

## Local Government Indigenous Employment Program Green Paper

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*First, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians on whose land this meeting takes place - the Ngunnawal people - and to pay my respects to their Elders past and present.*

The late Patricia Dixon was the first Indigenous Australian woman elected to local parliament in New South Wales and the first Indigenous Australian woman federal candidate for the ALP. In a speech she gave in 1994 at the International Union of Local Authorities in Toronto, Canada, when she was a councillor, she said:

Local Government is the place where change can happen.

It is the place where big issues at the national level have their base.

Local communities are where Aboriginal people meet white people. It is the place where we talk, play sport, shop, and have a laugh and a cry.

What is important is that Aboriginal people get to the starting line...<sup>1</sup>

And later, in a speech to the Australian Reconciliation Convention in 1997:

The sort of leadership local government can show is a commitment to working co-operatively with Aboriginal people. We see harmony where councils consult effectively with their Indigenous residents, listen to us, respect our opinions, involve us in committees of council, demonstrate support for our endeavours, and respect our culture. This helps us respond with the generosity of our people."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The late Pat Dixon in a speech to International Union of Local Authorities Congress, Toronto, Canada, made in 1994 when she was a councillor

<sup>2</sup> The late Pat Dixon in a speech to the Australian Reconciliation Convention, Melbourne, 1997

## Closing the Gap through 'Place-based' Employment

As a major 'place-based' employer with national reach, local government is uniquely positioned to play a greater role in providing Indigenous employment opportunities, while at the same time alleviating the impacts on the sector of skills shortages and an ageing workforce.

The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) is facilitating the roll out of a national employment program to encourage Indigenous workforce participation in the sector. The proposed program is a response to an urgent need to increase the pool of available talent for Local Government. In late May a draft Local Government Indigenous Employment Program Green Paper will be circulated to the sector and other key stakeholders for comment. The subsequent feedback will be incorporated into a white paper which will be used as the foundation document for funding applications for a coordinated and streamlined national approach – to add value and not duplicate state or local effort – and for demonstration projects in critical areas of need.

In the process of developing this discussion paper, consultation has taken place with Indigenous leaders, including Indigenous Chief Executive Officers in Local Government, key people involved in Indigenous employment programs, and other stakeholders, where time and their availability have allowed. The purpose of the discussion paper is to commence a conversation on the potential for the development and implementation of a Local Government Indigenous Employment Program.

The Program Objectives of the draft *LG Indigenous Employment Program Green Paper* are:

**To access** an 'untapped' talent pool as the next phase in the war for talent is just around the corner;

**To provide** additional talent to work in local government to alleviate skills shortages and the ageing workforce crisis that is due to impact the sector severely from 2011;

**To create** an employment program that will work with 565 councils to increase the number of Indigenous people working in Local Government;

**To provide** secure and sustainable 'place-based' employment opportunities to Indigenous people;

**To advocate and promote** the employment of Indigenous people by Local Government at least at a rate that reflects the local Indigenous population ratio.

**To supply** the sector with a framework, guidelines and best practice examples to encourage local implementation; and

**To deliver** LG Indigenous Employment Program demonstration projects with real and meaningful outcomes to guide the way for a national rollout.

## **The Workforce of the Future**

The ageing workforce crisis is looming.

### **The non-Indigenous Australian workforce is getting older ...**

- Approximately 2 of every 5 workers are aged 45 years or older;
- Around half of the workforce in agriculture, forestry and fishing, education, health and community services are aged over 45 years;
- The median age of the workforce in 2006 was 40 years.<sup>3</sup>

### **... while the Indigenous population is getting younger ...**

- The Indigenous population is growing and is younger than the non-Indigenous population. In 2006, 38% of Indigenous people were under 15 years, compared to 19% of non-Indigenous people, and
- Only 1% of the Indigenous population was over 75 years, compared with 6% of the non-Indigenous population.
- 32% of Indigenous people live in major cities and 43% in regional areas.

