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Ms Karen Struthers MP
Chairperson
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Q 4000

Dear Ms Struthers

Thank-you for the opportunity to respond to the issues raised by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee's Hands On Parliament Inquiry. I also thank you for the opportunity provided to Mr Simon Finn, State Organiser, to meet with the committee.

Recognition of the traditional owners is a key ceremonial element of the ALP's official forums. The acknowledgement of country at the opening of ALP conferences has been practice for some years and is now enshrined in ALP rules.

I. Encouraging the participation of Indigenous People

The ALP Queensland branch encourages the involvement of indigenous people through a range of means including: an established indigenous organisation enshrined in the rules of the party; the employment of a full-time Equity Officer; the identification of indigenous members joining the party and an extensive regional branch structure.

Identification of Indigenous members

- People identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander's are able to self-identify on ALP membership application forms.

Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders Reference Committee (APTSIRC)

The APTSIRC is an organisation within the Queensland ALP. Some features of this committee are:

- Constituted in ALP rules
- Elects its own positions (by and from indigenous ALP members)
- Committed budget allocation
- Objective to advance the interest of indigenous people in the party
- Whole of party committee -- access to all policy committees, not an isolated group

Branch structure

The ALP has an extensive branch structure throughout Queensland, which is supported by the ALP centrally and by local parliamentary members and activists. Some notable elements of this are:

- Branches have formed in regional areas where percentages of indigenous people are higher and have included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in Weipa, Thursday Island, Cooktown, Palm Island, and Normanton
- These branches have formed through the encouragement of elected ALP members. Steve Bredhauer, Member for Cook, Bob Scott, the former Member for Cook, Senator Jan McLucas and former Senator Margaret Reynolds have been particularly active in the encouragement of indigenous participation in North Queensland

Equity Officer

The ALP employs a full-time Equity Officer to advance the interest of equity target groups within the party. Increasing the participation of indigenous peoples in the ALP is a key performance objective of this position.

The Equity Officer assists the development and operations of the APTSIRC including advocacy of issues within the party and participation and recruitment activities

Other States Initiatives - NSW

The NSW ALP branch is similarly committed to the participation of indigenous people. The NSW branch has both an Indigenous People and Reconciliation Policy Committee and an Indigenous Labor Network within the NSW ALP branch structure.

In addition to supporting indigenous peoples access to the various party forums, the NSW Indigenous Labor Network holds an annual dinner at which the Pat Dixon Award is granted. This award recognises an indigenous member of the ALP, their community involvement and activities to increase the participation of indigenous people in the ALP

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Members/Candidates

With a few notable exceptions, the major parties have not had many indigenous candidates. This is probably due to several factors, including:

- Advancing indigenous people in political parties is a relatively recent activity
- Critical mass of indigenous population within electorates is relatively small

Whilst there are some localised examples of indigenous candidates in Queensland the ALP has a good record in targeting under-represented groups. In recent years the ALP has focussed on the lack of women in representative positions. Whilst there is more to be done, great advances in the number of women in elected positions have occurred and the Queensland parliament is a good example.

The ALP is committed to increasing the involvement of indigenous people in the political process and supporting initiatives that lead to increasing access to elected positions.

It should be noted however that elected positions are only one measure of political engagement. With 120 elected people amongst 6,500 members in Queensland, the vast majority of the ALP is engaged in policy development and political activity from outside parliaments.

Providing opportunities for involvement in the party and encouraging participation in the political process by indigenous people is the current target of the ALP's approach. Through building a support base for indigenous people within the party and using their involvement to break down impediments, the ALP aims to increase the representation of indigenous people in parliaments.

3. What more can be done

Within the ALP

A continued commitment to indigenous organisation within the party, including the funding of participation initiatives will hopefully increase the number of indigenous members of the party.

At this stage development of the APTSIRC is providing access to a broad range of decision-making bodies within the party. Access to policy development forums is well established.

Formal representation of the APTSIRC at the party's Administrative Committee was recently endorsed by the annual ALP state conference.

Public Funding

Models for the public funding of political parties are worth considering when planning for increased participation of indigenous people. In NSW for example, significant public funding is allocated to political parties for civic education purposes. This allows for the funding of recruitment strategies and educative activities.

Supporting the distribution of political material to indigenous people through the ATSIC roll might, for example, be one measure where public funding would enable the distribution of political educative material.

Clearly any such allocations would need to be made on the basis of equivalent support to major parties and be audited and benchmarked to ensure resources are not used for electioneering.

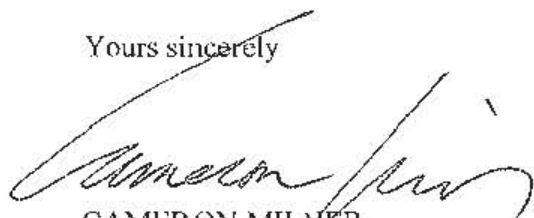
Regulated public funding targeted at education and participation of indigenous people would ensure a commitment to such programs. As the costs of campaigning increase political parties are increasingly reliant on major fundraising to fund campaigns. Whilst the ALP commits significant resources to the participation of under represented groups, there is a campaign imperative attached to every dollar of revenue.

Public assistance to enable political parties to undertake educative activities would ensure that resources were quarantined for activities such as participation initiatives for indigenous people. The ultimate aim of these activities would be to increase the representation of indigenous peoples in the parliament.

Once again, thank-you for the opportunity to provide this information to the committee. There are a number of complex issues associated with increasing the participation of indigenous people in Australia's systems of government and the ALP recognises the important work the LCARC is undertaking to advance these issues.

The ALP is very interested in considering the findings of the committee and providing further feedback if required in future.

Yours sincerely



CAMERON MILNER
STATE SECRETARY