

ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR PALM ISLAND COMMUNITY

Subject

Palm Island Community Company (PICC) - Non Compliance with delivering a service that meets the needs of the Palm Island community.

Purpose

To raise awareness of the Palm Island community concerns regarding PICC functions, its non compliance with its original intentions, PICC ineffective service delivery and the inefficient use of public finances.

Recommendation

The Palm Island community respectfully;

- Reaffirms its right to develop as an autonomous self determining community through the development of its own community model of service provision by Palm Island people;
- Rejects the current model and intentions of the PICC believing it to be a flawed model originating from a process that has misled the Palm Island people, built on pretense and continues to be non transparent and unaccountable to the community;
- Requests the PICC disbanded and removed from the Palm Island community forever and;
- The PICC model not to be imposed on any other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island community in Australia;
- Requests the current funding of PICC including additional funds for training and professional support to be transferred to the Palm Island community to assist the community development of its own service delivery model by the Palm Island community for the Palm Island community.

Background

According to the Palm Island Community Company Annual Report of June 2009, PICC is established under the Corporations Act 2001, (Commonwealth).

- *It is a public company...not for profit organisation... limited by shares and guided by a Shareholders' Agreement and Constitution. Ordinary shares are held by the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and State of Qld through the Minister for Communities and there is provision for the Commonwealth Government to become an Ordinary Shareholder.*
- *The directors on the board represent the three **partners** in the company – the Palm Island Community, the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and the Queensland Government.*
- *The Company acts as a **bridge** between the government and non-government sectors, through supporting existing **non government organisations** on the island, **attracting funding** and **expanding services** where there is a need.*

- *PICC focus is **identifying community priorities and developing an appropriate response** that leads to better outcomes for all individuals, families and organisation.*
- *PICC has **established a benchmark** over the last 12 months through which continual improvement and **review of all activities** is effectively maintained;*
- *PICC is a pioneering initiative to provide service delivery, capacity building and economic development to Palm Island having been **established as a Government structure** that incorporates commercial expertise, together with Palm Island representation;*
- *PICC was registered in 2007 and established **to link** a wide range of services on Palm Island to assist across the three areas of service delivery of **service provision, capacity building** and business entrepreneurial skills;*
- *PICC is **supporting** governance, management, leadership and service delivery mechanisms through **capacity building**;*
- *PICC **ensuring services have the resources and capacity** required in order to deliver targeted programs that **meet the diverse needs** of community members through **capacity building**;*
- *PICC can **successfully** develop the **level of accountability and transparency** required in order **to build trust with the community**;*
- *The future steps for PICC is to continue to have an **ongoing engagement** in the community, whereby PICC can work in **partnership in a collaborative** approach towards achieving outcomes and **improving** lifestyle, options and opportunities for individuals, families and organisations on Palm Island.*

Issues

The PICC model is not a **community proper model**; **it is not a negotiated model with the Palm Island community**. The model was **already developed** in the office of the Director General (Linda Apelt) and brought in to the community by staff of the office of the Director General who promoted the PICC to Palm Island as an **interim service** that would **assist with expertise advice and practical support with capacity building** to sustain existing Palm Island community service delivery thorough providing governance support and training.

The (PICC) model is

- Understood to be conceived and developed by the Director General Dept and;
- Imposed on the Palm Island people and community;
- It was and still is a model that is not community developed by the people, nor supported nor owned by the Palm Island people and community.

The issue of PICC being in partnership with the Palm Island community is farcical. There is no real effective and committed partnership between PICC and the Palm Island community.

- From the very outset the PICC model was introduced to Palm Island as a compulsory intractable model that was being implemented by the Qld Government Dept of Communities;
- From the initial days when the staff of the office of the Director General and their lawyer came into Palm Island with this model the Palm Island service providers strongly voiced their concern and disparagement that PICC was imposing yet another bureaucratic tier of government on Palm Island;
- Our cry of protest against the PICC model fell on deaf ears and was overlooked by the staff of the Director General;
- To date there is no evidence of a PICC Exit Strategy of how PICC is going to transfer control back to the Palm Island community services and leave Palm Island.

