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Cabinet Notes

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PETROL SNIFFING TASK FORCE

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TO: THE PREMIER FOR CABINET

Re: PETROL SNIFFING TASK FORCE

1. PROPOSAL

To provide information on the progress of the Petrol Sniffing Task Force.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Establishment of the Petrol Sniffing Task Force

2.1.1 Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) is the body corporate established under the *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act 1981*. AP is registered as the proprietor in fee simple in the AP Lands. The Pitjantjatjara Lands cover an area of approximately 103,000 square kilometres in the northwest of South Australia and is home to approximately 3,000 Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara speaking people.

2.1.2 The increasing prevalence of petrol sniffing within remote Aboriginal communities has led to a systemic breakdown of both community and family relationships. Most existing services do not appear to have a specific focus on petrol sniffing and are currently insufficient in number to manage this increasing health and social problem.

A group of Chief Executive Officers and senior executives of Commonwealth and State government departments began meeting in Adelaide in August 2000. They were drawn together by a shared commitment to improving the outcomes from the amount of money invested by them in programs and service delivery on the AP Lands. This led to the establishment of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands Inter-Government Inter-Agency Collaboration Committee.

Between August 2000 and September 2001 preliminary work was done in identifying areas of common concern and by commencing the collection of information and statistics for a database.

At its meeting in September 2001 the Committee adopted the following terms of reference: To work with and through the AP to:

- improve Anangu community capacity to manage current and emergent issues
- ensure that Anangu have access to services necessary to sustain life and well-being at a quality comparable with that enjoyed by other Australians
- design and deliver services in a manner which respects, promotes and sustains Anangu hopes and aspirations
- monitor, evaluate and review the success of programs and processes in light of the above

Since the introduction of the Police Drug Diversion Program the issue of petrol sniffing has been brought to a head on the AP Lands.

There is a need for urgent action to be taken focussing on petrol sniffing, which links in with the work of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands Inter-governmental Inter-agency Collaboration Committee.

To this end the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, supported by the Ministers responsible for the portfolio areas identified in 2.3 established a Petrol Sniffing Task Force (PSTF) which links in with the work of other state government groups and reporting structures aimed to address substance misuse.

The PSTF will report through existing state government groups addressing substance misuse and the AP Lands Inter-Government Inter-Agency Collaborative Committee.

2.2 Objectives of the Petrol Sniffing Task Force

The key objective of the PSTF is to identify a range of solutions to the issue of petrol sniffing on the AP Lands. These solutions will include evidence aimed at:

- Prevention of the uptake of petrol sniffing
- Community education strategies
- Appropriate diversion and treatment options

Emphasis will be placed on ensuring that sustainable programs are developed which are designed from the outset to be managed by the affected communities.

Programs established will seek to assist in restoring the cultural and social pride and wellbeing of communities through community ownership of the strategies developed and implemented.

Emphasis will be placed on the development of partnerships with interstate (Western Australia and Northern Territory) police and health service providers to coordinate the provision of services and to maximize the effective use of resources.

2.3 Composition and Reporting Structure of the Petrol Sniffing Task Force

The PSTF comprises senior officers representing the following key agencies:

- Department of State Aboriginal Affairs (DOSAA)
- Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE)
- Attorney-General's Department
- Department of Justice
- Department for Correctional Services
- SA Police (SAPOL)
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)
- Department of Health and Ageing (Office of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health – OATSIH)
- Office of the Federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs chairs the PSTF.

The PSTF operates in full consultation with AP who have committed to the establishment of a working party to work in conjunction with the PSTF.

2.4 Terms of Reference

The following key areas of activity have been identified for consideration by the PSTF in working towards a successful outcome.

