



Toni Matulick
Committee Secretary
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Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on issues relevant to the inquiry into regional and remote Indigenous communities.

The Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) is the NSW peak body representing agencies providing direct services to children and young people, and their families.

ACWA has been involved in numerous consultations at state and national levels, in relation to child protection, out of home care and children's welfare, including Indigenous children. ACWA has an on-going working relationship with the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (NSW) inc. (AbSec) at a state level, and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) at a national level.

ACWA has also been a member of the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia Inc. (CAFWAA) since its inauguration, and is a member of the coalition working with the Australian Government to develop a national child protection framework.

Furthermore, in the light of the recently released report by Justice Wood in response to the inquiry into Child Protection Services in NSW, ACWA has an interest in building the capacity and the resilience of regional and remote Indigenous communities to enable them better nurture their children and young people.

Moreover, the author of the submission has had experience working in regional and remote Aboriginal communities, including communities in Far North Queensland, the Barkly Region and Central Australia, for five years.

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In relation to:

- (a) The effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;

Generally speaking, ACWA has been opposing the NT Emergency Response from the beginning as it perceives it to be the least productive way to address the issues facing Indigenous people and achieving positive outcomes for any community. Building community resilience would have been a better way to achieve long-term outcomes to address the issues facing Indigenous communities.

Despite opposing the intervention, the author is of the opinion that, the constant change in the direction of government policies, especially social policies that have direct impact on the lives of people, is equally as damaging and hinders any chance of achieving positive outcomes. Consistency in policy direction is paramount to evaluate the effectiveness, and the intended and unintended consequences, of any policy.

Seeking a 'quick fix' or a 'one size fits all' does not work, not in the human services sector in general, and not in Indigenous communities in particular. A great level of flexibility, innovation and adaptability is required to achieve meaningful outcomes.

In the author's experience, it was neither the lack of resources, nor the lack of will, but rather the lack of understanding, patience and flexibility, which most bureaucratic systems are not designed to accommodate, were the reasons behind the ineffectiveness of some programs and their inability to deliver outcomes. Resources are being spent on recruiting bureaucrats to administer programs and deliver services that have limited scope and hence achieve limited outcomes for the community.

- (b) The impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;

Over a period of 10 years or more, the author has witnessed a change in the direction of government policies even within the same administration. Self-determination, while an admirable concept in theory, it requires a commitment from the government to develop the capacity of the community in order for it to work. Investing in short term 'pilot' programs is a waste of taxpayers' money, and expecting programs to be sustainable and self-funded is an unrealistic expectation.

Investing in a variety of uncoordinated and unrelated programs without having a clear vision for the community is a patched job that does not achieve outcomes.

More importantly, imposing programs without conducting proper consultation with the community, and without providing the community the opportunity to own and lead these programs, does not achieve outcomes.

Furthermore, trying to fix the problems facing some of the regional and remote communities by running social and cultural programs without investing in the infrastructure and in primary services does not and will not achieve outcomes.

Flexible, coordinated, community led programs that are funded over a period of 3-5 years do work, especially in communities where there is an adequate level of infrastructure and access to primary services.

- (c) The health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities, and

Painting houses from the outside and beautifying a community does not solve the over crowdedness nor the itinerant problem; building an adequate houses that accommodate large families, and regularly conducting maintenance checks and repairing existing houses, does.

Punishing parents for not sending their children to school and quarantining their income does not solve the literacy and truancy problem in communities; having a stimulating curriculum that takes into account the cultural and linguistic needs of Aboriginal children living in regional and remote communities, and providing teachers and educators with adequate cultural training, does.

Taking away parents responsibility to provide for and take care of their offspring does not guarantee the security of children; empowering parents and building their confidence, resilience, and self-esteem as human beings, does.

When it comes to regional and remote Indigenous communities, we tend to focus on the wrong aspects and measure the wrong outcomes.

- (d) The employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

According to anecdotal evidence, the CDEP reform have turned unsustainable positions to part-time position where people are still not paid enough.

While the idea of a sustainable community is reasonable, there is a limit to the number of plumbers, mechanics and hairdressers needed in any given community. In order to create real jobs there is a need to create a real economy, which, realistically, is not possible in some areas around Australia.