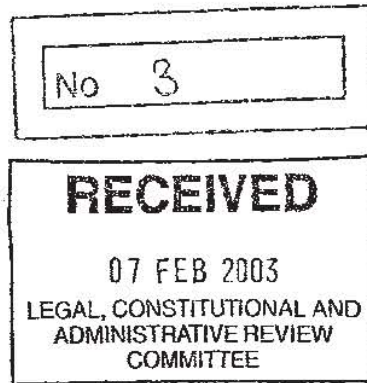


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28 01 03

The Research Director
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000



Dear Sir/ Madam

RE; A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES' PARTICIPATION IN QUEENSLAND'S DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

For a short period of time during 1975-1976, I live on Barnyili (now called Burunga) in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, training indigenous peoples in self-determination in the operation of business enterprises on the settlement. I left this locality to join the Northern Territory Prison Service in Alice Springs in mid-1976. I transferred to Darwin in 1978, where I spent twelve years as a Chief Prison Officer. I took early retirement in 1993. There was a 75% aboriginal content in Territory prisons and I was able to relate to them successfully, as I understood their culture as I did studies in anthropology and sociology units, plus attended lectures in Aboriginal customs & kinsfolk at the Darwin University in 1979. I represented the Department at the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody at the hearings in Darwin and assisted the department legal representatives. I was later responsible for implementing the recommendations at the completion of the commission's hearings. I feel that I have sufficient knowledge of Aboriginal customs to make informed recommendations to this enquiry.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

1. **What are some of the reasons that indigenous people are underrepresented in the Queensland Parliament?**
 - A. Unless an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander was widely known and popular within European society, political parties are not likely to choose them for pre-selection candidates, less it puts voters off-side. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders do not readily take part in political parties, as there is no parallel in their own society. Each tribe is an autonomous group that is run by the elders who operate under laws and customs handed down from generation to generation.
2. **What are some of the reasons that indigenous people might choose not be involved in Queensland's Parliament and government?**
 - A. Indigenous people are very cautious of speaking to Europeans about tribal problems because they do not understand Aboriginal customs. "As Commissioner Wooten pointed out, "such an attitude fails to appreciate that aggrieved Aboriginal prisoners are unlikely to complain to non-aboriginal prison authorities and fails to appreciate that racism can be structural and covert as well as explicit and overt." Generally, any racism displayed by members of the public is through ignorance of other cultures and do not understand the subtle nuances in racism.
3. **What factors make it difficult for indigenous people to participate in Queensland's system of democracy?**
 - A. Aboriginal tribes function under an autocratic system and they are not open to democracy. However, other factors that make it difficult, is that Europeans unwittingly commit racism by not making themselves aware that 'avoidance relationships' exist between members from separate moieties, that prevent them from being in the same building together. Or that they can cause members to 'lose face' in front of other tribal members by requiring uninitiated members to converse with initiated members on equal terms.

STRATEGY 1: ENHANCE PARTICIPATION IN THE EXISTING PROCESSES.

4. **Is more civics education and voter education targeted specifically to indigenous people necessary.**
 - A. Yes, because they usually only vote because it is compulsory.

*This is an extract from Indigenous Law Resources on the Internet (racism aboriginal prisoners) National Report – 25.6 Racism in Prisons, at paragraph 25.6.3. 2/.

2.

5. What other strategies might promote greater participation by indigenous people in the existing democratic process.

A. Encourage tribal elders to be involved in political conferences and make representation to their local member.

STRATEGY 2: DIRECT INPUT INTO PARLIAMENT.

6. Would avenues for bodies which represent Indigenous people to have direct input into Parliament enhance the participation of Indigenous peoples in the Parliament.

A. Yes. Providing the representative was also an Indigenous person or completely understood their culture.

7. Is it a good idea to enable bodies which represent Indigenous peoples to have direct input into Parliament? Why or why not?

A. Yes. Otherwise Indigenous people might never have any input.

8. If a representative body with direct input into Parliament was to be established how should it operate? For example.

- Who should be on the representative body?

A. A system of dedicated seats would be the best way to go.

- What forms of direct input should the representative body have?

A. Nominated elders from both moieties of each tribe.

- What else would be necessary to ensure Parliament considered matters raised by the representative body?

A. Give this dedicated group equal voting rights in parliament.

STRATEGY 3: AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ASSEMBLY

9. Would an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly contribute to the participation of Indigenous people in the democratic process in Queensland.

A. Providing they were heard on equal terms.

10. Is an Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Assembly a good idea? Why or why not?

A. No, as any separation of Indigenous people from European operations would cause opposing factions and would amount to apartheid.

11. If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly was to be established, how should it operate? For example:

- How should members of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly be selected?

A. By voting amongst indigenous people living in a defined area. Providing there was equal representation in the assembly from each moiety.

- What would be the specific role and functions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly have input in the Queensland Parliament.

A. Direct access to the Minister of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander affairs.

- What else would be necessary to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Assembly contributed to representation of indigenous people?

A. That at least one member from every tribe in the state.

- Would one assembly be appropriate, or should there be separate Assemblies for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.
- A. There may have to be sub-assemblies in each of the Northern, Western, Central and South Eastern sections of the state.

STRATEGY 4: DEDICATED SEATS.

12. Would dedicated seats enhance the participation of indigenous people in the democratic process in Queensland.
A. Yes, otherwise they may not get sufficient representation.
13. Are dedicated seats a good idea? Why or why not?
A. Yes, providing there is an equal representation for each of the 'sun' & 'moon' moieties.
14. If dedicated seats were to be introduced, how should they operate: for example:
 - How many dedicated seats should there be?
A. An equal number according to the percentage of Indigenous people in the State and sufficient to ensure that opposing moieties have more than one seat each.
 - In what ways, if any, should the role and functions of members in dedicated seats differ from members in other seats.
A. None.
 - How should members in dedicated seats be selected?
A. Elected by Indigenous groups from each of the sub-assemblies to fill the dedicated seats at the same time as State elections.
 - Should people who vote for members in dedicated seats also be able to vote as members in general electorates?
A. No, because they are already represented.
15. Should there be a referendum about the introduction of dedicated seats?
A. No.

STRATEGY 5: CHANGES TO ELECTORAL PROCESS.

16. Should Queensland electoral system seek to achieve representation of minority groups in Queensland?
A. Only through established political groups.
17. Should the electoral system be reviewed to ensure that it is the most effective electoral system to represent the diverse interests of the Queensland community?
A. Yes.
18. Would a different electoral system be likely to ensure greater representation of Indigenous peoples.
A. Yes. Dedicated seats would be a step in the right direction

GENERAL CONDITIONS.

19. What other strategies could be used to enhance the participation of Indigenous peoples in the democratic process in Queensland?
A. By encouraging established political parties to seek their involvement in that electorate.

20. What strategies or combination of strategies would best achieve enhanced participation of Indigenous peoples in the democratic process in Queensland.

- A. Highly educated Indigenous people who live in large townships or suburbia, would voluntarily seek to participate in political parties as they see fit. However, it would not be the same for indigenous persons who lived on settlements which are autocratic environments controlled by tribal elders.

Unless parliamentarians make themselves aware of the culture requirements of indigenous people they may cause problems unintentionally of a racial nature. I wish members of LCARC well in their deliberations and hope that an amicable solution can be found to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders an input into parliamentary affairs.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J/A Wright', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the bottom left.

J/A Wright.