



ACT | Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander  
Elected Body

Dr Chris Bourke MLA  
Chairperson  
Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
GPO Box 1020,  
Canberra, ACT 2601

Dear Dr Bourke

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body [Elected Body] has the pleasure in providing the Standing Committee for Health, Ageing, Community and Social Service its submission on the Inquiry on the ACT Public Service (ACTPS) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment. Since the ACTPS Employment Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People was launched by the former Chief Minister in conjunction with the Elected Body on 12 April 2011, it seems to have been more of a 'shelf warmer' than being embedded into normal practice for the ACTPS.

The ACTPS Employment Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People came out of a recommendation from the Elected Body's First Report. In our Second Report we recommended that *'ACT Government agencies have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competency Program for all managers and frontline staff'*. The ACT Government Response to that report stated that *'there is a commitment under the Employment Strategy for cultural competency training for managers and staff. Directorates will report on this through the ACT Public Service Respect, Equity and Diversity Framework Annual Progress Report to the Chief Minister'*.

In our Second Report we also recommended that *'that ACT agencies appropriately support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees in their placement to reduce the number of trainees not finishing their traineeship'*.

At the Elected Body's Estimates style Hearings on 23 and 24 April 2013, we asked each of the ACT Government Directorates on their performance against the Employment Strategy. We noted between June 2010 and June 2012, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within the ACTPS increased from 0.9 per cent (176) to 1 per cent (224), an increase of 48 personnel.

Initiatives utilised by agencies as reported in the Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate's Agency Survey include:

- Seven agencies reporting being involved in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traineeship overseen by the Community Services Directorate (CSD); and
- Four Directorates reporting providing Work Experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Superficially, the figures presented to the Elected Body, showed progress but following our detailed questioning there were apparent issues with these figures. Of particular concern to the Elected Body through analysis undertaken on our behalf the following became apparent:

- 33% of all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples employed by the ACT PS were temporary;
- 82% of all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT PS were employed at the ASO6 equivalent level or below as opposed to 74% for non-Indigenous people;
- That until recently with the establishment of the new Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs there were no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Senior Executive Officers;
- Only 0.4% of all the Senior Officer level or equivalent positions were filled Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders;
- That there are very few Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander graduates entering into the ACT PS since the Strategy has been in effect; and
- That there is a lack of strategic direction on the retention and advancement rates, career and development strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

At the Hearings in April this year, the Head of Service committed that the ACT Government would be making a concerted effort in attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates to the ACTPS. In addition his Directorate officials also committed to have a *"cadetship program up and running for next year, if not later this year"*.

The attraction and retention of professional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples has been a priority of the Elected Body in its discussions with the ACT Government as well as senior officials. The previous Chief Minister at the launch of the Employment Strategy stated that he wanted and needed *"the expertise and insights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can provide, in order to improve government policies and services"*. The Elected Body has not seen any substantial change in positions available or how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recruited, to make such a difference.

The former Chief Minister announced at the time of the launch the availability of \$50,000 for 20 learning and development places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and people with a disability. To our knowledge the success or continuation of this program has not yet been reported against.

Of particular concern for the Elected Body are sustainable career pathways for those who entered the ACTPS through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traineeship Program. The Elected Body has also noted from its community connections and consultations, that many of those former trainees are 'trapped' in the lower levels of the public service. We are deeply

concerned at the lack of aspirational career paths and development position levels these mostly young people were recruited to.

The Elected Body would like to see an employment program that is able to skill those at entry level to be equipped to advance to the higher ranks in the Public Service. Those who enter into trainee positions that are outside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traineeship Program have not generally been offered full time employment and career prospects. The Elected Body know of several who on completion of their traineeship have had to find stable employment in differing fields outside of the area they were trained.

The Elected Body would like to see:

- All ACT Directorates with their own strategies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment; articulating how they will attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through targeted and general recruitment;
- Attracting Indigenous candidates for the graduate and cadetship program;
- Development of career pathways and clearly articulated development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
- Suggestion of secondment opportunities, for staff to move into other directorates, and for community in to ACT Government directorates;
- Targeted promotion of the ACT Government as a career choice, utilising current staff and real stories of success;
- The development and implementation of 'Cross Cultural' training, uniformly across all ACT Government agencies;
- Reportable targets including salary levels and permanency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander officers reported not only in the "State of the Service Report" but accurately by ACT Government agencies in their annual reports;
- Conducting staff surveys to gauge interest and concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
- Analysis of staff working in ACT Government, progression/promotion, development opportunities, retention and separations;
- Ensuring exit surveys are conducted to gain valuable feedback that will inform practices and targeted efforts for attraction and retention;
- Evaluations of employment programs used to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff including the components of career pathways, mentoring, supervisor/manager responsibilities and effectiveness as well as tracking separations; and
- A recommitment to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and a commitment from government on the economic participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body stand ready and willing to work with the ACT Government and the ACT Public Service to assist. On behalf of our constituents we strive to provide quality advice to Government on how to attract, retain and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to enhance their economic position in the ACT Public Service. We are often frustrated that there seems minimal consultation and consideration of our views.

In summation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body is pleased that the ACTPS has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy but know that it has lacked the impetus to make the changes that were envisaged when launch in 2011.

We would like to discuss this face to face with the Standing Committee in the near future, so please don't hesitate to contact me through the ATSIEB Secretariat at [ATSIEB@act.gov.au](mailto:ATSIEB@act.gov.au).

Warm Regards



Rod Little

Chairperson

16 August 2013