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**Submission to Senate Select Committee
On Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
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Subject: *The need for a reliable and ongoing bus service from Yalata to Ceduna and return.*

This relates to the Committee's inquiry into

1. the impact of state and territory government policies on the well being of regional and remote Indigenous communities and
2. the health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote communities.

Yalata is an Aboriginal community about 200 kilometres west of Ceduna off the Eyre Highway that traverses the Nullarbor Plain from South Australia to Western Australia.

Background:

In 2005 the Australian Government provided \$50,000 to trial a weekly bus service between Yalata and Ceduna. *Refer to Attachment 1.*

At the end of the trial, \$100,000 was allocated from the SA Department for Families and Community for 12 months for a bus service. This was put to tender and a local operator, Mr Don Saltmarsh, was successful. Mr Saltmarsh is well respected amongst the Aboriginal community and has built an excellent rapport with families. He ran a 46 seater bus in a regular scheduled service successfully for almost 2 years. The service was reduced from 2 trips to one per week in the final 12 months. He maintained accurate records of passenger numbers and any incidents/problems that occurred during his runs. He averaged 30 to 40 passengers per trip.

The service ran successfully for the duration of the funding, customers were willing to pay the fare and behaved in an orderly manner on the bus. The bus schedule into Ceduna and the return trip to Yalata were time linked to the intrastate Stateliner service to ensure

no customers were inconvenienced and they were also able to access medical and personal services. (Stateliner is a private bus operation running many schedules in rural and regional South Australia connecting with Adelaide.)

When the funding for Mr Saltmarsh's contract expired, (despite lobbying for its continuation), a meeting was held at Yatala in September 2006 to establish a plan to maintain the bus service. The outcome was that the Community would run the service itself, utilising a 22 seater bus owned by the Yalata Community Council but in need of repairs.

- Department for Families & Community (DFC) contributed \$3000 toward the cost of repairs. This was a one-off payment as previous available funding had been committed to other priorities.
- Indigenous Coordination Centre contributed \$50,000 per annum. This funding was to cover repairs, maintenance, running costs and associated staff salary.
- The distribution of funds and organisation of the service was to be placed with the community.

It appears that the service was grossly under-funded, even set up to fail, when one considers that \$53,000 was virtually half of the \$100,000 funding for 2005, and a third of that announced by the SA State Government in October 2007 of \$150,000 per annum for a twice-weekly independently operated bus service from Alice Springs to Marla and the APY Lands.

Mr Saltmarsh was advised that his contract would not be extended and DFC gave the service to the community to operate. This had been tried previously without success. I was advised that the community operated service ran for a total of three days before the bus was extensively vandalised – all windows smashed, interior upholstery slashed and the roof “caved in”.

By November 2007 the Yalata/Ceduna community bus was still not reinstated and that is believed to be the position at 28 April 2008. There were initial delays with repairs to the bus after the vandalism due to unsigned bureaucratic paper work.

I understand that in July 2007 South Australia's Public Transport Division called for submissions from interested contractors to supply a similar bus service from Alice Springs to Marla and the APY Lands.

This raised the question why an independent service for Yalata was not funded and yet the Marla/APY Lands received funding for an independent State Government backed service. The philosophical reasons were the same for both services with similar distances travelled and yet the highly successful service previously provided at Yalata was not funded beyond 12 months while the contract for APY Lands clearly stated that the operator would be given a 12 months contract “with the potential to renew the contract for a further 2 years.”

Problems arising where no bus service operates:

I received information from a concerned grain transporter who, on his frequent trips to the silos at Ceduna, dealt with an increasing number of incidents where he had to swerve his heavy vehicle to avoid Aboriginal persons lying in the middle of the road or walking on the verge of the road in an intoxicated state. These instances had become virtually non-existent when a reliable bus service operated. Not only was the pedestrian at risk but the driver was also placed at risk when trying to avoid a tragedy with a fully loaded grain truck. This was just one example of many negative community disturbances and community problems in the Ceduna township that a reliable bus service alleviated or removed.

Many of the problems occurred because people coming to Ceduna for shopping etc could not get back to their homes often leading to family conflict and overcrowding of living arrangements in Ceduna.

Over the years Ceduna community and business owners have voiced their concerns relating to transients who were unable to return to their own communities and the associated problems that were being experienced in relation to criminal and social issues. The regular bus service greatly reduced these incidents however problems are again coming to the fore and causing considerable expense and ill will.

A regular service saves huge expenses and trauma in related community and family areas and these savings should be taken into account.

