



14 July 2020

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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RE: Inquiry into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (“Miwatj”) is an independent, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) operating seven primary health clinics and one wellbeing centre in communities across East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

Established in 1992, our mission is to ensure and expand Aboriginal community control of quality healthcare services and public health programs across the East Arnhem region.

Miwatj welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs into food pricing and food security in remote Indigenous communities.

Miwatj asserts that food security is much more than the cost of food, and affordability should be considered alongside other social determinants of health (SDoH). Miwatj intends to utilise this platform to identify the high impact areas that influence the SDoH and resulting food security, namely community-control and economic development.

The following submission includes ten key recommendations in response to the established Terms of Reference. Miwatj would like to bring the committee’s attention to recommendations 6 and 7 as our highest priorities.

I would also like to draw your attention to our comments under recommendation 10, which notes that the recommendations of this Committee’s 2009 *Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities* have yet to be fully implemented. Miwatj urges the Committee to progress implementation of its own recommendations, and to report on progress to its stakeholders.

Sincerely

Eddie Mulholland
Chief Executive Officer

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider remote community stores to be an 'essential service', that requires cross-jurisdictional support from government, health and social agencies at all levels.
2. Increase government funding that is available to remote community-owned stores to enable them to promote a healthy food supply.
3. Continue and strengthen the Community Stores Licensing Scheme through the adoption of a non-legislative collaborative model that is delivered through Land Councils, Traditional Owners and Township Leasing.
4. Implement a national and transparent approach to monitoring of food price, availability and affordability; ensuring that results are publically available.
5. Pilot the APO NT proposed Remote Development and Employment Scheme as an alternative to the current Community Development Program.
6. Increase investment into housing, social infrastructure and a regional Aboriginal community-controlled housing organisation using an economic development approach.
7. Take an economic development approach to local food production through the exploration of collaborations with appropriate horticulture/farming businesses.
8. Ensure support, through increased funding and flexible arrangements, for programs that can facilitate access to traditional bush foods.
9. Commit secure funding for School Nutrition Program to ensure program sustainability and viability.
10. Provide dedicated funding, leadership and monitoring to implement the Inquiry recommendations; including providing an annual report to submitters for the next five years.

RATIONALE

TOR 1: The environment in which Remote Community retailers operate

Recommendation 1: Consider remote community stores to be an 'essential service', that requires cross-jurisdictional support from government, health and social agencies at all levels.

In East Arnhem Land the majority of food supplies are delivered by barge. Food supplies from Darwin can transit for a week on the barge before arriving in community. As a result, the shelf life of fresh vegetables and fruit is much shorter than in regional or urban centres. The other method of delivery, by the Central Arnhem Road, is not currently passable in the wet season (typically between December-March). The Federal Government has promised \$180 million and the Northern Territory Government has committed \$45 million towards sealing the Central Arnhem Road (November 2019), this will seal about half of this arterial road into North East Arnhem Land.

Five Miwatj communities have stores (n=6) managed by a community-controlled store group, the remaining stores in our region are privately owned except for the Woolworths supermarket located in Nhulunbuy. In addition, three homelands on the Gove Peninsula are serviced by not-for-profit homeland community stores run by Laynhapuy Health (part of the Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation). These stores have been instrumental in increasing food access and food supply to those homelands by saving community members a \$1,300 round-trip bush taxi fare into Nhulunbuy (Bulloch et al, 2019). These homeland community stores have struggled to secure funding for this initiative outside of health funding.

In three Miwatj communities there is only one store, which means that these community-controlled stores play a central role in the health and wellness of community; measures that contribute to health and wellness include subsidising 100% of freight costs on fruit, vegetables and fresh milk, giving back to the community through benevolence funding, and providing donations to health programs (ALPA, 2020). It is recognised the cost of doing business in remote communities is significantly higher than in regional or urban areas with larger populations (CEQ, 2018). Due to the remote location, there are increased freight costs to provide healthy food to East Arnhem Land. Due to the size of the retail operations, the buying power of community stores is not equivalent to that of Coles or Woolworths (ALPA, 2009; Ferguson, 2016). During the recent pandemic response, the impact of this smaller relative purchasing power has been amplified as community stores tried to access stock at reasonable prices. In order to rely on remote community-owned stores to provide access to a healthy food supply, they need to be considered an essential service that can access support from government, health and social agencies.

