



Indigenous enterprises are Now open for business

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs last night released its new report **Open for Business: Developing Indigenous Enterprises in Australia**.

The report is the product of a short but probing inquiry inspired by the view that increased economic participation will assist Australia's Indigenous peoples close the unacceptable life expectancy gap of 17 years that exists between them and other Australians.

Indigenous business participation is relatively low, at only six per cent compared with 17 per cent for non Indigenous self employed. Non Indigenous people are also three times more likely to own and run their own business than Indigenous people, whose low outcomes are exacerbated with remoteness.

However, during the inquiry the Committee heard that Indigenous Australians—young and old, from urban to remote regions—increasingly see business as an opportunity to benefit their communities and are keen to engage with the mainstream economy. The range and diversity of Indigenous owned businesses currently in operation was also impressive.

The Committee Chairman Mr Richard Marles said: "The Committee proposes a package of measures which it believes will build real pathways for Indigenous Australians to self sufficiency and self determination. More Indigenous-run businesses will reduce welfare dependence, create positive role models for the young and deliver social benefits across the generations."

The report's 15 recommendations aim to improve existing arrangements and introduce new measures. There are proposals for data collection, new obligations under Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs), better coordination of government services and improved access to advice and micro-financing. Three key new initiatives are:

- the Australian Government pilot an Indigenous Supplier Development Council (Recommendation 13)
- a series of target levels be established for Government procurement from Indigenous businesses (Recommendation 9)
- the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) receive a boost in funding for its work in natural resource management and carbon emission abatement in partnership with Indigenous communities (Recommendation 6).

A media conference is scheduled for 1:30 pm on Tuesday 21 October in Committee Room 1R2, Parliament House. It will be webcast live on: <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

For **media comment**, please contact the Committee Chair, Mr Richard Marles MP, on 02 6277 4330 (Canberra) or 03 5221 3033 (Electorate Office).

Copies of the report are available at www.aph.gov.au/atsia or by contacting the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4559 or by at atsia.reps@aph.gov.au