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9 April 2010

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

Via email: indig.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

Inquiry into Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

I make this submission on behalf of the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation and the descendants of George Moreton Snr, in relation to the Inquiry of the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities.

Core Kuuku I'yu Northern Kaanju families; including the Moreton/Claudie/Nelson families own under the Indigenous land tenure system some 840,000 ha of bioculturally significant country centred on the upper Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers in Cape York Peninsula. The Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation (Chuulangun AC) based at Chuulangun homelands represents the interests of the Traditional Owners for the Northern Kaanju Ngaachi and has emerged as a leader in Cape York in protection of the environment and sustainable homelands and economic development. Chuulangun AC is providing an effective model of independent Traditional Owner driven economic development within a land management framework and is supporting collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous land owners and managers committed to living and working on country.

Our submission makes the following main statements that are of relevance to this Inquiry:

- **Homelands development** is the key to 'closing the gap' in health, social, economic and cultural outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- The focus of government funding, policies and programs on the **centralisation** of Aboriginal people into large townships and 'growth towns' goes against the government's commitment to 'closing the gap'.
- The focus of government funding, policies and programs in remote areas needs to be on 'on-ground' initiatives including those of Traditional Owners groups and organisations based on homelands.

A number of points are made below to support the above statements and a summary of the Chuulangun homelands is provided in an attachment at the end of this submission to serve as a case study.

Homelands development

1. The homelands movement has been around since at least the 1970s with some 1000 small Indigenous homelands communities now located across remote Australia.

2. There is a huge diversity in homelands communities with some populated by small family groups and some numbering more than 100 people.
3. Primarily, the reoccupation of homelands by Aboriginal people has been by choice and has been motivated by a commitment to live and work on traditional country, protect significant sites, reestablish Indigenous land management practices, and also to escape the health, social, cultural and economic problems associated with living in large townships.
4. Homelands communities have continued to grow in number across remote Australia despite the lack of a homelands policy and adequate needs-based government support throughout the past 40 years¹.

Benefits of homelands development

5. There is a growing body of research which indicates that life at homelands is much better - in health outcomes, education, employment, livelihood options, social cohesion, and housing conditions - than at larger townships², despite lack of government funding and policy.
6. This research suggests that 'closing the gap' might be more likely at homelands than elsewhere³.
7. Homelands also provide greater opportunities for employment of Indigenous people in environmental services as well as opportunities for enterprise development.
8. Homelands development, sustainable land management and the development of sustainable employment and enterprise on homelands fosters functional and resilient individuals and families, and viable, vibrant communities.
9. Homelands provide a healthier environment for raising children thereby improving health and education outcomes for Indigenous people.
10. It is well documented that the active engagement of Indigenous people on their traditional homelands enhances self esteem and confidence; reduces social alienation; and acts to promote and preserve health and well-being.
11. Homelands provide opportunities for improvements in the economic base of Indigenous communities⁴ – including natural and cultural resource management as a key remote area industry with significant economic development and employment potential, particularly when linked to other established and emerging resource-base industries including tourism, and the application of Indigenous knowledge and culture to the commercial provision of environmental services.
12. Investment from government and other sectors is needed to raise the importance of these industries and strengthen the employment and economic opportunities they can provide, particularly for Indigenous people living in remote areas.
13. Well coordinated and effective government and other sector investment in this area will strengthen environmental, cultural and heritage values, as well as facilitate improvements in health, social, cultural and economic outcomes for Aboriginal people.

¹ See Kerins, Sean 2010. The Future of Homelands/Outstations. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University With The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia: p1.

² See Claudie, D and B.R. Smith 2003 Developing a land and resource management framework for Kaanju homelands, Central Cape York Peninsula, CEPR Discussion Paper No. 256/2003: pp 15-18, and Davis, R. and Arthur, W.S. 1998. 'Homelands and resource agencies since the Blanchard report: A review of the literature and an annotated bibliography', CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 165, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra.

³ See Kerins 2010.