Two Miwatj communities are within driving distance to the Woolworths in the regional centre of Nhulunbuy, allowing residents to choose this option instead of their local community store. Accessing Nhulunbuy Woolworths can come at a significant cost, particularly for community residents who do not have access to a private vehicle. If travelling from Yirrkala the options are a bus that costs \$5 (each way) that runs during limited business hours, or the more accessible option of taking a taxi \$50 each way. Anyone who works or participates in services during the day will need to do their shopping by taxi. Some Yolngu may also choose not to shop in Nhulunbuy as they are more likely to encounter anti-social behaviour in town.

Recommendation 2: Increase government funding that is available to remote community-owned stores to enable them to promote a healthy food supply.

In addition to the benefits of community-controlled store models stated above, these stores have Board representation and local committees that ensure their business practices are aligned with, and advancing, community priorities. These stores are best placed to undertake nutrition initiatives. When appropriately supported, community-owned stores are able to promote healthier choices through pricing and product placement as they are engaged in working together with the community towards mutually beneficial outcomes. While competition is generally beneficial for consumers, this is contradictory if the competition is not community-controlled and is advancing opposing priorities in remote community settings.

This type of disparity is witnessed in communities that have private-store competition. Private store practices, often targeted solely at profit, force community-led stores to adopt their practices to meet demand. While food is generally more affordable in Woolworths than in community stores, Woolworths is not subject to Community Stores Licensing or the associated nutrition policies (detailed below in TOR 2). This means that customers are subjected to high levels of marketing and promotion of discretionary foods that exacerbate food insecurity and nutrition-related conditions. Woolworths is not managed or owned by the communities it services and poses significant price competition to community stores.

To ensure ongoing viability of community-owned stores, these stores require increased government support to provide an accessible, healthy food supply.

TOR 2: Licensing & regulation requirements and administration of Remote Community Stores & TOR 3: Governance arrangements for Remote Community stores

Recommendation 3: *The Australian Government continue and strengthen the Community Stores Licensing Scheme through the adoption of a non-legislative collaborative model that is delivered through Land Councils, Traditional Owners and Township Leasing.*

In the Northern Territory, the Community Stores Licensing Scheme was initially introduced under the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007*. In 2012 this was replaced with the *Stronger Futures Act*. The scheme is administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

The Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) runs stores in four Miwatj communities. In three of those communities they don't have any competition, allowing ALPA to implement strategies aimed at improving nutrition outcomes. An example of this is through the implementation of strategies identified in the Menzies/ALPA Healthy Stores 2020 Study. From preliminary reports, in communities that were able to implement all strategies, these nudge strategies resulted in a reduction in the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages.

Conversely, on Elcho Island whilst ALPA runs two stores/takeaways, a private company runs another two stores/takeaways. All four stores are subject to the Community Stores Licensing Scheme; however, nutrition practices vary greatly between operations. Having increased competition on Elcho Island meant that not all strategies could be implemented within the ALPA store, resulting in fewer health promoting outcomes.

The current risk-based monitoring of the Stores Licensing Scheme means that, unless serious concerns are raised, stores will receive minimum visits. Miwatj maintains that there is extensive opportunity to improve the nutrition environment and food security of these stores, especially in the privately-run stores, through strengthening the licensing scheme. Miwatj recommends the Australian Government extend and strengthen the Community Stores Licensing Scheme by requiring more comprehensive licensing obligations and increased surveillance. For example, the Scheme could include the Healthy Stores 2020 strategies for all stores to ensure an improvement in the food environment on Elcho Island.

In addition to increased monitoring, the Community Stores Licensing Scheme would be further strengthened through increased transparency of monitoring visits. The monitoring reports are confidential and not publicly available, even to the Public Health Nutritionists the Monitoring Checklist recommends stores work with. To see improvement, community members need to be aware of what the stores' requirements are under the Scheme.

A review on the implementation of the *Stronger Futures Act* in 2016 considered the food security measures included in the Scheme likely promoted the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food (PJCHR, 2016). However the Parliament's only review of the Act, through the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, found that compulsory income management is not effective in achieving its stated objective of supporting vulnerable individuals and families. In fact, it goes against a human rights-compliant approach as it hasn't been tailored to the needs and wishes of the community (PJCHR, 2016).

