to believing they are paying the reduced price, yet the goods are scanned at the original (higher, non-"special buy") price.

At the checkout customers are unable to see the price of goods being displayed. IBIS recently installed new computers and screens in its TI Main Store. However, the screens are only visible to the staff scanning the goods.

In mainland supermarkets screens are visible to the customer so if you are being overcharged or are being charged over \$10 for a cauliflower you are aware at the time of scanning.

In the interests of keeping customers informed of prices (particularly in light of the items that are not priced and the large number of items that scan at a higher price than on the shelves) it would be good practice for IBIS to introduce this system into their stores throughout the Torres Strait.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Torres Strait communities often use the local newspaper, The Torres News, to highlight issues in the area. However, as IBIS is the biggest advertiser in the Torres News, the commercial reality is that the Editor, Mark Bousen (P: 1300 867 737) will not write articles or investigate claims of over-charging, poor quality goods, ill-treatment by staff etc. as the newspaper relies on the income generated from IBIS advertising. While I fully understand the commercial implications for Mr Bousen this again leaves the community without a 'voice.' Concerns cannot be shared, other community members can not be alerted to the overcharging issues, people cannot engage in robust inter-island "discussion" via the newspaper to address or highlight some of the issues.

In his written submission Mr Bowler asserts that "...IIB delivers safe, nutritious food at the lowest possible price to remote Indigenous Communities at no cost to the public purse." (pg 4) This statement is clearly untrue – IBIS receives funding from Government for its nutrition program, in the very recent past Government has provided a substantial rescue package of funding to IBIS due to its significant financial losses and most recently Government has provided in excess of two million dollars to IBIS to install a bakery in its Thursday Island Main Store which acts in direct competition to two locally-owned, privately operated businesses. In addition this bakery uses frozen, preservative-laden dough rather than dough made from scratch, again putting further stress on health outcomes. As if this were not sufficient to warrant an acknowledgement of the Government funding received by IBIS, the store also employs staff whose wages are "topped up" through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), labour which is not available to private business and which is undeniably funding IBIS receives from the Government. Given this information it seems fanciful to claim that IBIS comes "...at no cost to the public purse."

It may, or may not be an issue that IBIS receives this amount of Government funding, depending on ones vies. My reason for highlighting the funding that I am aware of (and surely there must be much more) is not to debate whether IBIS should or shouldn't receive funding, but to draw committee and public attention to the blatant untruth purported by Mr Bowler. IBIS clearly *does* come at a cost to the public purse and this should be acknowledged.

In his submission Mr Bowler provides information regarding the "...critical service provided by the IIB...its Funds Transfer Process that ensures the economic wellbeing of the Communities ..." (pg 26)

This "critical" service provides, amongst other things, "Banking services – account deposits, automatic teller machines, transfers to other accounts. Personal Funds Transfers – from bank account to bank account. Electronic bill paying, including to all local suppliers." (pg 26)

What Mr Bowler conveniently fails to mention is that IBIS charges its customers a flat rate of \$30 per transaction. If a customer needs to pay a supplier \$20 and does this through IBIS, the cost to the

customer is \$50. This \$30 charge per transaction must be how IBIS "...ensures the economic wellbeing of the Communities."

The Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) IBIS chooses to install are usually provided by the St George Bank. The only banking institution available within the Torres Strait is the National Bank (NAB), which most people who live here chose to use due to ease of access.

Each time customers wish to check their balance or withdraw cash using a non-NAB ATM they are charged a fee directly from the owner of the ATM if that ATM does not belong to the customers financial institution.

It would be unlikely that any outer island residents use the St George Bank for their everyday banking needs so again rather than "...ensur[ing] the economic wellbeing of the Communities" IBIS has managed to ensure people on a low income are charged on a regular basis for the most basic of services. A situation which could largely have been avoided had IBIS management had the foresight to opt for NAB ATMs. One would have to wonder at the financial benefits IBIS derives from favouring St George Bank's ATMs.

It came to light during the inquiry that there are local residents on the board of IBIS. While most people expected this to be so, those I have talked to since the enquiry did not know who these residents were. It would have been helpful in a number of situations to bypass the ineffective, impolite and incompetent IBIS management and talk directly with a trusted local person to address a number of issues. Please see Recommendations at the conclusion of this submission for ideas on how this could be addressed.

IN CONCLUSION

There are evidently issues across the board at IBIS which need to be addressed before the claims in Mr Bowler's report can be taken seriously. To anyone who read the submission and did not shop at IBIS it would appear that IBIS is the pinnacle of retail excellence when this is so very far from the experience of IBIS customers.

The management of IBIS is failing to supply an adequate quantity of goods to stores, the quality of fresh fruit, vegetables and meat is inexplicably poor - it cannot be claimed this is due to the remote location as private individuals and other stores demonstrate it is possible to sell good quality, fresh produce.

The conduct of management available to us on the islands is akin to what one might see from inmates of a remand centre, not what one would expect from "...a Chief Executive Officer who is supported by five managers, together bringing over 100 years of retail experience to the organisation..." (pg 12)

In his written submission to the enquiry Mr Bowler states: "The IBIS Training Agenda ensures that all IBIS staff have the training needed to carry out the duties of their positions in a competent and effective manner."