- Audit of existing data sources on the prevalence of petrol sniffing and services provided on the AP Lands.
- A review of existing programs, services and resources from all sources addressing petrol sniffing on the AP Lands.
- Development of proposals for service delivery and intervention.
- Development of proposals to address community safety issues including legislative responses.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Agency Feedback

The PSTF has met on two (2) occasions, 11 December and 20 December 2001. At the first meeting a number of key issues were presented by agencies represented on the PSTF and these include:

- The AP Lands do not get the same service provision as elsewhere.
- The Police Drug Diversion initiative allows people on the AP Lands to be diverted if there are appropriate facilities available, eg drug assessment and treatment services.
- There will be a coronial enquiry into deaths on the AP Lands early in the new year.
- There are currently 12 community constables on the AP Lands and 9 police officers at Maria.
- Police are frustrated by what they are seeing – enforcement is not seen as the correct way of dealing with petrol sniffing; the problem is much broader than that and current legislation provides magistrates with few options.
- SAPOL is supportive of a consistent approach with the Northern Territory, Western Australia and SA, as the communities do not recognise borders.
- Phillip Ruddock, Minister for Indigenous Affairs will be visiting the AP Lands early next year and the Commonwealth is keen to work with the State on this issue.
- Extreme forms of behaviour surrounding petrol sniffing are of concern and need to be addressed by the police.
- Data indicates that there are 125 core sniffers and 100 – 125 casual sniffers although anecdotal evidence indicates these figures are much higher.
- The women from AP communities have met with the government representatives to voice their concerns over matters relating to petrol sniffing.
- A current concern is that petrol sniffers are now drinking petrol mixed with cordial.
- Over resourcing is an issue requiring attention.
- Mismanagement of community safety is a concern.
- Priorities of DETE are literacy, numeracy and attendance by students on the AP Lands, however recent media attention given to petrol sniffing has been a catalyst for 3 recent recruits to withdraw their applications.
- Major governance issues exist on the AP Lands and service providers are not talking to each other.
- There do not appear to be health or education programs running specifically for the AP Lands.

3.2 Issues Requiring Immediate Attention

The PSTF recognises that policies of intervention are not the answer and that agencies need to look at different solutions with the support of the Aboriginal people.

Community safety is a key issue and the PSTF is considering short and long term strategies in conjunction with AP, recognising that it is critical for community people on the ground to work together.

Two key issues requiring immediate attention are community safety and removal of hard-core petrol sniffers. Longer-term issues such as prevention and rehabilitation will continue to be a focus of the PSTF.

A key concern is the suggestion that the AP Lands could become a “powder keg” when more able bodied community men leave on community business for approximately 1 month, leaving behind the elderly, women and children with the petrol sniffers.

3.2 Action to Date

At the PSTF meeting of 20 December 2001, SAPOL reported a proposed strategy for the deployment of 2 x 5-day patrols to the AP Lands – one to cover the western region with the other to cover the central region.

Patrols will be supplementary to existing police resources at Maria and will be for a 6-week period during January/February 2002 after which the strategy will be reviewed. Police will consult and work with the local community and envisage response times will be reduced from the current six (6) hours to approximately two (2) hours.

DOSAA is able to make available facilities at Pukatja (Ernabella) and DETE has also offered SAPOL the use of huts at Pukatja at no cost. Other funding issues will be addressed by the PSTF.

DHS is following up on a range of health related issues, including availability of appropriate medical and rehabilitation facilities, particularly at Maria, as it is critical the police have medical support for the 6-week initiative.

ATSIC has committed to drive a co-ordination process through the Chairs of each community highlighting the importance to have appropriate and full representation on the governing bodies and forums.

3.3 Funding Arrangements

An audit of existing funding commitments will be undertaken by the PSTF in the light of changing priorities. Mechanisms for potential government and non-government funding of services will be considered by the PSTF.

3.5 Next Meeting

The next meeting of the PSTF will be held Friday, 11 January 2002 at 10.00 am at DOSAA.

4. RECOMMENDATION

The progress made by the PSTF as outlined in this paper is for Cabinet to note.



HON DOROTHY KOTZ MP
MINISTER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS
MINISTER FOR RECREATION SPORT & RACING

28 DEC 2001