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Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By way of email: indig.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Re: Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Submission

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is the national peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

SNAICC welcomes the opportunity to provide this written submission to the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities.

We appreciate that we are sending you this information at a very late stage in the process. As a result, we will keep our comments as brief as possible, attaching pertinent previous submissions focusing on the Northern Territory Intervention.

Background on SNAICC

SNAICC was formally established in 1981, elected its first national executive in 1982 and first received Commonwealth funding in 1983.

SNAICC operates from a membership base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care agencies (AICCAS), other Indigenous child and family welfare agencies, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), family support services, foster care agencies, link up and family reunification services, family group homes, community groups and voluntary associations, long day care child care services, pre schools, early childhood education services and services for



young people at risk.

In addition to these members SNAICC has a network and subscriber list of over 1600 community groups, mostly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, but also significant numbers of non-Indigenous community based services, government agencies and individuals with an interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children.

SNAICC is governed by a national executive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drawn from our members and operates from an office located in Melbourne, with funding provided by the Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. It is a non-government, not for profit organization.

General Recommendations

SNAICC's submission is focusing on the Committee's third term of reference, the 'health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities'.

SNAICC's research, policy and resource development work includes the diverse needs and issues faced by regional and remote and Aboriginal and Islander children and families, where the well documented disadvantage confronting Australia's Indigenous population is particularly acute. However, this work highlights three thematic issues relevant to the health, welfare, education and security of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

SNAICC respectfully recommends that the Committee's findings should have particular regard to the following:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations are the most appropriate organisations to provide child care and child and family welfare services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

While recognising the diversity of practices and purposes of the many services focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, there is considerable literature on the strengths of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services.¹ These strengths include that:

¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Footprints to Where We Are* (2005); Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Early Childhood Case Studies* (2004); T Hutchins, K Martin, S Saggars and M Sims, *Indigenous Early Learning and Care* (2007) and M Sims, A Guilfoyle, S Saggars, A Targowska, T Hutchins and S Jackiewicz, 'Indigenous child care – leading the way' (2008) 33(1) *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 56.



- the centres are community managed and controlled
- the community are centrally involved and invested strongly in the centres
- there is 'quality assurance',² in as much as services are responsive to community needs, and are trusted by the community
- they provide culturally safe care and support for children and families
- they offer a holistic service approach for both children and families and liaison with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services and parenting support programs
- programs address community interests such as workforce training and leadership development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers.

Funding for the improvement of child care services will fail to achieve policy objectives if it results in the exclusion of children and families unable or unwilling to use these services. SNAICC strongly advocates a strengths-based approach, that is, building upon the existing knowledge and experience base.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations must be supported with adequate financial investment and resources as well as professional support and partnerships.

In particular, regional and rural centres are faced with barriers to operation including staff recruitment, retention and training. Given the considerable need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, the recruitment and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff must be supported with targeted funding that also covers flexible delivery of training. This may include on site training or off site blocks of training supported by accommodation and travel allowances. This is particularly important in remote and rural areas. Funding must also cover backfilling of positions while staff are away upgrading qualifications.

Funding needs to be provided for the development of accredited training and recognition of prior learning of Indigenous knowledge related to family relationships, child rearing and cultural requirements. This will both formalise existing knowledge and allow the inclusion of

² T Hutchins, K Frances and S Saggars, 'Australian Indigenous perspectives on quality assurance in children's services' (2009) 34 (1) *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 10.



such subject matter in specialist and generalist early childhood training and education programs.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations must be supported for an appropriate amount of time.

For a period of time to be appropriate, it must allow for the establishment of the service, adjustments to community needs, professional support and development and compliance with standards and regulations. Any support must have longevity to ensure stability and opportunity for generational change.

Importantly, for a service to be successful, it must gain community trust through the provision of ongoing, consistent, community responsive needs.³

As discussed in detail in the accompanying submissions, the breadth and complexity of issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families require an approach that addresses individual community issues and provides long term financial and professional investments.

If further hearings are planned, SNAICC would welcome the opportunity to expand on these points and provide further detailed information.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Hytten
SNAICC Executive Officer

Attachments:

- *SNAICC's Submission to the Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board (August 2008)*
- *SNAICC's Submission to the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into sexual abuse of Aboriginal children (March 2007)*

³ M Bamblett and P Lewis, 'Detoxifying the child and family welfare system for Australian Indigenous peoples: Self determination, rights and culture as the critical tools' (2007) 3(3) *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 43.