

COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION

INDIGENOUS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION

From: Binaal Billa Regional Council

Submission No.: IFI/SUB/003

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SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO INDIGENOUS FUNDING

To the **Commonwealth Grants Commission**

From the **BINAAL BILLA REGIONAL COUNCIL of ATSIK, NSW**

Introduction: The following is a preliminary submission to the Inquiry into Indigenous Funding. It raises issues related to the terms of reference and other associated matters. The draft submission was developed at a meeting of the Strategic Development Committee of the Binaal Billa Regional Council held in Wagga Wagga on Wednesday 16 February 2000.

It is noted that the Commission will develop indexes of need by September this year. We would look to providing a further submission in response at that time.

Access to Services: With regard to the Wagga Wagga ATSIK region a critical issue is that of access to mainstream services. Because our communities are rural rather than remote the assumption might be made, incorrectly, that there is ready access to mainstream services. Because we have so little in the way of land or rights under Native Title law or other matters we are largely ignored.

There are at least two ways in which this assumption is wrong for this region. Firstly, whether in larger regional towns and cities or on the 8 discrete communities (which are part of non-Indigenous majority local government areas) Indigenous people do not access

mainstream services to the extent that they should be entitled to, for a number of reasons. In order to gain a clear picture of the resource gaps and why these are happening this is an area that must be examined.

Secondly, the impact of the general decline of services in rural communities is affecting the Indigenous communities further. What access they have had is eroded further. For example, there are fewer and fewer Indigenous officers in various Departments whose presence assisted access to programs and services. This helped to overcome the lack of cultural appropriateness of services. This problem is compounded by the restructuring of Departments so that there are no longer self managing Indigenous units (eg units responsible for administration of pre-vocational programs of DEETYA/CES). Another aspect of these problems is the use of short term funding programs that achieve nothing in the face of the problems of Indigenous people.

1996 ATSIC Budget Cuts: We believe that the Commission should be concerned with the impact of the cut to the ATSIC budget of 1996 and how the consequent loss of community training and the community youth support programs at that time particularly impacted on this region.

Mainstreaming and Loss of Accountability: Another major concern that we have are the consequences for performance and access to funding and services of the mainstreaming of funding. In relation to health, for example, funds were transferred (with the amount doubled) to the Commonwealth Health Department in 1995 for primary health programs. Nobody including this Council hears about what is happening to those funds any longer.

Invitation to the Commission to Visit the ATSIC Wagga Wagga Region: At the outset of your investigations we would like to invite you to meet in at least two communities in our region to see first hand what the needs are and what is being delivered on the ground. In this way you may get a better appreciation of the needs and the complexities involved in developing indexes of need from the perspective of this region. Our suggestions for these meetings are the discrete rural community of Murrin Bridge and the urban community of West Dubbo.

Hewitt R Whyman
Chairperson

29 March 2000