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The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Sir

Attached is a submission to the above Committee's **Inquiry into Indigenous Business**.

I apologise for not having this submission with you before Friday, 27 February 98, and seek exemption for its inclusion in the Committee's Inquiry.

I have had contact with and then worked with Aboriginal people for about 30 years. Lately- following discussions and a workshop with staff of ARDS Inc in Arnhemland I am becoming more aware and alarmed at what seems to be the confusion of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley in relation to economic matters.

I submit my thoughts for the Committee's consideration.

Yours sincerely

Pat Buchanan

Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Inquiry into Indigenous Businesses

Terms of Reference Point 2

***Possible future policy direction* and administrative arrangements at the Commonwealth Level to encourage indigenous commercial¹ initiatives:**

Economic confusion of Aboriginal people has been recorded by ARDS Inc personnel in the paper 'Economic Literacy Education' (I).

Aboriginal people in Arnhemland were found to be totally confused about:

- a the nature of wealth and how it is generated within Australia and internationally
- b the role of production and trade within the contemporary economic system;
- c the nature of private enterprise and its role within contemporary economics;
- d how the government generates revenue;
- e the laws and controls which govern the economic system;
- f their role as citizens in adding to the economic development.'

Even words like: trade, economics, economic development, private enterprise, balance of trade, budget, balanced budget, audit auditor, credit, creditors, value, debt, debtors, government revenue, public money, etc' were not properly understood.

ARDS work has continued with the development and application of a method of education in the peoples' own language that is now starting to reduce the confusion and demystify contemporary economic issues for people.

Some of the benefits in the short term that have resulted from this Economic Literacy education include:

1. A clear improvement in the audit reports of community associations and councils, together with fewer budget blowouts.
2. A better working relationship between Government personnel and the communities
3. Increased demand for information that people can understand.
4. An appreciation of the law and order issues on communities with the people understanding contemporary law.
5. Starting to see a move towards private enterprise.
6. More community members seeking education and skills training.

In speaking with some East Kimberley Aborigines who have indicated an interest in business it was obvious that a real understanding of business was lacking, even before considering business management principles.

Why should people be encouraged into business without the opportunity for crosscultural education that demystifies and clarifies how nonindigenous business and economic systems work?

Why should people be set up to fail, yet again?

Economic development will never proceed while people are confused and disempowered, and yet are often resource rich. And so the need to empower Indigenous Australians through the use of their language and cultural knowledge base to help them discover not only the contemporary economic systems and knowledge but also that associated with the legal, political, and health systems. Indigenous people must also live under their own structures and so nonindigenous Australians need to learn and acknowledge something of these.

Recommendations:

1. Where Indigenous people are confused about contemporary economic issues, that education in Economic Literacy be a prerequisite to any other assistance given in relation to commencing/building a business.
2. Provide financial assistance to language research centres involved in the linguistic analysis of Indigenous languages for the abstract conceptual understandings - the cultural knowledge base eg economic systems and knowledge.
3. Ensure the Commonwealth and State Government staff working in the area of development of Indigenous businesses have an understanding of the potential economic confusion of their clients.
4. Encourage government staff working with Indigenous people to learn and use the relevant language and participate in relevant cross cultural workshops.
5. Encourage the use of indigenous interpreters by government staff where appropriate.

-I. ARDS Inc., 'Economic Literacy Education', ARDS **Inc.**, 1995.
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