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Background

Jarlmadangah Burru Aboriginal Community (JBAC) is located approximately 120kms South East of Derby.

JBAC was incorporated under the "Commonwealth of Australia; Aboriginal Council and Associations Act 1976" on 3 December 1987. It was established to develop, manage, administer and advance all aspects of social, economic and cultural well-being for the people in Jarlmadangah Burru Aboriginal Community.

Jarlmadangah Burru is the result of the life-long struggle of Nyikina-Mangala elders, John and Harry Watson, to maintain their language, law and culture, and educate new generations. Jarlmadangah Burru Aboriginal Community is built around very strong social values and a dedication to the maintenance of Nyikina-Mangala Law and Culture (Nyikina and Mangala are the two language groups in Jarlmadangah Burru).

The community now has its own store, clinic, school, camel tours, cultural centre, telecommunications centre, administrative office, women's centre and active community development programs.

All major decisions concerning the community are made at meetings where everyone gathers and all can have their say. A strong commitment to cultural values, a strict alcohol and drug free policy and inspired leadership have made Jarlmadangah Burru Aboriginal Community a successful example of a community with an eye on the future as well as the past.

Nestled amidst the picturesque Grant Ranges, in one of the world's last great wilderness regions, with a vibrant history and culture, Jarlmadangah Burru is a unique and landmark Aboriginal community.

Submission

JBAC has operated a community store called Mulgayidi since 1999. The store is owned 100% by the community and has been managed by Indigenous members of the community for all that time. The manager is responsible for the day to day operations of the store at the community. He is also supported by the community Administrator/Accountant who is based in Broome and co-ordinates purchases and buying of stock and provided financial reporting.

The community has successfully operated the store over the past 10 years independently of outside bodies or the Outback Stores model. Employees are engaged under the CDEP program and some top up is paid for hours worked above their CDEP hours. The store contributes to the cost of fuel for the powerhouse and has provided the community with an essential service.

As stated the community has operated independently and has had to look at how it can offer community member's food supplies that will enable them to receive value for money and not lose money in the process. During its' ten years of operation the store has only recorded one small loss. All profits generated have been reinvested into the store for improvements and upgrading computers/POS.

The cost of food supply is a major issue, in particular purchasing from wholesalers where the cost of the majority of supplies is far greater than what you can purchase of the shelf for either Woolworths or Coles. As a result of this the store has established personal relationships with Managers of both food chains and is able to buy bulk from these retailers. It is also able to buy of the weekly specials of the catalogue where there are substantial savings, sometimes greater than 40%. This enables the goods to be marked up to similar prices of what a community member can buy off the shelf as if they were shopping in town. This is not for all products but this strategy enables community members who are on CDEP wages of approx \$249 per week to get the most value for their \$.

The purchasing from wholesale distributors is costly as they do not have the buying power of Coles or Woolworths and supplies are not always targeted for resale at a retail level but more towards restaurants and catering. The store does purchase its bulk frozen meat supplies from a local wholesaler as it is more practical from a pricing point of view and the product is consistent.

Fruit & Veg is purchased from the local wholesaler who also pre-packs and prices the goods at the markup requested by the Store. This method enables the protecting of the product from constant handling and for hygienic reasons.

Overall, the quality of food supply is good however, quality of goods can vary from poor to fair for fresh produce. There is very little competition as major food chains prices are almost identical for every product unless they are on special, as stated the wholesaler sells the majority of goods above the cost of what you can get off the shelf from the major chains for example powdered milk refills cost \$10.95 wholesale, the same product from Coles or Woolworths is \$ 8.95.

Most of the other stores purchase their goods from wholesalers thereby making their goods more expensive to community members. We have had community members from another community travel to buy food from our store as the community store where they live is more expensive.

The model used by JBAC is suitable for this community and is dependant on the efforts of those involved to make it work. Most other stores are either managed by non indigenous workers, who generally receive a wage for their efforts and require additional housing to accommodate, or by private companies. This generally leads to higher prices of good as these costs need to be recovered. What works at JBAC may not necessarily work with other communities.

The fact that this community has a store has a major impact on health and economic outcomes of the community. In relation to health the community has been able to supply fresh produce to community members. The store also works with the community health services in promoting health eating by identify what is a good food choice and what is a poor food choice. In addition, the fact that the store is community owned allows it to make decisions such as limiting the selling of products that are harmful to community member's health.

Economically, the community saves community members from traveling over 100kms one way to the nearest town to purchase basic food supplies and keeps community members in the community which in turn is more productive. Having a community store has enabled a number of community members to gain experience in retailing including students of the school who undertake work experience at the store.

The community has participated in a number of surveys and reviews of the community stores program yet there has been no feedback as to the findings of the review. There has also been a number of policy changes to programs such as CDEP that will have a major impact on how community store will survive this has already been witnessed in some of the stores in the West Kimberley Region and other parts of WA.

Conclusion

Community Stores have an important role to play in remote communities and is primary an essential

service, the economic component is of a secondary nature.

More needs to be done to work with major food chains such as Coles, Woolworths, IGA and others to support the Community Stores Model including working on relationships that creates opportunities for both parties. These relationships could foster employment opportunities, cultural exchanges, cheaper food supplies for community members as well as other economic benefits.

The Jarlmadangah Burru community welcomes the inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and is willing to appear before the committee to provide oral evidence.

Regards,

Joe Grande