I submit these examples to highlight the need for a reliable bus service to be provided for the benefit of regional indigenous communities.

Outcome:

A regular and sustainable bus service to regional and remote communities is a matter of social justice and is essential for the health and well-being of the community.

Enclosures:

Attachment 1 and Attachment 2 from the Anangu Lands Paper Tracker

Yalata: regular bus service to and from Ceduna

1.3

Summary

The need for the Yalata community to have access to safe, reliable and affordable public transport is long-standing and well-documented.[i] In March 2005, the Federal Government funded a six-month trial of a weekly bus service operating between Yalata and Ceduna. Additional state funding allowed the service to operate for another year. Since December 2006, the people of Yalata have not had access to any regular public transport to and from Ceduna.

The Paper Trail

In 1997, a South Australian report into "Aboriginal road safety issues" highlighted the pressing need for people living in Yalata to have access to appropriate transport services when journeying to and from Ceduna to reduce the risk of drink driving and pedestrian injury.[ii]

According to the report, the significant distance between the two communities - around two hundred kilometres - encourages people to take whatever transport options are available to them no matter how unsafe or unreliable they may be. The report states:

The provision of a community bus service would ensure a safer alternative mode of transport for people ... to access medical, shopping, entertainment and other facilities not available in the remote communities. Such a service may also prevent intoxicated pedestrians from being hit by passing motor vehicles while attempting to walk home along major roads and reduce the need for community members to purchase the cheap vehicles that are so often unroadworthy.[iii]

In March 2005, the Australian Government provided \$50,000 to trial a weekly bus service between Yalata and Ceduna. The funding was provided under a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) that aimed to "improve Yalata Community members' access to a range of services in Ceduna" and reduce the "number of people who have to remain in Ceduna ... due to lack of transport." [iv]

Promoting the SRA, the Federal Government stated:

As Yalata has no medical, legal or similar services, the Australian Government will ... fund a six-month trial of a bus service to Ceduna. The community will develop a set of bus travel rules, the police will train and support bus marshals, and the CDEP will provide bus drivers and marshals.[v]

The trial service commenced operations on 19 April 2005.[vi]

At the end of the six-month trial, the State Department for Families and Communities "agreed to provide funding to the value of \$100,000 for twelve months to allow the bus service to continue in the short term."^[vii] According to the Department, this funding was provided on the understanding that local government would "explore alternative ongoing funding sources beyond December 2006."^[viii]

In June 2006, all parties involved with the bus service reviewed its performance. They assessed the service "as being a major success" and noted the following highlights:

women and children from Yalata were able to access medical practitioners and other health services in Ceduna on a regular basis,

people from Yalata were able to purchase fresh fruit, vegetables and groceries at Ceduna supermarkets,

people from Yalata, particularly women, participated in Ceduna-based activities, and

a reduction in the number of people stranded in Ceduna due to a lack of transport. ^[ix]

On 28 September 2006, State and Federal Government representatives met with Yalata Community Council to discuss "possible funding sources and options" for continuing the service "on a long term basis."^[x]

Prior to the meeting three options were under consideration:

1. that Yalata Community use a community-owned bus to establish its own bus service,
2. that "funding be sourced from Commonwealth and State Government agencies to maintain the existing contractual arrangements", and
3. that the service "link into bus services operated by other Aboriginal communities."^[xi]

After considering various options, the meeting decided:

"that Yalata Community Council would obtain the necessary quotes to identify the costs associated with repairing the existing bus up to the level required of the Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure";

"the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination would identify possible Commonwealth funding to assist with the repair costs"; and

"the Yalata Community Council would identify costs required to operate the bus service on an ongoing basis and meet further with relevant parties to identify possible funding sources."^[xii]

In December 2006, the State Government's 12-month funding commitment came to an end and the weekly-bus service stopped running.^[xiii]

The Paper Tracker understands that the shift to a low-cost, community-controlled service has not been successful.

In April 2007, the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (Hon J Weatherill MP) noted that the community-owned bus had "been in the repair shop in Ceduna for at least five weeks."^[xiv]

As of 6 November 2007, the community-run service had not been operating for ten months.^[xv] At that time, the Member for Flinders (Mrs Liz Penfold MP) asked the Minister to consider providing funds for a private contractor to run a service similar to one funded on the APY Lands.^[xvi]

On 20 December 2007, in response to the Member for Flinders' request, the Minister stated that the Ceduna/Yalata service would "be self operated and managed by Yalata Community Council". The Minister also indicated that:

Yalata community's bus "still requires repairs" but that these "should be carried out some time this week,"

the service was expected to resume "not long after repairs are complete," and

discussions were "taking place with SA Police to trial a community constable being present on the bus service to deal with any misbehaviour, to support Anangu with catching the return trip from Ceduna ... and to detect and confiscate any alcohol attempted to be taken back to Yalata."^[xvii]

The Minister also stated that a West Coast Senior Officers Group would be established "in early to mid 2008" and that this would lead to the development of "longer term coordinated solutions ... for a range of challenging areas in the Eyre Peninsula, including the Yalata Bus Service."^[xviii]

The Paper Tracker understands that as of 28 April 2008, the bus service has not been operating for more than twelve months.

