

Tangentyere Council Executive

Response to the Report of the NTER Review Board

13 November 2008

Tangentyere Council Executive welcomes the release of the NTER Review Board report and generally supports the recommendations made. There are some items that the Executive would like to see some further clarification and others that need some additions. These are outlined as below;

OVERARCHING

Tangentyere Executive believes that the NTER directly targets people due to their race and where they choose to live and will continue to do so until the Racial Discrimination Act is fully reinstated and compulsory income management is either abolished or extended under the same principals to the broader Australian community.

In many communities there is a deep belief that the measures introduced by the Australian Government under the NTER were a collective imposition based on race. There is a strong sense of injustice that Aboriginal people and their culture have been seen as exclusively responsible for problems within their communities that have arisen from decades of cumulative neglect by governments in failing to provide the most basic standards of health, housing, education and ancillary services enjoyed by the wider Australian community. Support for the positive potential of NTER measures has been dampened and delayed by the manner in which they were imposed. (Northern Territory Emergency Response. Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008 p9)

WELFARE REFORM AND EMPLOYMENT

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this however we wish to submit further comments on the following:

Income management

The Executive agrees that voluntary quarantining of income should be available to community members who so choose and for specific purposes as determined by them. Members of the Tangentyere Council Executive, their families and other residents of Town Camps are tired of and disappointed with being branded as poor parents and/or having poor parenting skills. They believe that the blanket application of income management only serves to reinforce long standing negative historical perspectives of Aboriginal people. The concept of limited compulsory income management is supported however not until there is some clarification in regard to the ascribed triggers:

- that neglect is recognised and utilised as a key measure under child protection legislation,

- an effective measure of evaluation of school attendance is implemented and assessed and
- what do relevant behaviours encompass, what are the benchmark measures and who will determine these parameters? (e.g. violence, alcohol/substance misuse, gambling)

Until these measures are clearly identified and able to be effectively implemented and evaluated on a broad scale, Tangentyere Executive maintains that compulsory income management be immediately abolished.

In regard to Centrelink field interviews:

- that they are conducted with an appropriate interpreter and where one is unavailable, rescheduled without any penalty for people in receipt of income support,
- where an appeals process is undertaken, that community members are provided representation by an appropriately skilled advocate and an interpreter where needed.

LAW AND ORDER

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this however we wish to submit further comments on this including the need for effective integrated service delivery

Support for night patrols falls under the Law and Order measure. Safe houses fall within a separate measure: Supporting Families. This kind of artificial division reflects divided government agency responsibilities and funding sources. It is a chronic problem in establishing effective integrated services in Aboriginal communities. (Northern Territory Emergency Response. Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008 p10)

Alcohol, drugs and pornography

Tangentyere Executive request further information in regard to:

- why do Town Camps remain prescribed areas if they are to undergo a process of ‘normalisation’ and be developed into other suburbs within the town of Alice Springs?
- if they are to remain as prescribed areas what strengthened measures in relation to alcohol/substance misuse, mental health and policing have been or are to be implemented?

Police

Aboriginal people welcome police stations in communities previously dependent on periodic patrols. They want to work cooperatively with police to build greater security and stability in their homes. Similarly, there is support for measures designed to reduce alcohol-related violence, to increase the quality and availability of housing, to improve the health and wellbeing of communities, to advance early learning and education leading to productive and satisfying employment—these matters are uncontentionous.

(Northern Territory Emergency Response. Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008 p10)

Some suggestions in relation to quality community policing:

- the level of resourcing for police services on town camps be equivalent to those in remote area communities
- community stakeholders be involved in the design and delivery of relevant training and development for police officers prior to their deployment.
- evaluation of the quality and delivery of police services be undertaken on a 12 month basis and involves community representation.
- Increased funding for the Night Patrol so that 2 vehicles are on the road each night, one patrolling the town camps and the other patrolling public spaces and able to back each other up.
- An independent police complaints board be established

ENHANCING EDUCATION

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

IMPROVING CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this however we wish to submit further comments on the following:

- that the tripartite collaborative arrangement extend it's membership to include representation from consumers and nominated non health service providers.
- An overall review of the health framework agreement between the Commonwealth and NT Governments and medical services. This would ensure that consumers are involved in the design and implementation of health service planning including service delivery in a comprehensive primary health care environment. e.g paramedic attached to night patrol.

HOUSING AND LAND REFORM

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this however we wish to submit further comments on the following:

- Urgent repairs to infrastructure – Cyclical repairs and maintenance will be required throughout the life of new and upgraded houses to be more carefully and comprehensively considered to avoid an 'ad hoc' approach and to ensure funds are targeted and well spent. This to be funded at the equivalent level as per NT Government public housing rates.
- Community cleanup program – that this now be extended to Town Camps

COORDINATION

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

RE-ENGAGEMENT

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

GOVERNANCE, AGREEMENT MAKING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this.

Accumulated neglect by governments over 30 years has resulted in situations within some remote communities that could benefit from the same disciplined, professional approach that Australia brings to international programs of reconstruction and community development.

That is not limited to providing the hardware of a healthy community: adequate housing, infrastructure and schools. It requires the building of effective social and civil institutions that express the values and beliefs of the community. It requires investment in local skills and capacities and leadership. Essentially, it is about growing both the skeletal structure and the soft tissue of a community.

If it is to work, community development must be led by the community and partnered by government. That is the basis for a new relationship. (Northern Territory Emergency Response. Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008 p8)

DATA and EVALUATION

Tangentyere Executive agrees with the points made in relation to this however we wish to submit further comments on the following:

- An evidence based approach has always been the Federal Government's agenda and we at the Executive firmly believe and recommend that information sourced from grassroots organisations and services is essential.
- The development of an integrated information system needs to be done in conjunction with community people and researchers.

In conclusion Tangentyere Executive fully supports the comments and recommendations in regard to the practical application of the community development process.

Robust frameworks, adequate resources, functional governance and professional capabilities are necessary—but without the genuine engagement and active participation of the local community, deep seated change will not be achieved. It must be nurtured within the community. That is the lesson of the Intervention. (Northern Territory Emergency Response. Report of the NTER Review Board, October 2008 p11)