The *Stronger Futures Act* will conclude in 2022. This provides an opportunity to strengthen Community Stores Licensing under a model that repositions power and control back within the community. Under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*, land councils work with Traditional Owners and

Township Leasing to administer leases for businesses on Aboriginal Land. Through this framework, the NIAA could work with the aforementioned stakeholders to build a more sustainable model that isn't dependent on short-term policy.

TOR 4: Comparative pricing in other non-Indigenous remote communities and regional centres

Recommendation 4: Implement a national and transparent approach to monitoring of food price, availability and affordability; ensuring that results are publicly available.

The Market Basket Survey (MBS) has been used in the Northern Territory since 2000. The current MBS collects and reports on the prices of both a 'Healthy Food Basket' (HFB) and a 'Current Diet Basket' (CDB) for a family of six for a fortnight. The HFB is based on foods recommended in the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. The CDB is based on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the average diet that Aboriginal people in Australia consumed in 2012-2013 (NT Dept of Health, 2016). The composition of the CDB is evidence itself that the current diet is problematic, and clearly demonstrates the shift towards discretionary foods such as soft drink, hot chips and meat pies that have been introduced to communities by non-Aboriginal people.

According to the NT Market Basket Survey 2019, the East Arnhem region had both the most expensive Healthy Food Basket (\$888) and Current Diet Basket (\$954) (NT Dept of Health, 2020). On average, the HFB in remote stores was 56% more expensive than in the district centre supermarkets and 6% higher than the average of the district centre corner stores (NT Dept of Health, 2020). The MBS data demonstrates that the average price of the HFB is 12.99% higher in privately run stores than in stores managed by a stores management group (NT Dept of Health, 2020).

The Australian Standardised Affordability and Pricing (ASAP) methods is another survey that may offer greater cultural security and applicability for remote Indigenous communities. In 2018, Lee and Lewis tailored the Healthy Diets ASAP protocol to Indigenous groups and found it was more sensitive in revealing the high degree of food insecurity in those communities. The results showed that almost 50% of disposable household income was spent on the current diet, compared to the international benchmark of 30%. While lower, the 'healthy diet' was still too high at 38.7% of disposable household income (Lee & Lewis, 2018). It is important to note that while income is the highest predictor of food insecurity, anecdotally we know that there are other barriers to households eating a 'healthy diet' such as limited food storage, lack of equipment, time constraints and competing priorities. For example: the longevity of perishable fresh fruit and vegetables is already reduced from the week-long barge journey to arrive on shelves in local community stores. A family, which anecdotally is more likely to have a freezer rather than a fridge, will elect to purchase non-perishable food in order to counter the limited shelf-life of fresh produce. With multiple family groups living in one home, the household will further choose pre-prepared food to account for the lack of nutrition hardware to cook for the number of people sharing the meal that day.

Having access to food pricing, availability and affordability data is critical to be able to evaluate health-promoting food pricing policies. National-scale comparisons of this information would increase the evidence-base on health-promoting food pricing policies, provide a tool for advocacy and inform policy actions to improve food security. More importantly, publicising this information by store empowers community members to make informed decisions about where they shop when this choice is available to them.

TOR 5: Barriers facing residents in Remote Communities from having reliable access to affordable fresh and health food, groceries and other essential supplies

Recommendation 5: Pilot the APO NT proposed Remote Development and Employment Scheme as an alternative to the current Community Development Program.

Low income is the strongest and most consistent predictor of food insecurity (Seivwright, 2020). The current Community Development Program (CDP) disproportionately penalises remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The mechanisms behind this include: significantly more onerous obligations on CDP participants (hours and flexibility) which predispose them to a higher risk of non-compliance; existing barriers to accessing Centrelink services¹; and disproportionate levels of ill health combined with lack of services that make participation more challenging (APO NT, 2018). Additionally, the CDP program does not address the central problem: a lack of sustainable jobs that provide an independent living income. In 2013 the Senate's Finance and Public Administration References Committee recommended a complete overhaul of the CDP scheme. The *Social Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2018* brought in the new Targeted Compliance Framework which did not address any of the issues raised above.