The Paper Tracker will ask a number of State and Federal departments and agencies for information on their efforts to fund and re-establish a Yalata-Ceduna bus service. Information provided by those departments and agencies will be incorporated into this page as soon as it is received.

The Paper Tracker strives to provide accurate and up-to-date information. It

believes the above account to be a true and fair representation of what has happened. We will remove any inaccurate information as soon as it is brought to our attention. Please contact us if you have additional information on this matter or can provide us with an update.

- [i] Holder, R. 26 July 1997, "Eyre Hwy 'a danger' to Aborigines", *The Advertiser*; Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (SA) Inc. 1997, "Aboriginal Road Safety Issues," Report for Transport SA.
- [ii] Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (SA) Inc. 1997, "Aboriginal Road Safety Issues," Report for Transport SA, p30.
- [iii] Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (SA) Inc. 1997, "Aboriginal Road Safety Issues," Report for Transport SA, p30 and 41.
- [iv] "A safer community - Yalata" SRA document," 2005, Shared Responsibility Agreement, Australian Government, AMIS Agreement No. 292, p1.
- [v] Australian Government. 2005, "Shared Responsibility Fact Sheet: Yalata, South Australia" Available at:
http://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra/sa/fact_sheets/sa04.html#sra. Accessed 23 April 2008.
- [vi] Helps, Y. 15 October 2007. Email to J. Nicholls. The Federal Department for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs subsequently paid for a formal review of the SRA to be undertaken by Andrew H. West and Associates. See: Parliament of Australia, May 2007, "Community Affairs Committee. Examination of Additional Estimates 2006-2007. Additional Information Received. Consolidated Volume 3. Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio. FaCSIA Outcomes: Cross Outcome, Outcomes 1 & 2." Attachment A, p37.
- [vii] Vardon, S. 25 September 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [viii] Vardon, S. 25 September 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [ix] Vardon, S. 25 September 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [x] Vardon, S. 25 September 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia. Also: Vardon, S. 14 November 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [xi] Vardon, S. 25 September 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [xii] Vardon, S. 14 November 2006. Letter to Aboriginal Lands Parliamentary Standing Committee, Parliament of South Australia.
- [xiii] Saltmarsh, D. 23 April 2007. Information provided during conversation

with J Nicholls.

[xiv] Weatherill, J. 21 April 2007, Letter to L Penfold.

[xv] Penfold, L. 6 November 2007, Letter to J Weatherill.

[xvi] Penfold, L. 6 November 2007, Letter to J Weatherill.

[xvii] Weatherill, J. 20 December 2007, Letter to L Penfold.

[xviii] Weatherill, J. 20 December 2007, Letter to L Penfold.

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Attachment 2.

APY Lands: public transport bus service

Summary

In 2004, the South Australian Government allocated funding for a public transport bus service on the APY Lands. In July 2007, plans to establish a twice-weekly return service from Alice Springs to Marla via main communities on the eastern-side of the APY Lands were released. The Government had hoped to have the service up and running by October 2007.

The Paper Trail

The need to improve Aboriginal Australian's access to safe, reliable and affordable transportation is long-standing and well-documented.^[i]

In 2002, a review of the delivery of services to people with disabilities on the APY Lands noted:

The problem of mobility is a pressing need in such a vast area with no public transport and limited private transport, very little of which is appropriate for transporting people with a physical disability.^[ii]

More recently, in May 2007, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported:

- Indigenous people are more likely than non-Indigenous to have difficulty getting to places due to a lack of access to a motor vehicle or public transport, and
- the Indigenous households most likely to be without a vehicle are those in remote and very remote areas.^[iii]

The South Australian Government committed funding to establish an integrated public transport system on the APY Lands in October 2004.^[iv]

On 24 July 2007, the State's Public Transport Division called for submissions from parties interested in tendering for a contract to run a regular passenger transport service for communities on the APY Lands. Submissions closed on 22 August, with the service due to start operating in October 2007.^[v]

