

Briefing to Minister Macklin

Issue: **Home Building & Ownership**

From: Ms Yananymul Mununggurr, CEO
 Laynhapuy Homelands Association, NE Arnhem Land

BACKGROUND

The significant need for housing on permanently occupied homelands have not been addressed for several years by either the Australian and NT Governments. LHAI has not received funds for new houses since 2003/04.

While it seems the Intervention will be addressing housing backlogs in the prescribed communities, there has been no discussion about housing need in homelands, and there currently appears to be no process to have these needs considered.

ISSUES

- Overcrowding in homelands needs to be addressed simultaneously with addressing housing in major communities. The drift of overcrowded homeland residents to major communities could result in some quite adverse social consequences - reinforcing overcrowding in the major communities, increasing demand on already overstretched services, and bringing more people into the less functional environment of the large communities, reducing the better health of homeland residents, and increasing inter-clan tensions, and well as environmental risks with country not being cared for.
- Faced with the uncertainty about future housing supply , LHAI has recently commenced discussions with Habitat for Humanity (HfH) and others to develop partnership to pilot an environmentally sustainable model for home building and ownership for the homelands, through a combination of:
 - no interest loans from Habitat for Humanity
 - 'sweat equity' by homeland residents, including utilization of CDEP
 - loan repayments by 'owners' (possibly with LHAI as guarantor)
 - training in construction through RTOs
 - development and use of locally produced 'mud bricks' using a proven technology endorsed by Habitat for Humanity
 - on site management and supervision through volunteer effort and corporate sponsorship organised by Habitat for Humanity
 - accessing first home buyer and indigenous home ownership assistance from Government.

The initial project could be for up to 6 dwellings.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Australian and NT Governments recognise that homeland housing shortages need to be addressed concurrently with Intervention measures in the major communities.
- That the Minister note the 'home building & ownership' pilot project LHAI has started developing in partnership with Habitat for Humanity which:
 - o will establish a proven 'mud brick' making technology in the Laynhapuy homelands using a local resource and providing training and employment opportunities, and lead to viable business being developed.
 - o will support development of trade skills and employment in the area of construction.
 - o will establish a sustainable model for self-financing home ownership on homelands, while also requiring a 'sweat equity' contribution from homeland residents.
 - o will reduce overcrowding and unmet housing need, thereby beneficially impacting on health, education and general wellbeing (which are all important issues that have been targeted by the Intervention).
- That the Minister may be approached by LHAI and HfH at a later stage in development of the home building & ownership project to seek appropriate government assistance to bring the project to fruition.

Briefing to Minister Macklin

Issue: **Policy on 'Homelands'**

From: Ms Yananymul Mununggurr, CEO
 Laynhapuy Homelands Association, NE Arnhem Land

BACKGROUND

Residents of homelands and the organisations that service them have been operating in a policy and funding vacuum for the past several years. This is impacting adversely on the confidence and capacity of our people to move the development of their homelands forward.

The transfer of responsibility for the homelands from the Australian to the Northern Territory Governments in late 2007 has done nothing to resolve this uncertainty.

Homeland communities such as Laynhapuy provide unique opportunities because of the strength of culture, better health, and the absence of many of the social ills, and control over natural resources. These are strengths that government can build on. They provide an opportunity for the NT and Australian Governments to demonstrate their commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, by appropriately assisting Yolngu to create a space where they can develop their communities socially, educationally and economically as a culturally distinct but otherwise integrated part of Australian society.

ISSUES

- Organisations such as Laynhapuy Homelands Association Inc. (LHAI) have not been consulted by the NT Government, nor requested to provide information, or advised of the process that has been put in place to develop a 'homelands policy'.
- The history of past NT Government attitudes towards homelands and land and sea rights, and lack of experience in service delivery to homelands, is cause for some concern and mistrust. It is critical that, at minimum, all the transferred 'homelands funding' is used for that purpose only and not used to prop services to the major communities.
- The combined Laynhapuy homeland population is equivalent to or greater than that of many of the prescribed communities, yet no consideration is being given to homeland needs.
- The Local Government reform process (ie. establishment of Shires) has not taken homeland populations and services into account, and this is of enormous concern. A similar situation applies with respect to the public/community housing reform process. Without a 'homelands policy' Government agencies appear unwilling or unable to negotiate about needs, service provision or funding.

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- The uncertainty around homelands and service funding or provision is impacting adversely on the ability of organisations such as LHAI (perhaps the largest employer of Yolngu in NE Arnhem Land) to forward plan.
- LHAI is greatly concerned that the needs identified in the prescribed communities as a result of the Intervention will result in the needs of homelands being overlooked. Our people are subject to the same controls and intrusions from the Intervention, but are currently excluded from the potential Government investment.
- Many homelands are permanently settled with significant populations. Unfortunately there is a prevailing, and inaccurate view that most homelands are little more than 'weekenders'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Australian Government, as far as possible, ensures that the NT Government genuinely engages with homeland communities and their organisations in the development of their 'homelands policy'. This may be best achieved by homelands representation from each region on the policy working group.
2. That the Australian Government continue to play an active role with the NT Government in developing an effective and appropriate homelands policy.
3. That the intent and principles of UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples be taken as a standard against which the policy is measured.
4. That the Australian and NT governments recognise that homelands are socially, culturally and functionally different to major communities and require a different response from government. Homelands have significant capacity to do things for themselves with the right sort of assistance that capitalises on their strong desire to for self-sufficiency and independence from Government.
5. That the Australian Government recognise that homelands also have a significant backlog of needs, especially in relation to housing, power systems and basic community facilities – but also that these can be met at an appropriate scale of investment and delivered in ways that build local capacity.
6. That the Australian Government as far as possible, ensures that Financial Assistance Grants to the new NT Local Government bodies, and other funds to the Territory, are contingent upon guarantees that all permanent settlements, including homelands, receive basic services on the same terms as other citizens of the Northern Territory (eg. Power & Water Authority assumes responsibility for power, which is provided to consumers at the same equalised usage rate).