⁴ See Altman, J.C. 2003. 'People on country, healthy landscapes and sustainable Indigenous economic futures: The Arnhem Land case', Paper presented at the International Association for Landscape Ecology World Congress 2003, 14 July 2003.

14. Indigenous contact with the criminal justice system is less likely amongst people who live permanently on homelands – this is due in part by many homelands communities having a ban on alcohol and illicit drugs and there being greater social cohesion on homelands compared to towns where many different tribal groups are forced to live together causing tension and arguments.
15. Homelands communities are often called upon to accommodate offenders when the courts have ordered them to ‘stay out of town’ – unfortunately homelands do not necessarily have the resources to accommodate such people.

Centralisation

16. Government investment in centralised townships has been at the expense of homelands communities and ignores the body of evidence that points to better health, social, cultural and economic outcomes, livelihood options and social cohesion found in homelands⁵.
17. The focus of government funding, policies and programs on regional organisations is a top-down approach and marginalizes on-ground people.
18. The agendas of some regional city-based organisations which are focused on centralisation and control are damaging to the autonomy and empowerment of Indigenous communities yet governments continues to resource and support them.

Support for homelands development

19. There has been ad hoc support for homelands development from government over the past 40 years.
20. In 1986-87 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs inquired into and reported on: "The social and economic circumstances of Aboriginal people living in homeland centres or outstations, and the development of policies and programs to meet their future needs." In 1987 the Committee tabled its report (also known as the Blanchard Report) entitled *Return to country: the Aboriginal homelands movement in Australia*.

Among the key recommendation made by the Committee were:

8. *State and Territory governments provide funding to homeland centres for the 'essential' facilities and services which they are obliged to provide to all their citizens. These 'essential' facilities and services include water supply and reticulation, roads and airstrips, other infrastructure items such as housing and shelter and education and health services. The level of this funding should be increased in response to the growth of the homelands movement and the increasing needs of homeland dwellers.*
9. *Commonwealth and State and Northern Territory governments consult about detailed arrangements for the sharing of funding responsibility for homeland centres.*
21. In relation to homelands development in the Cape York region from about 1995-2005 some support was provided to homelands for infrastructure under ATSIC but through regional Indigenous organisations. This support, though minimal, facilitated the reestablishment of a number of homeland communities some of which are still operational despite a lack of specific funding for homelands and no homelands policy.
22. The successful homelands have incorporated their small clan-based communities and established their own management plans and sought and secured funding mainly for NRM

⁵ See Kerins, Sean 2010: p5.

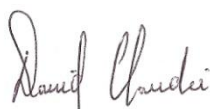
based projects on homelands which has kept the money localised and seen on-ground benefits.

In conclusion we recommend that government:

1. reexamine the viability of homelands communities and their effectiveness in 'closing the gap' in health, social, economic and cultural outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
2. reexamines the key recommendations of the 1987 inquiry into the homelands movement and particularly takes note of recommendations 8 and 9 (above).
3. revisits the homelands policy and establishes a policy and programs which support homelands development – importantly this must be undertaken by proper consultation with the right people and families which are actually based on homelands.
4. shifts their focus from centralised communities to homelands communities on a case-by-case needs basis.
5. shift their funding, program and service delivery focus from regional organisations to homelands-based organisations.
6. support a ground-up approach including on-ground community-based initiatives (such as the establishment of the Cape York NRM board).
7. appropriately resource homelands communities so that they can work with the community justice system.
8. recognise the integral link between the active engagement of Aboriginal on their traditional lands (homelands development) and improvements in the health, social, cultural and economic well-being of Aboriginal people.

On behalf of the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation and the Traditional Owners for the Kuuku I'yu Northern Kaanju Ngaachi I invite the Senate Committee to visit Chuulangun to conduct a hearing on Country and speak in person with people living and working on their homelands.