The APO NT-proposed Remote Development and Employment Scheme takes a strengths-based approach. It is focused on being community-driven, creating jobs, strengthening culture, being flexible, promoting incentives versus punishments, providing ongoing support and prioritising long-term economic, social & skills development (APO NT, 2017). Importantly, it would transfer more control to the community through local governance committees. The committees would assist remote job centres to partner with local Indigenous organisations and local government to create jobs through a Remote Jobs Investment Fund, Social Enterprise Fund and a Remote Youth Fund, among other sources of funding.

Government needs to act on the recommendations from the 2013 Senate report to develop a more culturally-appropriate alternative to the current CDP model. Piloting the Remote Development and Employment Scheme is a step towards empowering communities, creating jobs and economic development in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Recommendation 6: Increase investment into housing, social infrastructure and Aboriginal community controlled housing organisations using an economic development approach.

Housing

Overcrowded households are an additional strain on limited resources when it comes to food security. A recent report found that levels of overcrowding in bush communities was much higher than officially recorded. The study found an average of 7.3 and up to 22 people in bush community households (Hall et al., 2020). It is well-established that improving essential hardware can improve health status and reduce risk of infectious disease and injury (Pholeros et al., 1993). Crowded households increase the likelihood of health hardware malfunction and result in community members living with non-functional hot water systems, windows, kitchen facilities, washing machines and toilets among other health hardware; this poses a significant barrier to health and to safe food preparation (Hall et al., 2020). However, while overcrowding is a contributor to health hardware malfunction in remote communities, research has demonstrated that plumbing and electrical repairs were predominantly required due to either overuse/vandalism (9%), a lack of routine maintenance (70%), or problems with initial construction and installation (21%) (Pholeros et

¹ Barriers to accessing Centrelink services include office location, office hours, services not offered in clients' first language, and literacy and numeracy skills.

al., 2013). This clearly demonstrates the need to ensure more housing is provided, that those new builds are built to an acceptable standard and that sufficient training and employment opportunities are provided to local community members to facilitate routine maintenance.

While the new Northern Territory Housing Strategy 2020-2025 has included 'Culturally responsive' as a guiding principle, there needs to be a commitment to build culturally appropriate housing in remote NT communities. Many family groups choose to live together so working with families on adequate designs to meet their needs is tantamount to being culturally responsive. Miwatj staff have previously been involved in consultations on culturally appropriate housing design for Top End NT communities and that feedback has not been taken on; it's critical to respect and accommodate for differences between communities and that consultation is completed genuinely and in earnest.

On Elcho Island, there has been a commitment by the Northern Territory Government to build an additional 80 houses in Galiwin'ku. Typically, houses are built urgently using fly-in workers. The \$1.1 billion National Partnership for Remote Housing Northern Territory agreement was a welcome announcement, however thoughtful implementation is essential to provide the greatest impact. The government has the opportunity to meet housing needs, stimulate economic development and build capacity by training a local Yolngu workforce to not only build the houses, but to set up a local factory for building materials. Taking a more intentional economic development approach, over a longer period, will provide many more benefits than just additional housing. Governments must also commit to a long-term housing strategy that is aligned with projected population growth.

Social Infrastructure

Investing in the construction of social infrastructure can also promote economic development when built by a local workforce. For example, building a facility in community for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants to access creates both a community space to enhance that program's operation as well as contributing to economic development opportunities.

Another example would be to upskill a local Yolngu workforce to install and maintain water bubblers outside of public buildings. This would promote increased water consumption (as we anecdotally know that chilled water is preferable and less accessible compared to ambient water), improving nutrition status and supporting Yolngu employment.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Organisation

Investing in establishing a regional community-controlled housing organisation to oversee tenancy management of social housing stock in East Arnhem will additionally create jobs for Aboriginal people to undertake assessment and repairs. By providing appropriate training in essential trades for remote communities, repairs and maintenance can be carried out in a timely manner and do not depend on a fly-in fly-out workforce, ensuring long-term sustainability and cost-effectiveness of housing management. The achievability of this model has been evidenced by the Housing for Health program, where 78% of all people employed on projects between 1999-2012 were local Indigenous community members who were given training and basic equipment (Pholeros et al., 2013)

TOR 6: The availability and demand for locally produced food in Remote Communities

Recommendation 7: Take an economic development approach to local food production through the exploration of collaborations with appropriate horticulture/farming businesses.