Briefing to Minister Macklin

Issue: **Income Management**

From: Ms Yananymul Mununggurr, CEO
 Laynhapuy Homelands Association, NE Arnhem Land

BACKGROUND

The proposed roll out of Income Management from June 2008 to the Laynhapuy Homelands is of considerable concern to our homeland residents and our Association.

Our members believe the Government's approach to Income Management is unwarranted and unacceptably intrusive in their lives. The traditional kinship structures of homelands can generally deal quite effectively with parental irresponsibility.

We are very opposed to a rumoured proposal that CDEP wages will be paid via Centrelink so that income can be quarantined.

ISSUES

- Homelands have not experienced the breakdown of 'social norms' and do not suffer from the issue of alcohol and substance abuse, which have been given as the justification for income management.
- Our issues of school attendance, nutrition, training, employment are a function of inadequate access to services – not parental irresponsibility.
- Homeland residents often rely on 'income pooling' to meet the costs of travel to Nhulunbuy to access goods and services. This will be difficult to do under Income Management.
- Income Management will seriously impact on the viability of Laynhapuy Aviation P/L if it compromises the carefully and responsibly managed 'book up' system that enables homeland residents to travel.
- Homeland members already meet their obligations to pay rent, and for utilities, through CDEP payroll deductions and voluntary Centrepay deductions (for non-CDEP members).
- The introduction of Income Management will necessitate immediate ad hoc measures to guarantee 'food security'. This may seriously undermine LHA's current efforts to establish a 'homelands food/stores service' controlled and operated by members with the potential to provide employment and training opportunities.
- LHA has previously offered a 'bill paying service' to members which assisted with managing income, but changes to CDEP in recent years resulted in the service being discontinued.

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- Centrelink is very ill equipped to service homeland communities on a case management basis, and our members are concerned they will bear the costs of this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Australian and NT Governments invest strategically in teacher housing and/or small combined training facilities/Visiting Officer Quarters in the major homelands (which all have schools) so that fly in fly out teaching can be minimised and teaching time in homeland be significantly increased.
- That LHAI's proposal for the establishment of a homelands food/store service (ie. a 15 month old SRA proposal) be supported financially as a matter of urgency, subject to the outcome of the feasibility study to be completed by the end of April 2008, to address both nutrition and income management objectives.
- That LHAI be supported financially by the Australian Government to provide **an effective voluntary option for managing income**, through establishing:
 - o a financial advice & training service, and
 - o a bill paying service to our members

to complement our existing systems of voluntary CDEP and staff payroll deductions, and use of mainstream voluntary Centrelink deductions.

These measures could be funded through savings to Centrelink, and through Northern Territory Emergency Response funding for a manager/trainer to train Yolngu into these service provision roles, and to monitor and report on the management of income.

- That the Australian Government reserve its legislated Income Management measures for application only to individuals, where such drastic intervention is justified on the basis of substantiated child/family welfare concerns.

Briefing to Minister Macklin

Issue: **Unintended Employment Consequences of Intervention**

From: Ms Yananymul Mununggurr, CEO
 Laynhapuy Homelands Association, NE Arnhem Land

BACKGROUND

For many years, the wage and salary conditions of remote community organisations have been sub-standard, and not reflected the responsibilities or skill requirements of the jobs. This has been a direct consequence of unrealistic grant funding levels and has been a major contributing factor in the failure of many organisations and/or poor service provision.

The roll out of the Intervention is setting new and currently unachievable and unsustainable wage/salary levels in remote communities.

This is starting to have adverse consequences on other employers and organisations who's roles are equally important to the achievement of the objectives underlying the intervention.

ISSUES

- Salary packages for the Government Business Managers are disproportionate to:
 - o what is currently achievable for very experienced and skilled managers of community organisations
 - o what is provided for in Government grant funding to support such positions
 - o what is going to be achievable for 'community managers' under the new Local Government Shires.
- Wages and hourly rates for tradesmen under the Intervention housing programs are disproportionate to what is available through grant funding for organisation who supply similar building and maintenance services.
- LHAI has recently lost its builder/carpenter responsible for the maintenance of some 100 houses to the Intervention, largely because the hourly pay rate is about 2.5 times higher than what LHAI can afford from its grant funding. It is likely to be both difficult and expensive to find a replacement. This will have a direct negative impact on our ability to:
 - o maintain the value of past investment in housing capital and maintenance
 - o support the wellbeing of homeland residents/tenants
 - o training of construction trainees
 - o LHAI's ability to compete for contract work and develop its building business.

Unintended Employment Consequences of Intervention

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- Unless the roll out of the Intervention and contracting of maintenance and construction works is undertaken very sensitively to local capacities (private businesses and community organisations) to both undertake works and remunerate employees, the Intervention could inadvertently undermine more sustainable aspects of local economies, local business development initiatives, training activities and service provision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That all Intervention measures be accompanied by proper assessment of the economic, employment, and training impacts on existing employers and businesses in the targeted communities.
2. That the Australian Government urgently and explicitly recognise that it is setting new wage and salary benchmarks in remote communities, presumably because this is what is required to attract the necessary experience, competency and commitment.
3. That these very significant upward movements in wages/salaries be reflected, as a matter of urgency, in increased provisions for wages and contracting fees in all grant funding arrangements with other providers of services to remote areas, where they need to draw on the same sections of the labour market (eg. management, trades, etc.)