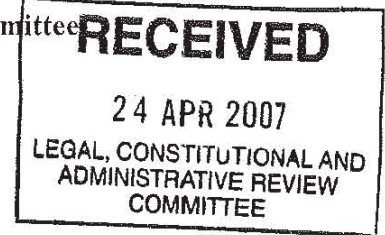


No 2

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Submission to the
Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee
Legislative Assembly of Queensland

From Students at Abergowrie College
24th April 2007



What are the barriers to Indigenous peoples' participation in Queensland's Democratic Processes?

- It is seen as too hard;
- For many, if not most, Indigenous people Mainstream English is their second, third or fourth language;
- Race and racism continues to be an issue – many non-Indigenous people would hesitate to vote for an Indigenous person; stereotypes and perceptions that Indigenous people may not be as capable as non-Indigenous people still exist;
- There are Issues of culture – both that traditional forms of authority (elders) are present in communities, and that cultural practices have a priority in communities;
- The contrast and distance between 'white government' and the traditional ways of the elders;
- Other issues of culture include the demands of culture – can these positions cope with the priority given to such times as Tombstone Openings, funerals, family issues, and special occasions which come first for an Indigenous person?; Indigenous people have to live in an Indigenous world and in a non-Indigenous world and they are very different ways;
- Education – many older people do not have a lot of education, and younger people need to know more about how governments work;
- For most there is a lack of understanding of the political processes;
- Shame – fear of failure;
- The 'tall poppy syndrome' where people who succeed can then be seen as "too good for us" or "show off";
- Lack of self-confidence and belief that if I got involved I could do a good job;
- Remoteness, distance, and the difficulties of connecting and travel;
- Perceptions that politicians are "posh" (and not like us), 'perfect';
- Apathy – the reasons for apathy include: the ways Indigenous people have been treated and are treated; the perception that governments tell lies; disagreements; perceptions that "they won't listen" so why speak up?; "White men come up with "plans" for communities instead of sitting down with us and asking us what we need – ask us; lasting resentment about "white people" taking over our land and the stolen generation;
- In some ways Indigenous people still feel separate, apart from non-Indigenous Australia;
- Needing to understand how to vote better.

Where have you learned about Government and democratic processes?

- TV and radio;
- Newspapers;
- SOSE in Years 8,9,10;
- Religion and Ethics in Year 12 (Life Choices unit);
- Learning how to run a meeting and the roles and responsibilities of President, Secretary, Treasurer, and members;
- The visit's from Mr Pat Purcell, Emergency Services Minister;
- (Many young people know more than their parents about how Governments work).

What would encourage you to become involved, give you confidence?

- Chances like this to talk to you and know you are listening;
- Learning what this report is about;
- The experience we have had doing our weekly radio program.

Recommendations:

- Ref 6.3 (Civics Education – Extra curricula activities), p 30: we note in Paragraph 4 the message from the consultation that “young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be encouraged and supported to participate in all youth activities.” Paragraph 5 then refers to Youth Parliaments and speaks about activities “on a smaller scale” for young Indigenous people in “regional and remote school”. Our question is: Why ‘on a smaller scale’ for regional and remote kids? Are Youth Parliaments only for kids in the South East? Providing on “a smaller scale” for regional and remote kids does not seem to be “encouraging and supporting” them to “participate in all youth activities”. It seems to be say that kids in the South East will continue to get the best opportunities and kids in regional and remote areas will get second best. Could the ‘smaller scale’ sometimes be given to the South East?
- Re 7.1 paragraph 6 We would like to know what leadership programmes from the Queensland Government are available for us? Fir those programs to help Indigenous young people that need to be available to remote students.
- Funded opportunities be given to young Indigenous people to go to Brisbane, to see the Parliament working, to learn about what Parliamentarians do.
- Parliaments need to get out to remote communities and experience the differences, the perspectives and changes in remote communities.
- Voter education should happen in all schools in year 11 and 12.
- In communities there are many people who cannot read mainstream English. Traditional languages are not written language but are spoken languages, so it would not help to have voting papers and information in traditional languages. Our suggestions are: (a) have a voting help line with people who speak traditional languages to answer questions, and give direction;
(b) Set up a way of people voting over the phone. The directions would be in traditional language, and the votes could be given by pressing buttons, e.g. to vote for Joe Smith press 1.
- Leadership education (for leadership after school, not just in a school), should start late Year 11 and go into early Year 12.

