

19 February 2009

Dr Anna Dacre
Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Dacre

The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) notes the Standing Committee's request for submissions about the operations of local community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The ILC is an independent statutory authority established to provide economic, environmental, social and cultural benefits to Indigenous people through providing assistance to acquire land and manage Indigenous-held land.

The ILC welcomes any efforts made to increase the health and socio-economic outcomes that community stores provide in communities. The ILC would like to briefly discuss the issues, and provide an idea, around the following elements of the Terms of Reference:

- food supply and quality; and
- impacts on health and economic outcomes for communities.

Food supply and quality, and outcomes for communities

"In many Aboriginal communities, the store is often the main socioeconomic enterprise in the community (Roberts 1994:5, cited in McDonnell and Martin 2002), and the main provider of food for many people (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) in the Community" (2002:2).

Evidence shows that community stores in remote Indigenous communities supply inadequate produce, both in quality and price. A majority of community stores have a high degree of market power, either through being the only provider of grocery items in a community or as one of very few providers of goods to a community (McDonnell & Martin 2002:14). Due to remoteness and the lack of alternatives, Indigenous people have little choice but to shop at the community store, the Indigenous consumer ends up paying a higher than market

price for an item. The disadvantaged position of the Indigenous consumer is further compounded by, in many circumstances, the fact that many houses in remote communities do not have refrigerators/freezers/cold storage, therefore forcing consumers to purchase products that are available on demand (Finlayson, 1997, cited in McDonnell and Martin, 2000:14) (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Working Party. 200:23).

One of the biggest problems community stores face is access to fresh produce. Transportation of produce is problematic. Many stores are not on route between major hubs and therefore transport costs are relatively high compared to those on route to another freighting destination. The cost incurred by the community store only has one place to pass this – to the consumer.

It is widely documented that Indigenous people in the remote communities are suffering a range of health issues caused, or exacerbated, by poor diet and a lack of nutrition (National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Working Party, 2000).

At their best, community stores can have significant impacts on health and social-economic outcomes for communities. The ILC understands that some of the most effective community stores have been driven by community health initiatives. For example, the Steering Committee of Ananga representatives who oversee the management of the Mai Wiru Regional Stores, have put in place strong rules for governing the stores that ensure they supply healthy food and contribute to positive health outcomes (Nganampa Health Council, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Anangu Pitjantjatjara and All Community Councils on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, 2002:16).

Market Garden Proposal

The ILC Chairperson recently wrote to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, suggesting that all Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) should be required to develop market gardens to improve access to fresh fruit and vegetables. The ILC offered to assist the Government with bringing the required expertise and funding for these horticultural projects.

When these market gardens are operational, they could sell produce to stores in the community.

This will result in the following social and economic benefits for communities:

- Fresh, high quality fruit and vegetables available for purchase in stores leading to positive health outcomes;

- Reduction in the cost of fruit and vegetables due to reduced transport costs - making it a cheaper option for consumers than fast food;
- CDEP participants engaged in meaningful work and trained in horticulture and skills that are useful for future employment;
- Development of a sustainable community enterprise that contributes to income generation within the community; and
- School children participating in, learning from and enjoying the experience of cultivation.

The ILC understands that the development of market gardens will require tailoring to local conditions and situations, including the infrastructure available, climate and water, expertise, and linkages to school and education programs. Development of the garden projects should build on the experiences of locations where they have already been successfully implemented, including:

- The EON Foundation has implemented fruit and vegetable gardens in the Kimberley. The success of the project in 2008 has led to requests from other communities in the region seeking similar assistance.
- The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has funded a project of a similar nature in the Torres Strait and plans to extend the concept to other islands.
- Two bush food market gardens that have provided sound results as at Amata and Mimili in the far north of South Australia. These two communities are now looking at expanding their market gardens and have shown interest in involvement with the Outback Pride Group (Armstrong Muller Consulting, 2007).

Summary

Community stores in remote areas can, and should, play a pivotal role in producing better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Reform of the community store needs to be considered together with other initiatives that can support and promote healthy choices in Indigenous communities. Community stores should also be focussed on delivering training and employment for local Indigenous people.

The ILC is committed to working collaboratively with other agencies and organisations to achieve sustainable benefits for Indigenous people in regional and remote areas.

The ILC would be happy to discuss our ideas with the Standing Committee in more depth, and look forward to hearing the outcomes of this inquiry. Please contact Michael O’Ryan, Director of Policy and Program Development on 07 3854 4685 to discuss these matters.

Yours sincerely

SHIRLEY McPHERSON
Chairperson

References

McDonnell, S. and Martin, D. F. 2002, *Indigenous community stores in the 'frontier economy': Some competition and consumer issues*, Discussion Paper No. 234/2002, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Working Party, 2000 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2000-2001 and first phase activities 2002-2003*, National Public Health Partnership 2001.

Nganampa Health Council, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Anangu Pitjantjatjara and All Community Councils on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, 2005, *Strategic implementation Plan: Mai Wiru Regional Stores Policy and associated regulations for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara*, Adelaide, SA.