The Company does not act as a bridge between the government and non-government sectors on Palm Island.

- PICC has changed their initial mandate from supporting existing non government organisations on the island to taking over the funding from the majority of non – government human and social service providers in the community;
- PICC does not attract funding; it is funded by the Qld Government Dept of Communities to the estimated amount of \$ 3 million plus dollars. Approximately \$1.5 million dollars was the initial expense provided by the Qld Government to provide a foundation for the PICC with the vision that it would begin to generate its own income. Since the inception of the PICC finance of up to \$3 million and more is being poured into the PICC to date with not visible effective service delivery to the community.

PICC ensuring the Palm Island community services have the resources and capacity required in order to deliver targeted programs that meet the diverse needs of community members through capacity building; and that PICC can successfully develop the level of accountability and transparency required in order to build trust with the community;

- To date there is no effective and functional service delivery happening and no mechanism that the community can access information on how and what the finances are used for.
- There appears to be no transparency and accountability mechanisms to the Palm Island community, consumers are not able to access information of service availability or service effectiveness hence Palm Islanders are not able to make informed decisions to service access. There doesn't appear to be an accessible service evaluation documenting outputs;
- **Palm Island people do not know how the millions of dollars plus is being spent nor do they see it at a service delivery level.**

There is no service expansion on the service delivery level, what has taken place is the mere transfer of funding from one community program there by making that program defunct and transferring that money into the coffers of the one entity of PICC.

- Prior to PICC overtaking the services, the exiting non government organisations were delivering a functional service to the community and forming a purposeful service discussion group to provide a more coordinated approach of service delivery across the human and social services spectrum of which the Dept of Communities were a significant part.
- PICC in now attempting to deliver what the existing community services used to do in the community and doing it badly. To date PICC has been unsuccessful at service delivery to the Palm Island community because their structure and processes do not support the unique service provision that was provided.
- The PICC focus of identifying community priorities and developing an appropriate response that leads to better outcomes for all individuals, families and organisation is failing Palm Island.

There is no bridge between the government and the non-government sectors on Palm Island, there is only the Government assuming control of the non-government services and imposing the Government agenda on Palm Island under the guise of being a community NGO.

From the outset the true developmental process was hidden from the Palm Island people, we were led to believe a ruse. **PICC did not support existing non government organisations on the island; it took over those organisations and now controls the funding with no input from the community.**

There has not been any support given to the existing community services to build capacity in their governance skills according to their original intention that the staff of the Director General came into the community with. If the Palm Island NGO services were funded to the level as PICC is they too would have the capacity to buy in expertise, training and programs.

- **This same PICC smacks of the days when the Dept of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Affairs (DAIA) and its predecessors wielded their control over the Palm Island community and its people, stripping the Palm Island community of the opportunity to develop, making its decisions and its own mistakes and allowing the Palm Island community to rise up and learn from those mistakes.**
- **Where is the governemement's commitment to building community independence?**
- **Where is the empowering of community's integrity and its self belief in self management and self determination?**
- **The community is now witnessing over the last 12 months PICC has not built capacity; rather it has incapacitated the community in their vision and progress towards autonomy, self worth, and community pride in self determination.**

Twenty five years ago the then Dept of Aboriginal and Island Affairs removed their staff and all infrastructures leaving Palm Island. The Palm Island Council had to rebuild from nothing. However despite the actions of D.A.I.A the Palm Island community under local community government by local people has progressed at a steady pace towards self governance and self determination. Yet we are continually obstructed by government at every attempt of moving forward.

PICC has become a millstone around the neck of the Palm Island community, weighing Palm Island down and undermining the integrity of the community development process of self determination that Palm Island has been progressing towards over the last 25 years

The existing community services that were funded by the Dept of Communities have in effect been made defunct by the Dept of Communities and the funding for those services has been transferred to the PICC. These services are Services

- Men's group night patrol program
- Relationships Australia – Healthy Families Program
- PCYC - Universal Families Program
- Kootana Womens Centre
- Diversionary service
- Disability services
- Youth Patrol

The PICC has been active for 2 years from ASIC registration; its initial intentions have now changed dramatically. PICC is now the central point of receiving funding from the Dept of Communities to be the service deliverer of family support and other human and social services. This means that the various existing human and social service provider programs has been undermined, bypassed and incapacitated of funding to build the PICC in the community.

