

# Chapter 5

## Cross Portfolio Indigenous Matters

5.1 This chapter contains the key issues discussed during the 2011-2012 additional estimates hearings for cross portfolio Indigenous matters pursuant to Resolution of the Senate of 26 August 2008.<sup>1</sup> The following portfolio departments were in attendance:

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Department of Health and Ageing
- Department of Human Services

5.2 The committee heard evidence from the departments on Friday 17 February 2012. Areas of the portfolios were called in the following order:

- Closing the Gap
- Northern Territory Emergency Response
- Employment and Economic Development
- Indigenous Business Australia
- Indigenous Housing
- Health Issues

### Closing the Gap

5.3 The committee sought information on the reported 90 per cent of Indigenous children that were enrolled in a preschool program in the year before full-time schooling and whether any additional data had been collected on the attendance at preschool.<sup>2</sup> Officers reported that a new national collection is being developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that will attempt to measure attendance where it is possible.<sup>3</sup> The department also clarified that attendance data for preschool is available by jurisdiction, however the difficulty with monitoring attendance at preschool is that it is not compulsory.<sup>4</sup>

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1 *Journals of the Senate*: No.22–26 August 2008, p. 683.

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 10.

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 10.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 11.

### ***Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services***

5.4 The committee asked officers about the gap between opportunities in metropolitan and regional Australia, mentioning that there is a 50 per cent gap in educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians who live in metropolitan areas compared to those that live in remote areas, and queried the department on its role in measuring the standards of delivery in remote areas.<sup>5</sup>

5.5 Mr Brian Gleeson, Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, explained that his office is attempting to develop performance indicators in order to achieve measurable examples of progress. This will lead to an evaluation to assess whether outcomes are being achieved:

As an example of that [...] I convened a series of roundtables last year around school attendance. I found it very helpful to get the jurisdictions around the table to ask some very hard questions about the issues of teaching, quality of teaching, school attendance.<sup>6</sup>

### **Northern Territory Emergency Response**

5.6 The committee queried on what basis new signs were being installed in indigenous communities. The department replied that the new signs incorporated new words and better placement in order to be succinct and clear.<sup>7</sup> Officers stated that communities were consulted around what messages they thought the signs needed to reflect, as well as the messaging the government needs to add. Officers added that these signs will be located in places which give people a general warning that there are restrictions that apply in the Northern Territory.<sup>8</sup> Officers added that if a community does not want a sign, the legislation does not require it.<sup>9</sup>

### **Indigenous Business Australia**

5.7 The committee began by commending the Indigenous Land Corporation for the work they had done in increasing the amount of full-time employees at the Ayers Rock Resort.<sup>10</sup>

5.8 The committee sought further information on the issue of cadastral boundaries and if the circumstances for the drawing of these boundaries had changed.<sup>11</sup> Officers replied that different surveying is currently taking place:

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5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 16.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 16.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 24.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 24.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 24.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 26.

11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 33.

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What is different with the surveying that the Executive Director of Township Leasing is doing now is that the work involves the subdivision of the actual blocks within the town. This sets up the ability of proponents of leases to take a particular block of land without having to pay the survey costs up front.<sup>12</sup>

5.9 Indigenous Business Australia was keen to update the committee on its home ownership program, pointing out that it was about to approve its 15 000<sup>th</sup> home loan.<sup>13</sup> Mr Chris Fry, Chief Executive Officer, explained that most of the home loan clients would not have got a home loan through mainstream finance and that it is important because it represents a wealth transfer to the clients.<sup>14</sup>

## Housing

5.10 The committee noted that there are some houses in Indigenous communities that are in need of repair. Officers explained that work and repairs are carried on after construction by the Northern Territory government during regular repairs and maintenance.<sup>15</sup> Occasionally, staff from the repairs and maintenance program have to schedule a particular visit to a house if there is a long waiting period before they were originally scheduled to visit that area.

## Health

5.11 The committee noted that there are currently a few petrol stations that are still refusing to stock Opal fuel. Officers stated that there are eight stations refusing Opal and that these consist of five in the Northern Territory, two in South Australia and one in Queensland.<sup>16</sup>

5.12 The committee sought information on children receiving the first ear, nose and throat health checks in the Northern Territory Emergency Response, particularly whether children were referred for a second check up.<sup>17</sup> The department stated that of the 1968 children who had a first consultation there were 1283 who required a follow up:

As of May 2011, of those 1,283 who required further follow up, 227 had been reviewed by an ENT specialist, 85 still had their review period active, 751 had not been reviewed by an ENT specialist and 170 had no fixed review period and had not been seen.<sup>18</sup>

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12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 33.

13 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 35.

14 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 35.

15 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 47.

16 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 58.

17 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 59.

18 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 59.

5.13 The committee asked the department about the funding allotted to address suicides in the Kimberley, specifically involving the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide initiative.<sup>19</sup> Officers stated that Boab Health Services was funded in order to deliver extra services in the region and that it had employed two experienced psychologists that are delivering Indigenous suicide prevention services under the initiative. These services are being provided out of Broome and Kununurra.<sup>20</sup>

## **Conclusion**

5.14 The committee thanked the departments, officers and ministers for their attendance and confirmed the importance of the cross portfolio estimates hearings for addressing Indigenous issues. During the entire Additional Estimates process for 2011-2012 the committee asked over 850 questions on notice.

**Senator Claire Moore**

**Chair**

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19 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 17 February 2012, p. 65.

20 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 65.