Community gardens are often considered a solution to shortening the supply chain of fresh produce to remote communities. Community gardens in the Top End have not been sustainable due to a lack of community engagement and control, insufficient workforce, lack of fair pay, short and insecure funding cycles, and the crop selection not being appropriate for the community (Hume, 2013). When incorporated into a CDP model, there is often a lack of workforce motivation and inadequate investment made (Hunter, 2014).

If local food production is to be sustainable it's necessary to “engage with appropriate groups such as primary industry, small business development and all levels of government to explore the feasibility of large-scale local food initiatives that have a solid economic foundation and strong business model” (Apunipima, 2017). Exploring collaborations with Centre Farm/TopEnd Farm and encouraging development of local food production business through ‘Developing East Arnhem Land’ and the ‘Aboriginals Benefit Account’ grant funding, would not only shorten the supply chain and increase the food supply, but more importantly would have deeper impacts through economic development. Opportunities to capitalise on local food production and expand supply to both domestic and international markets need to be explored, such as the success of commercialising the Kakadu plum (Leach, 2019). With the recent recognition by Queensland researchers of the nutritional properties of the Green Plum on the Gove Peninsula (Baczkowski, 2020), this could represent a significant economic opportunity that would benefit from government support.

Recommendation 8: Ensure support, through increased funding and flexible arrangements, for programs that can facilitate access to traditional bush foods.

Local food production is not the only option to provide Indigenous community members with a shortened supply chain. Taking a strengths-based approach to food security includes acknowledging the value, knowledge and skills associated with hunting and bush food collection. In community consultation undertaken to develop the Miwatj Health Food Security & Nutrition Strategy 2020-2024, community members identified that they would like to eat more bush foods, however experience a number of barriers to doing so.

The greatest barrier to increasing intake of bush foods was access to transportation and supplies such as boats, 4-wheel drives, etc. Some Indigenous Ranger Programs across East Arnhem Land offer activities such as the Learning on Country program run by Dhimurru Rangers in collaboration with Yirrkala school, which provides students with opportunities to visit and learn about their culture and environment with Traditional Owners. The Learning on Country program aims to improve school attendance rates, the readiness of students to find satisfying and rewarding careers and instil the next generation of Yolngu land owners with the needed skills. Additional funding would expand programs like this one and enable other ranger groups to offer similar programs, increasing intake of and access to traditional bush foods. Additionally, where Aboriginal Corporations have access to vehicles or hunting equipment, greater priority placed on the importance of these programs should be leveraged to ensure asset management practices are not prohibitive to these initiatives.

TOR 9: Any other relevant factors

Recommendation 9: Commit secure funding for School Nutrition Program to ensure program sustainability and viability.

The School Nutrition Program (SNP) was introduced to the Northern Territory at the same time as the Community Stores Licensing scheme through the Australian Government’s Northern Territory Emergency Response. The goal was to improve: school attendance, engagement and learning; and to

provide employment opportunities for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Menzies, 2017).

Currently, schools are required to apply for funding on an annual basis. While it is reasonable for the funding amount to be responsive to enrolment figures, greater security on the guaranteed continuation of the program is necessary. An evaluation conducted in 2016 found that the SNP provided at the least 35-45% of student's daily energy requirements (Menzies, 2017). As a major source of food for community children, the possibility of funding not being renewed has a direct impact on the food security of community members. In addition, it means that employment opportunities are often precarious and not secure.

Recommendation 10: *The Australian government provides dedicated funding, leadership and monitoring to implement the Inquiry recommendations; including providing an annual report to submitters for the next five years.*

There have been previous attempts to put food security on the national agenda, such as the 2009 *Inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities* which tabled 33 recommendations, of which only 10 have been implemented, five partially implemented, and 18 have not been implemented.

