



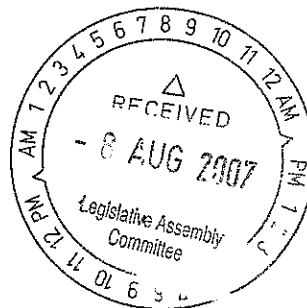
Department of Water
Government of Western Australia

RAC Sub 10

Our ref: CEOW262/07

Enquiries: Don Crawford, (08) 6364 6815

Dr Jeanine Purdy
Principal Research Officer
Education and Health Standing Committee
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000



Dear Dr Purdy

Where from? Where to? A Discussion Paper on Remote Aboriginal Communities

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Education and Health Standing Committee's Report No 6 on remote Aboriginal communities.

A submission is attached which briefly outlines the Department of Water's (DoW) role in supplying water services to discrete Indigenous communities. Some brief comments are made about a couple of areas in the report that could be checked and revised.

If you have any queries regarding this matter, please contact Mr Don Crawford, Manager of Policy and Planning Industry Support on 63646815 or email him on don.crawford@water.wa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Paul Frewer
A/ DIRECTOR GENERAL

6 August 2007

SUBMISSION

TO: Education and Health Standing Committee
REPORT: Where From? Where To? A Discussion Paper on the Remote Aboriginal Communities
ORGANISATION: Department of Water
CONTACT: Don Crawford
Manager Water Industry Support
(08) 6364 6815
0417 933 430

The Department of Water (DoW) notes the Education and Health Standing Committee's discussion paper on remote Aboriginal communities. Although the DoW was not contacted directly during the preparation of Report No 6, the paper draws heavily on the DoW's *Report for the Minister for Water Resources on Water Services in Discrete Indigenous Communities* when discussing water infrastructure.

The DoW was officially established in January 2006 to ensure the State's water resources are planned and managed to meet community requirements, now and into the future. This includes ensuring that West Australians have access to water services.

Following the preparation of the report on Indigenous water services, the DoW took on the lead role of improving the standard of water services (water and wastewater) to Indigenous communities. This is seen as a co-ordination role bringing together policy, resourcing and implementation requirements to enhance the existing arrangements. This role involves liaising and working with the many agencies that are already involved in supplying water and other essential services to these communities, and working with them to improve the situation and implement government policies.

The key strategic documents governing policy direction in supplying essential services are the Bilateral Agreements. The relevant bilateral documents are "An Agreement for the Provision of Housing, Infrastructure and Essential Services for Indigenous People in Western Australia (November 2005 – June 2008)" and the "Bilateral Agreement on Indigenous Affairs (2006 – 2010)". State and Commonwealth agencies are working together to develop the programs required to achieve the goals in these bilaterals. In the essential services area, the program for power was started in 2000 and is ahead of the water services program.

In Report No 6, at least one reference and quote to a bilateral appears incorrect. The quote in section 4.1 on page 69 is from the Bilateral Agreement on Indigenous Affairs.

In the Executive Summary (page xix) and Chapter 3 (page 58), there is reference to 82% of Indigenous people living in remote communities in mid-sized or large communities under the Remote Areas Essential Services Program (RAESP) for the provision and maintenance of water, power and wastewater services. The 82% figure would include town-based communities as well, of which five are covered under RAESP. There are around 42 town-based communities.

Our understanding is that the "chuck-in" system for paying water bills only applies to town-based communities where the Water Corporation charges the community for the water services supplied. The "chuck-in" occurs when the bill arrives and needs to be paid.

Staff in the DoW are available to discuss water service issues further if required. The thrust at the moment is to develop a program that encapsulates the regularisation and normalisation objectives across Indigenous communities of all sizes. We are investigating developing a program to normalise water services in communities greater than 200 people (similar to the Aboriginal and Remote Communities Power Supply Project (ARCPSP)), revitalising the Town Reserve Regularisation Program (TRRP) for the town-based communities, extending the Remote Areas Essential Services Program (RAESP) to discrete remote communities less than 50 people and trying to be innovative with technological or other solutions for the small communities.

For the Committee's information, the DoW is represented on the COAG Working Group for Reconciliation that is associated with the implementation of the National Action Plans for Reconciliation in Natural Resource Management (NRM) and Primary Industries (PI).

In recent meetings the Working Group has identified two major issues that need to be addressed:

Potable Water – this has been raised as a major opportunity to be addressed at regional and remote levels through funding other than NRM funding to assist service delivery of this natural resource to Indigenous communities.

The Working Group completed a briefing note for the relevant Councils to address the issue and this is yet to be confirmed. It has been recommended by the Working Group that this issue is too large to be funded by the State and Territory Governments and is the responsibility of the National Water Initiative.

Welfare to Work Reforms - the second issue is the new policy of "Welfare to Work" reforms being introduced that will have an impact upon the Indigenous communities involved in NRM and PI projects that are supplemented with the CDEP project. It has been raised by the Working Group in another briefing note to the Ministerial Councils.

The DOW is developing a new Indigenous employment strategy to train and employ local Indigenous people at regional level to be involved in water resource management. It is proposed to commence with four trainees in July 2007 and recruit another four in January 2008. The DOW proposes to increase the number of Indigenous people working within the agency to 3% over three years.