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<sup>3</sup> Ivan Neville, Branch Manager, Labour Supply and Skills Branch, DEEWR, National LG Skills Forum, Feb 2009

- 25% of Indigenous people live in remote and very remote areas, compared with 2% of non-Indigenous people.<sup>4</sup>
- If present levels of fertility and mortality continue, there will be 1 million Indigenous Australians by 2040.<sup>5</sup>

**... and the fastest rate of growth is projected for the urban Indigenous population.**

- In the 10 years to 2016 alone, the Indigenous population in Australia's main cities could grow from about 164,000 to 220,000.
- This equates to a growth rate of almost 3 per cent a year, which far outpaces growth rates for the Indigenous population nationally (2 per cent a year) and for the non-Indigenous population in the main cities (1.5 per cent).<sup>6</sup>

**With a projected population of one million by 2040, the Indigenous workforce will be the workforce of the future.**

### **Change the Value Proposition**

There are many examples to be inspired by, and to use as the basis for new approaches to ensure successful outcomes. At the October 2009 Enterprise World Forum, Adrian Appo from Ganbina – the Koori Economic Employment and Training Agency Inc – spoke on the *Closing the Indigenous Economic Gap* of the importance of changing the value proposition.

We started to focus on the issue, not the solution ...

**We changed the value proposition from liability to asset.**

Education retention for our Indigenous students is now around 90% (compared with 20%), and our Indigenous employment participation rate is 90% ...<sup>7</sup>

In addition, the Local Government Indigenous Employment Program will need to pay attention

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<sup>4</sup> *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2009 Fact Sheet – The Indigenous Population*

<sup>5</sup> *Specific plan needed to close the gap for urban Aborigines*, Nicholas Biddle, research fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU - SMH 7 August 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/nwdycs>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Appo's presentation on *Closing the Indigenous Economic Gap* panel at Social Enterprise World Forum, Melbourne 6-8 October 2009. Ganbina is based in Goulburn Valley, Victoria.

to metropolitan Indigenous communities as well as remote communities as the urban issues are considerable:

Nicholas Biddle, research fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), ANU was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last year:

To close the gaps, all levels of government will have to have one eye on remote Australia with the other on indigenous gaps in the cities ...

Although large in number compared with their remote counterparts, urban Indigenous Australians make up only a fraction of the population of the city or town in which they live. This makes targeting the employment, education, housing and health services required to reduce socio-economic disparities extremely difficult...

In urban Australia especially, the issue is not whether jobs and schools are available, the greater constraint is the ability of the indigenous population to take advantage of the opportunities that are available...

A specific strategy is needed to bring about sustained improvements in socioeconomic outcomes for urban indigenous Australians, something the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has recognised.<sup>8</sup>

### **100,000 Indigenous jobs over 10 years**

One of the six ambitious targets the Australian Government has set to close the gap is “to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade ...

Indigenous unemployment is three times the rate for other Australians. Halving the gap within ten years means that an additional 100,000 Indigenous Australians will need to find and keep jobs...

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<sup>8</sup> *Specific plan needed to close the gap for urban Aborigines*, Nicholas Biddle, research fellow, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU - SMH 7 August 2009 <http://tinyurl.com/nwdydc>

In the private sector, the Government is supporting the Australian Employment Covenant's target of creating 50,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians with essential training and work-readiness programs.

What we need are new approaches to entrenched problems and innovative answers to questions like:

- *What can local government contribute to help achieve the COAG targets, including the target to halve the gap in Indigenous employment outcomes within a decade?*
  - *How can the Australian Government work better with local government to close the gap?*
  - *How can local government support Indigenous initiative to forge new relationships, including with the corporate sector and broader community?*
    - *foster the leadership of Indigenous elders, women, men and youth?*
    - *celebrate local achievements and share a positive vision with Indigenous people?*
    - *better target gaps in services and infrastructure, particularly in remote Indigenous communities?"*
- Australian Council for Local Government background paper, November 2008 meeting<sup>9</sup>

The LG Indigenous Employment Program aims to deliver real, meaningful and achievable outcomes, avoiding the all too common syndrome, aptly described by Indigenous author and Miles Franklin Award winner Alexis Wright, of planning "another process to look at a process of how to be involved in a process for anything to get done."<sup>10</sup>

We look forward to your input after late May, when the LG Indigenous Employment Program Green Paper will be circulated.

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<sup>9</sup> Australian Council for Local Government background paper, November 2008 meeting.  
[http://www.aclg.gov.au/media\\_centre/backgrounders/files/indigenous\\_engagement.pdf](http://www.aclg.gov.au/media_centre/backgrounders/files/indigenous_engagement.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Alexis Wright remembers Oodgeroo Noonucal, *Overland* magazine 2009