Implementation of 2009 Remote Stores Inquiry recommendations:

1. The Committee recommends the Australian Government fund the rollout of the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) resources to all remote Indigenous communities across Australia, in conjunction with the support required by a nutritionist.
Partially implemented.
2. The Committee recommends the Australian Government consider the development of an incentive scheme to influence store managers to sell healthy produce.
Not implemented.
3. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require that membership of the Outback Stores Board include a nutritionist.
Implemented, but since lapsed.
4. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with state and territory governments, health services and remote store operators to ensure that nutrition education programs are available to all remote Indigenous communities.
Not implemented - programs have reduced in last 5 years.
5. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require all Outback Stores to develop, in consultation with local communities, a specific healthy store policy.
Implemented.
6. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with all remote Indigenous community store owners, operators and communities to assist in the development and ongoing management of a healthy store policy.
Not implemented – there is no requirement for stores to action.
7. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work collaboratively with state and territory governments to fund and make available to all remote Indigenous community stores: the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) or similar point-of-

sale monitoring tool; training for store employees on the operation of the tool; mechanisms to provide feedback to communities and governments about the sale of products from the store.

Not implemented - the RIST is used mainly by NIAA and research institutions.

8. The Committee recommends the Australian Government make available in all Outback Stores a system similar to the FOODcard established by the Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation. The Committee also recommends that the Australian Government consult with other remote community store operators to facilitate more widespread introduction of this system for communities who are interested.
Not implemented.
9. The Committee recommends the Australian Government consider the optional introduction of a healthy food card system to pregnant and breast-feeding mothers in remote Indigenous communities.
Not implemented - a similar system is currently being investigated by University of Queensland, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and Apunipima Cape York Health Council.
10. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national Primary Health Care program to fund and coordinate supply of healthy lunches and drinks to children at pre-schools and schools in remote Indigenous communities where this need is identified.
Implemented (NT).
11. The Committee recommends the Australian Government, in collaboration with educational institutions, investigate and develop: the facilitation of training of Indigenous staff living in remote communities to store management levels; the certification of in-store training of skills such as health promotion and food supply and storage.
Not implemented.
12. The Committee recommends the Australian Government assess the impact that Community Development Employment Projects reform will have on the viability and employment opportunities in stores in remote Indigenous communities.
Not implemented – this program has since changed.
13. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national remote Indigenous food supply chain coordination office to: support individual communities or regional groupings of communities to develop supply models by examining the possibilities appropriate to them; facilitate the establishment of cooperative arrangements including transparent cross-subsidisation models, if appropriate; assist to develop supply models that deliver healthy perishables to remote communities weekly where possible; disseminate information on options for supply models to remote Indigenous communities.
Not implemented.
14. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the proposed national remote Indigenous food supply chain coordination office, investigate working with charitable delivery organisations, such as FoodBank Western Australia, to aid in the delivery of fresh fruit and vegetables to remote Indigenous communities.
Not implemented.

15. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a remote community store infrastructure fund to assist stores to invest in delivery, refrigeration and storage facilities that will support the supply of fresh and healthy produce to Indigenous communities. Access to the fund may be contingent on stores having a healthy food policy and participating in a nutrition education program.

Implemented.

16. The Committee recommends the Australian Government ensure health clinics in remote Indigenous communities are aware of the nutritional value of bush tucker and other traditional foods and actively encourage communities to continue to engage in traditional practices.

Not implemented.

17. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support community garden, traditional food and farming projects in remote Indigenous communities for the local production of food, particularly in schools, where it is demonstrated that long term sustainability can be attained.

Implemented.

18. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to fund programs to eradicate feral animals in remote areas as required.

Implemented.

19. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government examine ways to facilitate remote Indigenous communities undertaking collaborative arrangements with stores to distribute and /or sell locally grown or harvested produce.

Not implemented.

20. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government assist stores across Australia in remote Indigenous communities to develop partnerships with local food production and harvest industries and expand operations to also function as market places for community grown produce. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government trial a partnership that requires Outback Stores to support local food production and harvesting industries and buy an annual minimum of goods from these local sources.

Not implemented.

21. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government commission a regional cost of living study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in remote communities in Australia and report by the end of 2010.

Not implemented.

22. The Committee recommends the Australian Bureau of Statistics consider expanding the Household Expenditure Survey to capture Indigenous specific data and remote community data.

Not implemented.

