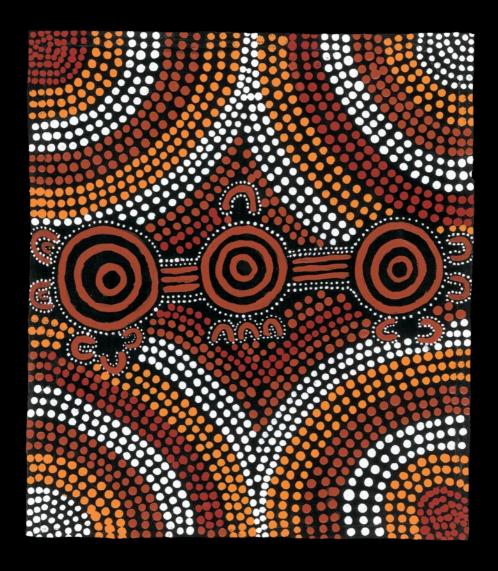
Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred"

In our Law children are very sacred because they carry the two spring wells of water from our country within them



Summary Report
of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry
into the Protection of Aboriginal Children
from Sexual Abuse 2007



Purpose of the Board of Inquiry

The Board of Inquiry was created by the Northern Territory Government in August 2006 to research and report on allegations of sexual abuse of Aboriginal children. The Chief Minister asked the Inquiry to investigate concerns about serious child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.

The Inquiry was established to find better ways to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse.

What the Inquiry was asked to do

The Inquiry looked at the problem of sexual abuse within Aboriginal communities and possible solutions. Rex Wild QC and Pat Anderson co-chaired the Inquiry, assisted by a small team of staff. Rex is a former Northern Territory Director of Public Prosecutions and senior lawyer. Pat is an Alyawarr woman who is well known as a strong supporter of disadvantaged people and has many years experience working with Aboriginal people, especially in Indigenous health.

The Inquiry was asked to:

- study how and why Aboriginal children were being abused, focusing on unreported cases
- identify problems with the way the government responds to and attempts to protect Aboriginal children from abuse
- look at how government departments and other agencies can better work together to protect and help children
- look into how the government can better support and educate Aboriginal communities to prevent child sexual abuse.

In cases of sexual abuse, the child is often removed from the community (to be taken to a place of safety or to be interviewed). This can lead to the child believing they have done something wrong, and make families reluctant to report as it is the child who is removed rather than the alleged perpetrator.

From a submission to the Inquiry

How the Inquiry worked

The Inquiry collected information by listening, learning and drawing on existing knowledge to find better ways to protect Aboriginal children and support their families. Handling such a sensitive issue was challenging for the Board, so they created settings where people felt safe and found it easy to talk.

Travelling all over the Territory, the Inquiry gathered feedback from more than 260 meetings with individuals, agencies and organisations, and visited 45 communities to talk with local people. The Inquiry received 65 written submissions.

An Expert Reference Group was appointed to assist the Inquiry. The Reference Group was an important resource to the Inquiry, offering valuable advice and support.

What the Inquiry learned

The Inquiry gathered and reviewed a vast amount of information that was shaped into 97 recommendations for the Chief Minister. Underlying the Inquiry's findings was the common view that sexual abuse of Aboriginal children is happening largely because of the breakdown of Aboriginal culture and society.

Important points made by the Inquiry included:

- Child sexual abuse is serious, widespread and often unreported.
- Most Aboriginal people are willing and committed to solving problems and helping their children. They are also eager to better educate themselves.
- Aboriginal people are not the only victims and not the only perpetrators of sexual abuse.
- Much of the violence and sexual abuse occurring in Territory communities is a reflection of past, current and continuing social problems which have developed over many decades.
- The combined effects of poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, gambling, pornography, poor education and housing, and a general loss of identity and control have contributed to violence and to sexual abuse in many forms.
- Existing government programs to help Aboriginal people break
 the cycle of poverty and violence need to work better. There is not
 enough coordination and communication between government
 departments and agencies, and this is causing a breakdown in
 services and poor crisis intervention. Improvements in health and
 social services are desperately needed.
- Programs need to have enough funds and resources and be a long-term commitment.

It is impossible to set communities on the path to recovery from the sexual abuse of children without dealing with the basic services and social ills. It is our hope that no Aboriginal child born from this year on will ever suffer sexual abuse.

Rex Wild QC and Pat Anderson, Inquiry Co-Chairs



What the Inquiry recommended

Child sexual abuse is a complex and deep seated problem that requires urgent, dedicated and collective action from the entire community. The Inquiry's recommendations are intended to offer advice to the Government on how it can best support and empower communities to prevent child sexual abuse now and in the future.

Many opportunities for significant change have been put forward. The Board highlighted a number of action areas which hold the key to success.

Education

Education is the key to helping children and communities foster safe, well adjusted families. School is the way to keep future generations of Aboriginal children safe. Getting children to school every day is essential because:

- · children are safe when they are at school
- school is a venue for educating children about child sexual abuse and protective behaviours
- education provides opportunity, empowerment and achievement and offers a way to overcome the social and economic problems which contribute to violence
- children can confide in their teachers.

The Inquiry urged the government to improve Aboriginal education systems, including local language development, to make education more effective for Aboriginal children.

A range of education campaigns

Education campaigns are recommended to inform people about:

- · child sexual abuse and what to do about it
- · mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse
- the impact of alcohol, pornography and gambling on communities, families and children
- the value of education, and encouraging a culture of parental and community commitment to sending children to school.

Alcohol

Alcohol remains the gravest and fastest growing threat to the safety of Aboriginal children. There is a strong association between alcohol abuse, violence and the sexual abuse of children. Alcohol is destroying communities. The Inquiry recommended urgent action be taken to reduce alcohol consumption in Aboriginal communities.

Family and Community Services (FACS) and the Police

Both need to work more closely with each other and with communities. It is important FACS and the Police build the trust of communities so everyone can work together to combat child sexual abuse. The Inquiry has also proposed an Advice Hotline so anyone who is concerned about possible child sexual abuse can call someone for confidential information and advice.

Family support services

Family support services need to be improved, particularly in Aboriginal communities, as this will help to strengthen families and keep children safe and healthy.

Empowerment of Aboriginal communities

Communities can take more control and make decisions about the future. The Inquiry's report suggests ways in which this can happen including the role which men and women can play, the introduction of community justice groups and better dialogue between mainstream society and Aboriginal communities.

Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Inquiry recommends that the government appoint a senior, independent person who can focus on the interests and wellbeing of children and young people, review issues and report to Parliament.

The future

There is hope for safe, happy generations of Aboriginal children provided serious attention is given to the Inquiry's findings and appropriate steps are taken to help communities.



For more information contact

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