

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS COUNCIL

**Dr Sue Gordon AM
Chairperson**

Ms Karen A. Flick
Manager
Indigenous Telecommunications Section
Department of Information Technology and the Arts
38 Sydney Avenue
Forrest ACT 2603

Dear Karen

Backing Indigenous Ability Discussion Paper

Thank-you for providing the National Indigenous Council (NIC) with the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper produced by the Department of Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) entitled “Backing Indigenous Ability: Delivering a Comprehensive Telecommunications Package in Indigenous Communities”. I circulated the paper to my fellow NIC members and invited them to comment. A number of them have carefully considered the discussion paper, as have I, and as such my comments reflect the views of the NIC.

In essence, the key findings of the discussion paper highlight what the NIC and Indigenous people have been saying for some years now, that is, the requirement for access to basic telephone services which most Australians take for granted. We therefore welcome the fact that the need for basic telephone services was reflected as the highest priority in the paper’s key findings (page 4, first dot point).

We note that the key findings also record the role of more advanced telecommunication services to support internet access and videoconferencing as crucial in enabling remote communities to enhance economic development and develop self sufficiency.

We have emphasised in our discussions with the Attorney General’s Department the role of video conferencing in line with recommendation 3.3.3 “for example, to access justice services, specifically those to do with juvenile court hearings, and access to health services”. I note, however, that justice issues are not mentioned in the key findings listed on page 4 - the fourth dot point refers to email and videoconferencing facilities providing a platform for community issues (including politics, health issues and education.....). You may wish to consider adding law and justice to this list.

The discussion paper’s key findings highlight another issue that the NIC is keenly aware of and that is the issue of training. The third dot point notes that “the greater availability and use of community facilities has improved the quality and quantity of interactions and developed personal and learning capabilities”.

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In the NIC's collective experience, the low utilisation of any modern technology in remote communities tends to be due to the lack of expert training provided to communities and the need for ongoing training over a longer period of time. There is a clear need for initial training following the introduction of technology and, as people become more proficient at using the technology, for ongoing training to ensure that interest is maintained as skills are enhanced. In time, the NIC would expect that community members would themselves become the trainers.

I trust the above comments are helpful in enabling you to finalise the discussion paper and issue the report. More importantly we hope that sufficient momentum will be generated to address the report's key findings, which will contribute to improving communications for remote Indigenous communities.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sue Gordon AM
19 May 2006

cc NIC Members

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