

Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture

Yugambah Museum Language & Heritage Research Centre

CNR PLANTATION ROAD & MARTENS STREET
BEENLEIGH QLD 4207
Email: admin@yugambah.com

TELEPHONE: (07) 3807 6155
FAX: (07) 3807 6144
Website: www.yugambah.com

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The Secretary, Jonothan Curtis
Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

Attention Mr Jonothan Curtis:

Inquiry into the Administration of Indigenous Affairs

The Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture submits the following information for your consideration:

(a) The provisions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission amendment Bill 2004

The announcement by Prime Minister John Howard that the “experiment of separate-elected representation for Indigenous Australians had failed and that ATSIC would be replaced by a government appointed body is a matter of serious concern. The Committee as described by Mr Howard would become the decision makers on matters affecting our economic, social and cultural needs.

Whilst there is no doubt most of the government appointees will empathise with their indigenous people it is unlikely that they will have the confidence of the community whose interests they are expected to represent. Neither would they have any authority within their advisory role to influence the mind-set of a government bent on assimilation. The long held hope of self-determination through an effective election process would not be attainable for indigenous people under this system.

ACTION

The previous ATSIC model for indigenous self determination be restructured thus:

- abolish all ATSIC regional councils across Australia
- amalgamate regions where indigenous population is sparse
- have two representatives elected by indigenous people in each ATSIC region
- provide adequate resources for the elected representatives to work effectively to find out about the economic, cultural and social needs of their constituents
- pass information on with recommendations to a committee that operates in a similar manner to the Senate Estimates Committee
- Maximise Indigenous voter response by holding the ATSIC election on the same day as the Senate elections

(b) the proposed administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstream departments and agencies

The administration of Indigenous programs and services by mainstream departments and agencies could be problematic for indigenous organisations that provide services that are indigenous specific.

Research/ local indigenous history

Our organization operates as a local history museum, language and heritage research centre. We provide services to the many indigenous families who seek historical and cultural information that is not available through public institutions. We have become a repository for records that families want preserved and made available for future generation. Our services are an enormous benefit to young parents and youth who are struggling to establish their identity and find out about their ancestral families and heritage.

Our services are currently subsidised by ATSIC/ATSIS. The loss of this funding would have a serious impact on our ability to provide these services in the future.

Language

The maintenance and revival of indigenous languages has been a positive achievement in the Goolburri and SEQ ATSIC regions. It has led to the employment of a number of Indigenous language workers and initiated interest from TAFE colleges and schools for the implementation of courses that will lead to further employment of language workers in schools or in the courts..

The language work has been subsidised by ATSIC through the ATSILIP program. The loss of this funding would most certainly be detrimental to the work that has been done by us and by the many indigenous language workers and organisations across Australia.

ACTION

We recommend that funding be set aside within mainstream organisations and agencies for Indigenous focused programs that would not be serviced otherwise.

Submissions for funding could be directed to the office of the elected Indigenous representative and assessed according to performance outcomes.

© related matters

Education/ cultural awareness

The education system historically and across all states has failed Aboriginal people badly due to a wide range of factors including government policy.

Australians as a whole do not understand the issues that continue to impact on the lives of Indigenous people long after they have moved away from traditional lifestyles.

There must be a vast improvement in education beginning at early childhood, so that ALL Australians understand and respect the cultural differences between their own families and that of indigenous families.

ACTION :

Cultural awareness be made an essential element of training and professional development for ALL PERSONNEL including teachers, police, health workers and others who interact with Indigenous people in the delivery of services. These programs would be developed and delivered by qualified indigenous people. Funding for these programs would be an essential budget component of the relevant service deliverer.

Patricia O'Connor
Secretary
Kombumerri Aboriginal Corporation for Culture