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Fostering economic development for Aboriginal people in NSW

NSW Ombudsman

A special report to the NSW Parliament

In a report tabled in Parliament today, the Acting NSW Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, has recommended measures to ensure that Government's efforts to foster economic development for Aboriginal people in NSW are successful.

"This report sets out the reforms we believe are needed to deliver tangible and sustainable improvements for Aboriginal people in NSW," said Professor McMillan. **"Government has already started the important work, but success will depend on the development of a robust and flexible framework, and the appointment of a suitable body to implement the necessary changes."**

The recommendations in the Ombudsman's report are informed by over 10 years of working closely with Aboriginal people to resolve problems with government service delivery, in some of the most disadvantaged communities in NSW. That experience is supplemented by our research and consultations with Aboriginal leaders and business leaders over the past 18 months, as part of our oversight of the OCHRE program in NSW.

OCHRE — *Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Respect, Empowerment* — is the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs.*

"OCHRE's release in 2013 was prompted by two earlier Ombudsman reports," said Professor McMillan. **"In 2012, my office reported to Parliament on our audit of the NSW Interagency plan to tackle child sexual abuse in Aboriginal Communities. In 2011, we reported on the need to do things differently in order to address Aboriginal disadvantage."**

"My intention in making this report is to ensure that my office's insights from working with Aboriginal communities in NSW will inform the important work of the Department of Education (Aboriginal Affairs) this year, as it develops the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework for NSW. That Framework will provide an important platform for addressing disadvantage in Aboriginal communities and for promoting economic independence."

The Ombudsman's 2011 report on addressing Aboriginal disadvantage highlighted the limited success of past government led initiatives intended to increase the economic participation and capacity of Aboriginal people. **"It is timely to remind government now that a strategy such as the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework currently under development is unlikely to be successful without a strong body to implement it,"** said the Acting Ombudsman.

“Accordingly, my report recommends that once the Government adopts the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework, it appoint a suitable entity to deliver the promised reforms,” said Professor McMillan. **“This could be a new entity, or an existing one, as long as it possesses the skills, experience and clout to drive the implementation in partnership with the business community and Aboriginal leaders.”**

“Increasing the economic prosperity of Aboriginal people is critical to improving social outcomes in many areas, such as health, education, child protection and community safety. Economic development is also fundamental to sustaining and renewing Aboriginal culture and language into the future.”

The Ombudsman’s report discusses the key barriers to Aboriginal people successfully participating in the economy. **“It is not enough to simply increase job opportunities. There needs to be a focus on addressing the significant obstacles impeding Aboriginal economic development,”** Professor McMillan said. **“Those barriers include poor educational attainment, comparatively high rates of incarceration, financial exclusion and low rates of home ownership.”**

“It is also important to encourage wealth creation and to assist people to turn their lives around. This can be achieved by support to obtain finance, pay off debts, or participate in small business enterprises,” said the Acting Ombudsman.

“Furthermore, improving the prosperity of Aboriginal people will have a flow on effect for the economy more broadly, through increased tax revenue, reduced government expenditure and increased consumption.”

The Ombudsman’s special report *Fostering economic development for Aboriginal people in NSW* is available on the Ombudsman’s website: www.ombo.gov.nsw.au.

** For more information about OCHRE, go to the website of the NSW Department of Education (Aboriginal Affairs).*