

COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION

INDIGENOUS FUNDING INQUIRY

SUBMISSION

From: ATSIC - Tasmania

Submission No.: IFI/SUB/0041

Date Received: 24/07/2000

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION

Mr Allan Morris
Commonwealth Grants Commission
Cypress Court
5 Torrens Street
CANBERRA ACT 2612

Dear Mr Morris

COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION HEARING - TASMANIA

Enclosed please find the submission I proposed to provide from ATSIC Tasmania after the hearing on 13 June, 2000.

The submission does not talk to much to the issues raised by our elected arm as their presentation was not provided to me in written form. I have tried to highlight some of our Commissioner's concerns about cultural protection, sea rights and land ownership although in a very rudimentary fashion.

If I can be of further assistance or any matter need clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

(Richard Trevena)
State Manager, Tasmania

21 July, 2000

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COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION - TASMANIA – JULY 12/14

Introduction

- Tasmania does not represent a microcosm of the Aboriginal circumstance but has a complex mix of non traditional, rural and urban Aboriginal lifestyles spread across a state environment in which the state is made up of a group of islands. Issues related to culture, reclamation of language, isolation because of the need to fly or boat to some locations, geographical location and some basic infrastructure service problems faced by Aboriginal people throughout Australia are just some of the concerns.
- Until quite recently there was no recognition of Tasmania having an Aboriginal population, the last Aboriginal person to die being enshrined in the myth of Truganini. Populations of Aboriginal people descended from sealers and kidnapped women were overlooked, as were those Aboriginal people who escaped the network of hunting parties and government attempts at capturing and resettling them. Thus, there has been for some time a group of people who suffered not only from institutionalised racism even though they did not officially exist but also, because of community knowledge, local exclusion as well. Many Aboriginal people have, because of the relocations which occurred, been dispossessed twice.

This means that Tasmania is no different in terms of the difficulty of establishing and measuring need, deciding on priorities, designing strategies, programs and services to meet those needs and coordinating and monitoring the activities of service providers. It is very obvious though that a great many Aboriginal Tasmanians wish to reinforce, reinvigorate and rediscover their culture. In order to do this, the basic requirements which statistically apply to the Aboriginal population must be overcome but a further problem must also be dealt with. The Aboriginal people of Tasmania must be accorded some recognition as existing, having genuine grievances which need to be addressed and also need to be taken seriously as contributors to a broader awareness of Aboriginal society and to Australia as a whole.

One over arching concern within the Aboriginal community is the question of Aboriginality. This has been a vexed question for some time and has been the subject of both bitter dispute and court cases with very little clarification of how to determine Aboriginality coming from the debate. What has not helped is a seeming conflict between State and Commonwealth criteria and process' for determining Aboriginality and an apparent contradiction between the way ATSIC and the Australian Electoral Commission go about broadly defining who is Aboriginal for the purposes of their

respective responsibilities. The result of this is that, at worst, genuine Aboriginal aspirations are ignored and/or are not heard.

Health Agreement - An Aboriginal Health Agreement has been signed in Tasmania between the Commonwealth Health Minister, State Health Minister, Chairman of ATSIC and the Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

- There has been a strong commitment for Federal and State health authorities, the peak Aboriginal health organisation and ATSIC to work cooperatively, avoid duplication and pool resources.
- This has resulted in the creation of a Tasmanian Aboriginal Health Partnership which has developed a regional plan designed to improve Aboriginal health outcomes in Tasmania. Negotiations are still to be conducted with a view to having representatives from all Indigenous controlled Health Services on the Partnership.
- The plans and associated needs were researched at the Aboriginal health worker and community level, were widely consulted with a range of stakeholders and across many levels of government.
- This is a good example of the constructive role ATSIC can play in monitoring the delivery of other Government programs and playing a major advocacy role.

NAHS - The National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Environmental Health Capital Works Program is national program targeted at providing new infrastructure and upgrading existing facilities to improve environmental health conditions on Aboriginal communities through access to adequate and appropriate housing, infrastructure, and essential municipal services.

- ATSIC's 1992 National Housing and Community Infrastructure Needs Survey identified a significant backlog of basic housing and infrastructure needs in remote communities. Adequate environmental health infrastructure, such as water supply, sewerage, power, local roads and basic housing are of critical importance in improving health and living standards in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The NAHS program supplements the efforts of State, Territory and local governments in overcoming the backlog in the provision of housing and related infrastructure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Priority is to be determined on the basis of need as demonstrated by Health Impact Assessments, Housing Needs Surveys, organisations' housing waiting lists and census data.
- A key aspect of the planning process for the next triennium was the selection of priority projects.

- Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) were conducted on project proposals to determine priority environmental health needs.
- The HIAs encompassed a desktop study, agency consultations, development of a site visit short-list, site investigations and the development of a prioritised list. During the process, emphasis was placed on involvement of and input from ATSIC's elected arm, State Office personnel and project communities.
- The HIA methodology used was based on the experience gained during the assessment and delivery of NAHS Round 1 program.

