



Opening Statement by the Coordinator General to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee Friday 21 October 2011

The position of Coordinator General is a statutory role, established under the *Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services Act 2009*.

I took up my appointment on 20 July 2009, nearly two and a half years ago.

As the Coordinator General my role is to monitor, assess, advise in relation to, and drive:

- a) The development and delivery of government services and facilities in each of the 29 specified remote communities in Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales, and
- b) Progress towards achieving the Closing the Gap targets in the specified remote communities.

I have powers to seek relevant information and documentation, request people to attend meetings and request assistance from service agencies. While these powers come with some authority, I am also required to consult with the heads of agencies before I am publicly critical of an agency. This legislative requirement is outlined in section 18 of my Act.

My staff and I work productively with the range of Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies involved in the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement, including Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Progress will only be made to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage if all agencies, governments and communities work cooperatively and collaboratively.

I am independent. My office has its own budget. My staff has been recruited through the APS procedures and have been selected by me and report to me. I might add that they come from a range of agencies across all levels of government, different jurisdictions and the private sector.

Although my Office is physically located within the FaHCSIA offices, I do not report through the FaHCSIA Secretary. My reports are not subject to 'clearance' by the Secretary, any other public servant or indeed the Minister. I report directly to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and if necessary to the Prime Minister.

Let me conclude by referring to the questions raised in the last Senate Estimates hearings in regard to the letters I wrote to Dr Harmer (the then Secretary FaHCSIA) on 22 June 2010 raising a number of issues regarding the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement and the role played by his Department as the lead agency. These issues were raised in the context of the development of my second report to the Minister which was publicly released in October 2010.

As indicated earlier, the legislation governing my functions and powers as Coordinator General requires me to consult directly with the heads of agencies if I am considering making negative comments about their agency in my reports.

Following the letters of 22 June 2010, I subsequently met with Dr Harmer and received a formal response to the issues I raised. My second report was then finalised. In this regard, there were 21 references to FaHCSIA made in that report and some of those references covered issues that I was not fully satisfied with as a result of the several exchanges I had with the Department and Dr Harmer. Matters have moved on since then, as evidenced by my fourth report, released this month.

The development of my four statutory reports to date have all been the subject of robust enquiry and dialogue with government agencies and other stakeholders. In this regard I have met and will continue to meet regularly with Federal, State and Territory Ministers, the Secretary of FaHCSIA and the heads of other agencies to inform the development of my reports. These meetings are also necessary to follow up on issues and or recommendations from previous reports and, importantly, resolve service blockages to ensure the best outcomes possible for the Indigenous peoples living in the 29 Remote Service Delivery priority communities.

We are now approximately half way through the term of the National Partnership Agreement.

As indicated in my four reports, progress has been made:

- we see new and refurbished houses;
- we see new police stations and more police;
- we see infrastructure development;
- we see new safe houses, child and family centres, sport and recreation facilities;
- and so on and so on.

Most importantly we are seeing greater community ownership and shared responsibilities.

Now that the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement has moved more to implementation, I will also be focusing more on assessing outcomes and addressing the strategic blockages across government.

I will be seeking to balance strategic and operational interventions and to focus more on a 'facilitator and mediator' role rather than 'auditor or arbiter' at both the strategic and operational levels of the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement.

Brian Gleeson

Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Supplementary Estimates 2011–2012

Tabled document no: 2.

Portfolio: CROSS PORTFOLIO

By: OCGRIS (BRIAN GLEESON)

Date: 21/10/2011