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Senator David Johnson,

Chairman, Senate Inquiry in to Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

11 September 2008

KALACC Formal Submission to the Senate Inquiry

Dear Senator Johnson.

This current letter and submission from KALACC is entirely the same as an email which was sent to you by us on 25 August.

We send this correspondence to you again and now ask that you treat this letter, and the attachments as per our email of 25 August, as our formal Submission to the Inquiry.

Kind regards

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Thank you for your acknowledgement of my email regarding cultural heritage and repatriation issues. Some of the other members of the Senate Committee have now also acknowledged that issue and have undertaken to write to Ministers Macklin and Garret on our behalf.

This present email focuses more directly on the issues most relevant to the Terms of Reference for the Senate Inquiry in to Remote Indigenous Communities.

Before coming directly to the issues of sustainability pertaining to remote communities, I need to state again that our view is that one of major difficulties facing remote communities is engagement with Government, at both State and Commonwealth levels.

When the Senate Committee visited us in Fitzroy Crossing last week I provided to some of the senators a folder entitled Government Letters of Rejection. There are 21 letters in that folder, covering issues such as the proposed Fitzroy Crossing Youth Centre, repatriation of cultural property, funding for KALACC's arts and culture programs, regional representation, youth justice diversion and preventative health programs – including suicide prevention. The 21 letters come from both the current Commonwealth Government and the previous Commonwealth Government.

The common factor across the 21 letters is that they all find polite ways of saying 'no' to our requests.

And in the email of last week relating to Repatriation issues I have documented four years of unsuccessful attempts by this organisation to gain support from the Commonwealth.

The WA Coroner makes it clear that there is no health gap in the Kimberley. The Coroner says that there is a huge gulf and that people up here live in Third World conditions. He also finds that in 24 of the 27 deaths he has Inquested, alcohol and other drugs are significant causal factors in 24 of the cases.

Yet KALACC has 21 letters of rejection from the Commonwealth, many of which relate to our requests for preventative health and preventative justice initiatives.

The Coroner also found that the State Government was missing in action. Justice Alistair Hope's first recommendation was that the State appoint a lead agency which would have clear accountability for Indigenous outcomes.

Before Premier Carpenter called the current election, we wrote to State Minister Roberts seeking a copy of the WA Policy on the Sustainability of Remote Indigenous Communities. We knew that such a policy existed because The West Australian newspaper ran a story in which Minister Roberts referred to the Policy. But when we subsequently wrote to the Minister seeking a copy we were told that it was in draft form and not a publicly available document.

It seems that the WA Parliament is more advanced down this path than the WA Government. Attached to this email are a number of documents including the Parliamentary Reports in to Regional Representation and Governance and the Report in to Successful Initiatives in Remote WA Indigenous Communities.

When the Senators visited KALACC last week we made the point that most of what we had to say on these matters was contained in these State Parliamentary Reports. We certainly commend those reports to the Senate and ask that the Commonwealth seriously consider the contents of those State Parliamentary reports.

Prior to the visit by the Senators last week it was not fully clear to us that this recent trip was to take the form of an initial community consultation.

I made the point that consultation was not something that we were lacking and that the only people we had not seen were John Howard and Kevin Rudd.

What we are desperately lacking is any real action from the Commonwealth.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee you sought our approval to return next year to undertake formal Senate hearings.

Our former Deputy Chairman (Mr Butcher Wise), speaking on behalf of KALACC, indicated to you in our meeting that we would be keen to participate in such hearings. Mr Wise has been in our office again today and reiterated this view – which is reflective of our formal KALACC position.

In other words, we hereby formally invite the Senate Committee to hold a set of formal hearings in Fitzroy Crossing at the earliest suitable time next year (and for cultural reasons and for weather reasons this may be early April 2009).

Again, I thank yourself and the other Senators for meeting with us last week.

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