The unacceptable social and physical environment in which the descendants of Tasmania's original occupants currently survive warrants stronger consideration than currently demonstrated by the dominant culture. The following facts illustrate Indigenous disadvantage in Tas:

- **Morbidity** - Indigenous Australians die on average 20 years earlier than other Australians.
- **Infant mortality** - Maternal and infant mortality rates are higher for Indigenous people.
- **Health** - Infectious diseases and chronic diseases such as diabetes, trachoma, ear disease and renal failure are far more common in Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people.
- **Employment** - The unemployment rate for Indigenous people is an estimated 20%, as against 11% for the general community.
- **Education** - About 13% of Indigenous students are finishing secondary school, compared with a non Indigenous rate for Tasmania of 22% and a national retention rate of more than 77%.
- **Population** - Aboriginal people in Tasmania are highly critical of ABS population figures and have long argued that due to data collection difficulties and queries on the validity of the count, there has been a significant over count of the Aboriginal population in Tasmania.
- **Housing** - Aboriginal people comprise 3% of the Tasmanian population but in 1996/97 Aboriginal clients comprised 8% of all people seeking supported accommodation in state.
- **Home ownership** - The home ownership rate for Aboriginal people in Tasmania is 24%, in comparison with the general population rate of 71% and Tasmanian rate of 45%.
- **Rental housing** - Aboriginal people in Tasmania rely much more heavily on public rental programs than the population at large: 42% compared to 24% for the general population of Tasmania.

- **Infrastructure** – Tasmania has only Cape Barren Island as a discrete community. This community is one of the most disadvantaged in Australia. The recent trouble with plane fuel in Victoria provided a backdrop to a lifestyle entirely dependant on either planes or barges for bring into the island even the most basic necessities. This adds to the cost, inconvenience and outright danger to the welfare of the community population.

Housing Agreement – An initiative (potential) stemming from the National Commitment which seeks to improve the coordination, planning and delivery of housing services to Indigenous people in Tasmania.

- After years of negotiations an agreement is still not signed between the Commonwealth Housing Minister, State Housing Minister and ATSIC Chairman although negotiations have started again.
- This has resulted in the continuation of funding to Aboriginal housing organisations established for that purpose. While this has not presented many problems on the Furneaux islands, there have been concerns from time to time on the main island of Tasmania.
- ATSIC, State and Commonwealth housing funds should be pooled to create a “one-stop” housing shop. Currently, ATSIC CHIP funds account for only 10% of the home purchased in the North and North West of Tasmania with ATSIC funds.
- ATSIC Elected Arm representatives should constitute half of the Aboriginal Management Board of an AHA but ongoing concerns about Aboriginality and the mistrust this has generated in the community are making this one of the more contentious negotiating points in establishing a housing authority.

Regional Planning and Needs Analysis

Consideration of need is a complex national task and Tasmania is no different in terms of the difficulty of establishing and measuring need, deciding on priorities, designing strategies, programs and services to meet those needs and coordinating and monitoring the activities of service providers.

- This comes on top of the need to recognise the differences between the needs of people on the main island and those on the Furneaux Islands.
- In ATSIC at a regional level the Regional Plan is the prime document which sets out the needs and aspirations for a particular geographic area as determined by the Regional Council.
- The Regional Plan is strategic in it’s construction and the implementation can be divided into two areas – those programs and services either funded or delivered by

ATSIC and those programs and services delivered by other Commonwealth and State agencies.

- While the Tasmanian Regional Council are able to direct the activities of ATSIC, their ability to influence the activities of other levels of Governments to cooperate with and commit resources to Regional Plan priorities can be limited. An examination of the 1999/2000 State Budget papers provides a good example of the problems of transparency and accountability in showing how Commonwealth funds are applied for the benefit of Aboriginal people.
- While it is accepted that the State Government expends funds on Indigenous affairs, it is impossible to determine from the figures provided. Therefore this raises the problem of accountability and transparency for the funds allocated. This has long been a bone of contention with regional Council who have pursued the provision of this information through the life of more than one Regional Council.
- Other levels of Government can ignore the Regional Plan when constructing and delivering programs and services on a regional basis. This is further compounded by a homogenous view of Tasmania which seems to dominate nearly all program delivery by State and Federal and local government agencies. People in the Furneaux Islands are more isolated and have special requirements.

Recommendation 1:

The CGC should consider measures to make it mandatory for all levels of Government to include Regional Council plans in their strategic planning and program delivery regimes.

Recommendation 2:

The CGC should consider the adoption of regional needs analysis indicators and processes, including cultural concerns in its funding deliberations.

SUMMARY:

Importance of culture, heritage, land for well-being

The Elected Arm remains concerned about the restricted nature of the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry. The ATSIC Board has stated that questions of comparative need have not been addressed and that the holistic approach needed to properly redress Aboriginal disadvantage has not been given sufficient priority. Per capita assessment is not enough and needs to weight and balance physical needs and the cultural and heritage needs of people taking into consideration the extent and permanency of loss of culture and heritage. This type of approach needs also to balance land needs and

sea rights access so that there can be a complete redress of Aboriginal concerns about both economic and cultural well being.