It would be difficult to see how this could be the case given my own experience with attempting to get refunds for overcharged items which was dealt with in the most unprofessional manner imaginable. Also when one takes into account the number of items not priced around the store, when rotting fruits and vegetables remain on the shelf for purchase, when Use-By dates are ignored, when items are regularly sold after the Use-By date has expired and when Mr Bowler sees fit to abuse a member of the community for selling fresh fruit and vegetables at the local market.

Staff appear to be either untrained or grossly under-trained in the area of basic customer service, in the rotation of stock, in any kind of quality assurance or food safety. Ordering and keeping of stock is a shambles, the quality of and provision of fuel and oil is hindering local fishing businesses, overcharging is rife and this is despite IBIS' mission which is: "To provide our customers and the people of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Communities with high levels of service and quality in goods and services, in a manner which clearly meets their expectations and those of the IIB".

Of course prices will be more expensive when living in a remote area; I think that goes without question. The question is: how much more expensive (80% - 100+% is usual, currently) and should customers expect to be aware of the prices they are paying by seeing costs displayed on the shelves and at the checkouts?

But the issues with IBIS evidently run much deeper than poor quality, limited availability and incorrect pricing. To listen to Mr Bowler at the inquiry and to read the report submitted IBIS does not identify one single area where it could improve its operations.

How can someone who is supposed to have such an overview of the organisation truly believe this? I am sure the Committee is questioning this after hearing the witness statements in the many communities they visited.

It takes a great deal of courage for many island residents to speak at a public forum, especially to offer criticism, and yet speak they did. That in itself is testimony to the widespread, far-reaching issues within IBIS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a formal Complaints Policy to deal with customer complaints. Keep a Complaints Register to be presented at each Board Meeting detailing the actions taken as a result of the complaints received.
2. Initiate a service such as is employed by mainland supermarkets whereby if a customer is overcharged for an item at the checkout they receive the first item free and if multiples of the item have been purchased they receive the subsequent items at the price shown on the shelf. In addition to being politely administered this system must be widely advertised so that customers are aware of their rights.
3. Install computer screens with large enough font size that allow customers to see items being scanned thereby alerting customers at the point of sale when they have been overcharged for an item or when they have been charged for a whole cabbage/cauliflower etc. although they have only purchased a half.
4. Ensure all fruit and vegetables are priced every week, not only fruit and vegetables on special.
5. Ensure IBIS advertise the regular price of specials in addition to the "specials" price.

6. Ensure that goods advertised as "Special" are available to purchase or an alternative "Special" offered if the original Special cannot be delivered.
7. That the supply, stocking and quality issues be thoroughly investigated and rectified without delay.
8. That fresh food storage issues on the outer Island be rectified to ensure vegetables and fruit are not inappropriately stored thus causing further spoilage issues. End all storage and selling of fresh produce directly from boxes stored on the floor or on shelving designed for dry goods.
9. That the CEO of IBIS live in the Torres Strait, ensuring they have an on-the-ground, every day view of what is happening in their stores. They would also then be able to regularly shop at IBIS and see the 'quality' of the fresh food week in, week out – rather than how it is displayed for their visits.
10. Ensure customers in every store have easy access to information to enable them to make a complaint or raise an issue and ensure complaints are all referred to a central department to be addressed in a consistent manner.
11. That a locked, visible, advertised "Suggestion Box" be available in each store and that suggestions received are tabled at Board Meetings detailing actions to be taken as a result of suggestions made.
12. That CEO and Retail Operations Manager visits to Outer Island stores be advertised on IBIS noticeboard and in Council Offices so the message reaches customers who would like to talk with IBIS Management.
13. Ensure external monitoring of the in-house IIB Food Safety Plan to ensure compliance. Currently the plan, developed and monitored internally is failing to provide safe food to remote communities.
14. That IBIS introduce a system of reducing the price of fresh fruit and vegetables before they need to be thrown out and dumped.
15. That an IBIS "sub-committee" be developed for each Island with an IBIS store, thereby providing community members with an avenue (known, trusted and available) to provide feedback regarding IBIS issues. This would then be fed to IBIS board members and responses provided direct to the residents raising the issue. As each island currently has a Health Council, and considering the direct link between health and the cost, quality and availability of goods, perhaps the Health Council's charter could be expanded to receive and report on issues associated with IBIS.
16. That IBIS use their notice boards in each store to advertise (by way of a laminated poster with photographs) the current Board Members. Had I realised that a Board Member lived in

my community I would have approached him when I was having issues with overcharging, thus possibly negating the need for the Office of Fair Trading to become involved.

17. That the Federal Government looks at a substantial increase the Zone Allowance for the Torres Strait in recognition of the significantly higher cost of living in comparison to mainland communities.
18. That a freight subsidy be initiated. My suggestion would be to run this in a similar way to the Diesel Fuel Rebate, whereby individual and businesses are responsible for keeping receipts/invoices for freight and the subsidy be paid when a tax return is submitted. This would ensure the people who use the freight services claim the subsidy; the more usage the higher the subsidy, there is no cost for administration for the freight company and those who provide freight services cannot be accused of retaining the subsidy and not passing this on to customers.