23. The Committee recommends that, following implementation of supply chain coordination and efficiencies, the Australian Government give consideration to a freight subsidy for fresh produce for the Torres Strait.

Not implemented.

24. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a working group with representatives from the Department of Families Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, state and territory governments, remote community store operators and the Australian Bankers Association. The working group should be tasked with: investigating the transaction fees being charged in remote Indigenous communities; investigating the impact of the limited banking choices available in remote communities, such as the consequent extent of fees charged for using foreign Automated Teller Machines; ensuring Indigenous Australians in remote communities have the financial literacy and access to facilities to make informed decisions regarding money management options, including the use of book up; investigating mechanisms to lower or waive financial fees and charges for Indigenous people in remote communities.

Partially implemented.

25. The Committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs support remote Indigenous community service programs that develop lifestyle skills, such as home cooking and shopping, to ensure Indigenous families have the skills to prepare healthy and nutritious meals in the home at low cost.

Not implemented.

26. The Committee recommends that the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs coordinate the dissemination of a healthy takeaway food guide, such as the Remote Indigenous Stores and Takeaways (RIST) Healthy Fast Food: a Resource for Remote Stores and Takeaways, and provide appropriate start-up training for remote store operators.

Implemented.

27. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government support proposals that Indigenous owned and controlled community stores register as corporations under the Corporations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2006. In addition, the Committee recommends the Australian Government actively promote and encourage registration under the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations.

Implemented.

28. The Committee recommends that the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations receive additional funding to provide governance and financial management training to community stores that register under the Corporations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2006.

Implemented – Building Strong Stores training.

29. The Committee recommends that, if the Australian Government proceeds with the proposal for a national licensing regime for remote community stores, the following should be taken into account: administrative processes to apply for and maintain a licence should be streamlined and easily complied with by Indigenous corporations, store committees and managers; there should be a well-defined procedure to appeal any decision to refuse a licence, such as through the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and a refusal should also consider the interim and longer term impacts it may have on a remote community's food supply security; the definition of a community store should be sufficiently flexible to encompass bush delivery, hub and spoke operations and other food supply models which offer economic and health benefits to communities; licence assessment should be undertaken in a timely manner; licences should be issued either to store owners, or jointly

to store owners and store managers; mandatory qualifications and accreditation should apply to store managers; licences should include a requirement for a healthy store policy and to display pricing; licensing should be subject to a review to ensure it is not providing unfair advantages to corporately managed stores over individual and community stores.
Not implemented (nationally); **partially implemented** (NT).

30. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require that membership of the Outback Stores board include Indigenous representation.
Implemented.

31. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government revise the purpose of the Outback Stores model to recognise the following two distinct roles: the commercially viable operation of a remote store where a community contracts it to manage their store; under advice from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the delivery of store services to communities where the current store is unviable or the regular supply of healthy food is not secured. Supplementary interim funding for these services be provided on a case by case basis.
Implemented – the Statement of Intent (2014) acknowledges the need to manage and provide financial support for stores in remote communities that are not commercially viable where there are sustainable benefits for food security and the community.

32. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government require Outback Stores to disclose a financial statement of expenditure of the appropriated funds received to date.
Partially implemented – financial statements are publicly available post-2009.

33. The Committee recommends that, rather than support particular service providers, the Australian Government work proactively with individual communities to develop and support a diversity of good store operations or delivery models that recognise the unique needs and situations of those communities and ensure food security to all remote communities.
Not implemented.

There was also the *COAG National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities* announced in 2009, however, the Auditor-General found that the Strategy was “*constrained by a lack of dedicated funding and the generally limited engagement from the states and territories*”. It concluded that overall, the Strategy “*has made only a limited contribution to food security as activities were not completed as planned*” (ANAO, 2014).

In order to see real change, there needs to be a commitment by the Australian Government to provide dedicated funding, leadership and collaboration to address food insecurity. To demonstrate this commitment, Miwatj MHAC proposes the government provides an annual report on the outcomes of this Inquiry for the next five years.

CONCLUSION

Miwatj would appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee to elaborate on our position as outlined above. We also welcome a visit to East Arnhem Land by Committee members so they can see first-hand the challenges that remote Indigenous communities face when it comes to food prices and food security.

REFERENCES

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