

SUBMISSION TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

This submission is based on my personal experiences and observations over the past 17 years as an employee of Aboriginal Development Commission, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission and the now Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Services. I am a Non Aboriginal person and my service has in the main been with urban communities and individuals.

The decision of the Government to abolish ATSIC as an organisation and in particular the elected representation has, to me, diminished the self determination aspirations of a nation of people still struggling to obtain the rightful acknowledgement for the forceful dispossession from their land. While the argument can be made that Regional Council elections do not always receive the full support of those eligible to vote the fact remains that this process gave a mandated voice to the needs of the various regions/communities. Regional Councils have deliberated at length to formulate dynamic Regional plans to address those needs and forged close links with the administrative staff who deliver these services.

I therefore respectfully submit that the Regional Council structure be allowed to continue and not phased out after 12 months, as announced. Aligning Regional Council and Federal Government elections could possibly enhance voter response as there would be an overall focus on the performance of elected representatives in general at that time. The current cost of holding Regional Council elections would also be substantially reduced if this process could be implemented.

I have reservations about the proposed "advisory board" being able to represent community needs without fear or favour when there is no recognised mandate in this selection process. The absence of any formal announcement about the structure of the "advisory board" other than the selection will be made by Government and that it will not have any authority has compounded those reservations.

The loss of the national voice through the impending abolition of the Board of Commissioners has saddened me however I recognise that while the media focus remains on individual activities instead of the broader issues there is a need for change. I would however still advocate the need for a recognised national body albeit in a different format.

The transfer of program functions and staff to mainstream departments via the Indigenous Co-Ordination Centres structure and its attendant COAG approach could be a positive step for the future provided this is not the beginning of the end for designated funding for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander programs. This issue in particular has given me cause

for concern and the longer term implications of this "mainstreaming" are considered to be worthy of the Committee's closer examination.

In conclusion I wish to advise that I am proud of the achievements made by our Department in its various identities and the dedication and enthusiasm displayed by my colleagues. I have always understood that when we accomplished our task there would no longer be a need for my services; regretfully however I do consider that this time has arrived.

Yours faithfully

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