Yours faithfully,



David Claudie
Kuuku I'yu Northern Kaanju Traditional Owner
CEO/Chairman, Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation

Attachment

Chuulangun homelands development

The Chuulangun homelands community of 15 permanent residents is situated on Aboriginal freehold land on the upper Wenlock River. Northern Kaanju families reestablished this community in the late 1980s after some 50 years absence from our homelands due to the policies and practices of government which forced our ancestors to live in towns, missions and government settlements. Since then we have shown considerable commitment to homelands in an effort to re-establish ourselves as primary landowners, managers and decision-makers for our traditional lands and to facilitate improvements in the health, social, cultural and economic well being of our people. *We are actively practicing our native title by living, working and engaging on our traditional lands.*

Chuulangun AC has undertaken considerable planning to ensure homelands development is sustainable and consistent with Northern Kaanju land and resource management principles. In 2003 we prepared a comprehensive land management framework for the Northern Kaanju Ngaachi which formed the basis for our Kaanju Ngaachi Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) Management Plan prepared in 2005. This plan was prepared with funding assistance from the Natural Heritage Trust and the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage (now Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts). The first stage of the Kaanju Ngaachi Wenlock and Pascoe Rivers IPA was declared on 4 June 2008 at a ceremony at Chuulangun. Managed by the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation on behalf of Traditional Owners, our IPA is the first to be declared on Cape York Peninsula. It covers 197,500 hectares and includes a large part of the upper Wenlock and Pascoe Basins. Our management plan also considers the expansion of the IPA over a further 135,000 hectares of the northern Kaanju Ngaachi.

Our IPA management plan was followed by the development of an Investment Strategy which is based on priorities identified in the IPA management plan and builds on activities continuing to contribute to significant land management outcomes and the range of environmental, socio-cultural, health and economic benefits provided by the active engagement of Indigenous people in land and resource management on their homelands. Our plans are consistent with the multiple benefits provided by the active engagement of Indigenous people in land and resource management. These benefits provide a clear case for on-going government and other sector support and investment in this area.

Economic development opportunities on Chuulangun homelands

A key principle underlying economic development on the Kuuku I'yu Northern Kaanju Ngaachi is that *our business is sustainable land management*. Economic development should enhance sustainable land management and be consistent with the protection of the Indigenous and natural heritage values of Ngaachi. Northern Kaanju people see their land and resources and their knowledge, skills and experience as having great potential for the development of enterprises that will sustain our land and people into the future.

Importantly, our main objectives for economic development are to provide permanent full-time employment for local people and to generate income to support the permanent reoccupation of homelands and sustain our growing homelands community in terms of improved health, education, employment and capacity building outcomes for local people.

Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation has a number of enterprise opportunities in development that are based on the principles of the conservation economy, including eco-tourism and campgrounds construction and sustainable harvest of plant products. Currently we have low-impact campgrounds that accommodate the increasing number of tourists and other visitors to our homelands. This venture will expand into spin-off products such as wet season and safari tourism. It is our aim that our

enterprises will generate enough income into the future to support our growing community in terms of infrastructure and service needs and sustained employment.

In 2005 we established the Chuulangun Ranger Program and we currently have six full-time rangers employed – three under the Queensland government's Wild River Rangers program and three under the Australian government's Working on Country program. Bush Heritage Australia also supports the work of the Chuulangun Rangers. It is our goal is to have 20 Chuulangun Rangers working in full-time permanent positions across the Kaanju Ngaachi IPA and the wider Kuuku I'yu Northern Kaanju Ngaachi by 2015.

As well as on ground land management work, in 2010-11 the Chuulangun Rangers will complete their Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management. We are also investigating the feasibility of law enforcement training for our rangers so that they can appropriately deal with illicit activity such as poaching, illegal fishing, and unauthorised firearm use on the IPA and the wider Northern Kaanju Ngaachi.

Chuulangun homelands have been asked on many occasions to accommodate ex-offenders as part of parole arrangements and to accommodate young offenders so that they 'stay' out of trouble. Unfortunately we do not have the resources or facilities to accommodate people in this regard. There is a strong need for homelands communities to be resourced so that they can work with the criminal justice system on such programs.

For more information about Chuulangun homelands and the activities of the Chuulangun Aboriginal Corporation visit www.kaanjungaachi.com.au.