- When parliament meets do you start with an acknowledgement of the traditional owners or have a traditional owner welcome you to country?
- Have you ever asked an Indigenous person to become involved or to try for election?
- The alcohol management plans are not working – there is still domestic violence etc, (But that is not just an Indigenous problem; Indigenous people don't like alcohol and violence just being made an Indigenous problem; by contrast deaths on roads is more a non-Indigenous problem but it is not said that way;
- Government material and advertising needs to include more Indigenous faces – not just when it is about Indigenous issues;
- Identifying, training, and mentoring young people for getting involved in Government but that has to be by Community and Government together; it will involve resources and money but they will be able to learn from experience. If the community is involved in the mentoring and training then there might not be the shame and “too good” put on the person.

Mica Newie

Mica Newie

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Andreas Wackerow

Geoffrey Pascoe

Geoffrey Pascoe

Leonard Morrison

Leonard Morrison

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Liam Chapman

Kieren Marr

Kieren Marr

Anthony Savo

Anthony Savo

Songhie Mills

Songhie Mills

Cary Walsh

Cary Walsh

A message - *You show us* by Cyril Fisher

I am fifteen and I am very proud to be an Aboriginal Australian. Thanks to my parents, my grandparents and uncles and aunties I am at school. I want to go to university and to grow to be a good man and do good things for you and for our people.

My Indigenous brothers and I are growing to be young men now, and we think of the future. I know some of my brothers feel a bit hopeless about their futures, or sometimes, even if they want a future. I am thinking about the well-being of boys like me who are becoming men. And I am thinking too about what you expect men like me to be in our communities. To do that we need to know our stories and our ways. We want to know our country, our culture and our words. A man came to school to show us how to throw spear and boomerang. We liked that, but some Aboriginal boys felt shame – no-one had taught them before. We would rather have learnt throwing and hunting from you and our elders.

Knowing our traditional ways matters more to me than learning how to hunt pig with a gun. We want you to teach us. We need you to show us. But you can't teach us if you're drinking grog and fighting.

You want a good education for us ...we want education from you too...education about our ways....not bad ways

Many of you have worked hard to help our people be recognised as equal citizens in our country. Thanks for doing that for us. Thank you for what you teach us and for the pride you want us to have. You tell us that there is still lots more to do with health and education and housing and employment and land rights and reconciliation. We are the young men who are going to do that with our women, with councils and committees and communities and governments. We and our sisters are the councillors of the future. Those are big responsibilities. Governments can give us all we want and even if they did give us all we want, will life be different for you and me in the future? We have to make it work for our people. Won't it be good when our communities and most of our people don't depend on governments to help us! I need you to show me how things should be. You will need us to take all those responsibilities and to run meetings and plan projects. Right now, to do that, we need you to show us now how to be those kinds of men and women – men and women who do things in a respectful way ...in ways that keep our culture alive.

Not too many years away you will be grandparents, and there will be younger people to be community leaders. We are those young people. We don't want to grow up to be fighting or violent men, men who drink grog and do drugs. And most of all you don't want that for us and your children. We don't want to go to jail or die young. We want to grow up to be leaders in our communities, and eventually the elders. We want to be family men and community men,

men who play with their kids and look after you and our grandparents, and uncles and cousins.

We have good ideas for the future, and we have a lot of hope. We want to do good for our families, our communities, our people and Australia,but we can't do that unless you show us now.....show us how to be respectful men, how to have time with our kids and how to solve our problems without fighting and swearing.

YOU show us.....how can we learn? ...YOU have to show us.