*PICC endorses that it has established a benchmark over the last 12 months through which continual improvement and review of all activities is effectively maintained. **Their bench mark misses the mark!***

- The current staff of PICC has raised their concerns that during their short time of employment over the last 3 months they have received no professional support and work direction from the Service Management level. Staff are working with out real direction and feeling like they are being set up to fail;
- There is little to no confidence in Management. After the initial 3 month probation period some staff members were demoted and some of the positions were changed with out prior knowledge of the staff. They now have new job descriptions but still with no real support and direction;
- Staff employed in new positions need support and training; 3 months is an inadequate period of time to assess work performance; demoting staff and changing job positions in an organisation that is just beginning to provide services;

- The internal function of PICC is unstable with growing staffing problems of disgruntled employees who are expressing their concern that they do not have clear direction from Service Management as to what their jobs entail;
- They do not have a clear directive on the outcomes or outputs of their service delivery;
- Consequently some staff has resigned and others are examining their employment and that of the commitment to them by PICC Senior Management. Current anecdotes reveal the lack of staff development and training of current human and social service staff employed by the PICC in the community, once again setting up Indigenous people to fail in their jobs and consequently attracting the comments from Governments that Palm Island is not able to manage its own affairs;
- PICC has now employed a non Indigenous supervisor to make sure the employees turn up for work and do the job on Palm Island. The new employee is now the Services Manager for Palm Island site and will be flown over 2-3 days a week to make sure staff goes to work. The staff alleges that this new onsite Services Manager does not engage with them about their work performance or give them direction;
- As of the 8th October 2009 two significant Aboriginal PICC employees have resigned their positions from middle management and practice level because of no confidence in the management ability of PICC General Manager & Services Managers.

It is now general knowledge that the PICC model be developed by the Government in order that it can be transferred or transported to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities in Queensland, placing on those communities what has been imposed on Palm Island.

The name Palm Island Community Company although owned by the entity is a misnomer.

- Calling PICC a community company when it is not is misleading to the public and to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities;
- Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities will be misled by its implication that the PICC is a Palm Island *community proper* owned and driven entity.
- In reality; Palm Island people strongly believe that PICC is a government intervention developed and implemented by government for government's agenda.
- The presence of a Traditional Owner on the board or the community nominated directors does not represent *community proper* support and engagement.
- Despite the rhetoric and propaganda that the Qld Government espouses; there is currently no support for the PICC to remain in the community.

In effect PICC is creating community dependency whereby the community development is contingent on this Government entity to provide the majority of human and social services to the community; it has become a monopoly model by taking the funding of local community organisations and making them obsolete.

The majority of Palm Islanders are uninformed of the workings of the PICC, its structure and function in the community; PICC is viewed by the community as another layer of government bureaucracy that has taken away the opportunity for community autonomy and capacity building of community services by Palm Island community service providers

PICC has Ordinary shares which are held by the Palm Island Aboriginal Shire Council and State of Qld through the Minister for Communities and there is provision for the Commonwealth Government to become an Ordinary Shareholder.

- To date the Commonwealth Government have not taken up the two places reserved for them on the PICC Board of Directors. **Why has the Commonwealth Government distanced it self from PICC, why have they not taken up the provision to be an Ordinary Shareholder?**

The annual report says future steps for PICC is to continue to have an ongoing engagement in the community, whereby PICC can work in partnership in a collaborative approach towards achieving outcomes and improving lifestyle, options and opportunities for individuals, families and organisations on Palm Island.

The consistent storyboarding of PICC processes ensures that there is an up front face that service provision is happening which deflects any opportunities for criticisms to be laid at their door on their performance.

How can the government justify continued support for PICC when millions of dollars have been poured into the PICC with only 4 Palm Island community shareholders?

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