



# Apmer Aharreng-arenykenh Aknganenty Aboriginal Corporation

## Feedback to the Forrest Report

Apmer Aharreng-arenykenh Aknganenty welcomes the self-reliance theme within Andrew Forrest's report into Indigenous training and employment.

In particular, we welcome the recognition within the report of the importance of **local decision making** and **cultural authority to set and enforce norms** and we call on the Commonwealth Government to negotiate governance arrangements with the Alyawarr nation around these principles. Indeed, the Alyawarr nation had been seeking regional governance arrangements for some time.

A departure from the paternalistic and dishonest approach taken with the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* on Alyawarr Lands is crucial. As highlighted in the Forrest Report, generational welfare dependency will continue if the following barriers are not removed:

1. reliance by governments on more public servants and service providers to make the necessary changes rather than empowering first Australians themselves;
2. a lack of coordination and collaboration in Commonwealth and state and territory policies and programs and how they are implemented;
3. an almost exclusive focus by governments on treating the symptoms of entrenched disadvantage, rather than preventing it, so success is limited and very expensive;
4. drawn-out approaches, such as targets to only halve employment disparity, therefore extending the trajectory of cost, lost opportunity and misery to individuals and to the country;
5. a lack of accountability for results, with service delivery and welfare systems that entrench passive income lifestyles for providers and recipients.

Alyawarr culture remains strong and we do not face many of the social problems that some other Aboriginal peoples have been confronting.

Our maintenance of outstations and the general absence of the influence of missionaries are widely recognized as factors that have contributed to our high level of social functioning. The problems that we face are as a result of lack of resources and inept bureaucracy, not social disintegration.

All that the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* has done for us is increase bureaucracy and despair. It was announced in 2007 by the former Howard Commonwealth Government on the back of claims that pedophile rings were operating in Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory.

The Intervention was then imposed on all Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory in 2008.

Furthermore, the three key pieces of legislation that gave life to the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* were suspended from the operation of that part of the *Racial Discrimination Act* which is concerned with the prohibition of racial discrimination. The *Northern Territory Emergency Response*, was precipitated by the *Little Children are Sacred* report of 2007. There is no denying that drastic action in many parts of the Northern Territory was and is warranted, but as United Nations Special Rapporteur James Anaya observed in his 2010 report on the situation of indigenous peoples in Australia, such action need not have been racially discriminatory, nor introduced without regard to Aboriginal peoples' human rights.

The recent development of income management programs within both the Cape York trial and the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* provides a poignant contrast of approaches to working with Aboriginal peoples.

Whereas the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* was imposed by the Commonwealth Government without any institutional Aboriginal support, the Cape York trial developed as a partnership between its four participating Aboriginal communities, the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and the Queensland and Commonwealth governments.

A key question to be asked is 'what outcomes could be achieved if suitable governance arrangements were to be negotiated with existing Aboriginal institutions, traditional or otherwise, through instruments such as domestic treaties?'

The blanket imposition of the *Northern Territory Emergency Response* across Aboriginal lands within the Northern Territory demeans all Aboriginal peoples living on them, including us Alyawarr.

Our Alyawarr leaders have agreed to continue on this path to establish a regional authority in Alyawarr Language Region and to work in partnerships and mentoring arrangements with Northern Territory and Federal governments along with developing the region to establish a central location to set up business and tourism partnerships which we still see as the only way to create training and job opportunity for our people and to keep our people on country. Alyawarr leaders are keen to sit down and talk with the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments to establish regional governance arrangements.

Recognition of the importance of local decision making and cultural authority to set and enforce norms offers real hope to us and we are keen to step up.

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**Spokesman**

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