Documentation prepared by the Public Transport Division provides an outline of how the service will run. It indicates that:

- it will be a fixed route service linking communities on the APY Lands with Alice Springs and Marla.^[vi]
- it will run twice a week and may include stops at Indulkana, Mimili, Fregon, Umuwa, Pukatja, and possibly Amata.^[vii]
- the service will have to meet the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.^[viii]
- the maximum fare that an operator will be able to charge for one-way travel "between any of these towns - Alice Springs, Marla, APY Lands" is \$75 concession and \$150 full fare.^[ix]
- the maximum fare that an operator will be able to charge for one-way travel "within the APY Lands" is \$5 concession and \$10 full fare.^[x]

- the operator will be required to employ two full-time travel assistants who "must be APY residents."^[xi] Their main duties will be "to assist passengers in using the services including assisting them on and off the vehicle and [to] provide interpreting services as necessary." Other duties may include assisting with vehicle repairs, freight, ticketing "and creating community awareness of the service."^[xii]
- the vehicle will be "a modern passenger vehicle with air-conditioning,"^[xiii]
- passengers will be allowed to carry up to 20kg of personal luggage free of charge,^[xiv] and
- the operator will be given a 12-month contract, but "with the potential to renew the contract for a further two years."^[xv]

The documentation prepared by the Public Transport Division included the following example of how the twice weekly service might run:

Monday:

departure from Alice Springs 7.00am, travel through APY Lands (excluding western communities), arrive Marla 8.00pm

Tuesday:

departure Marla 7.00am, travel through APY Lands (excluding western communities), arrive Alice Springs 8.00pm.

Thursday:

departure from Alice Springs 7.00am, travel through APY Lands (excluding western communities), arrive Marla 8.00pm

Friday:

departure Marla 7.00am, travel through APY Lands (excluding western communities), arrive Alice Springs 8.00pm.^[xvi]

The State Government has committed \$150,000 per annum towards the costs of operating the bus service. In addition to receiving that funding, the operator will "retain fare revenue and concession reimbursements."^[xvii]

On 9 January 2008, SA Tenders and Contracts advised that a contract for the bus service had not been awarded but that submissions were "currently under consideration."

The Paper Tracker understands that as of 30 March 2008, a contract for the service had still not been awarded and that Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) has suggested some changes to the proposed service which from its perspective would increase employment and economic opportunities for Anangu.^[xviii]

The Paper Tracker will continue to monitor progress on the establishment of the APY public transport bus service.

The Paper Tracker strives to provide accurate and up-to-date information. It believes the above account to be a true and fair representation of what has happened. We will remove any inaccurate information as soon as it is brought to our attention. Please contact us if you have additional information on this matter or can provide us with an update.

[i] See: Australian Bureau of Statistics & Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, ABS 4704.0, p14 & 183; and Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (SA) Inc, 1997, *Aboriginal Road Safety Issues Report*, pvi.

[ii] Tregenza, J. 2002, "Review of the delivery of services to people with disabilities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands," p29.

[iii] Berry, J., Nearmy, D. & Harrison, J. 2007, *Injury of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, due to transport, 1999-00 to 2003-04*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p4

[iv] Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2004, "Taskforce funded projects on the APY Lands," p1.

[v] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p25.

[vi] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p24.

[vii] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p24.

[viii] SA Public Transport Division, 2007, "Notes for the industry briefing session ... held on 3/8/2007 at Alice Springs," p2.

[ix] Government of South Australia, 2007, Draft Service Contract for the Provision of Passenger Transport Services for communities on the APY Lands between the South Australian Minister for Transport and the Chair of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara and The Contractor, p44.

[x] Government of South Australia, 2007, Draft Service Contract for the Provision of Passenger Transport Services for communities on the APY Lands between the South Australian Minister for Transport and the Chair of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara and The Contractor, p44.

[xi] SA Public Transport Division, 2007, "Notes for the industry briefing session ... held on 3/8/2007 at Alice Springs," p2.

[xii] SA Public Transport Division, 2007, "Responses to questions taken on notice at the Industry Briefing," p1.

[xiii] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p23.

[xiv] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p25.

[xv] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p29.

[xvi] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p24.

[xvii] Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure, 2007, "Request for proposal to provide a regular passenger transport service for the communities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands," Government of South Australia, p24.

[xviii] This understanding is based upon the content of emails exchanged with representatives of both the State Department of the Premier and Cabinet and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara in mid March 2008. As of 30 March 2008, the contract for this service was listed as "unassigned" on the SA Tenders and Contracts website.

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