

Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities
Private Round Table Meeting

3 minute presentation

Prof. Mick Dodson

Friday 13 February 2004

9.45-2.00pm

Committee Room 1R1, Parliament House

I am here at this round table wearing a number of different but related hats. Firstly as Chairman of both the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre and secondly as Chair of Indigenous Studies at the ANU.

I understand Indigenous Capacity Building as being about developing strong local, regional and national governance and leadership. These are intrinsically interrelated and must be imbued with the local Indigenous cultural values and aspirations.

Leadership is about providing guidance or direction. Governance is about power, relationships, processes of representation, decision making and accountability.

Good Governance is about protecting and promoting public interest.

There are no quick-fixes to voids in leadership and governance in any community. Capacity building for leadership and governance is a long-term, dynamic process.

My concern for this meeting is to convey the primacy of Leadership in the community capacity building debate.

Leadership requires different skills in different circumstances. Leadership requires activities that are collaborative, innovative, builds networks across sectors and leaders must have strong community support.

Few people are born leaders. Leaders require nurturing, coaching and supporting. Leaders need exposure to experiences which build skills, role models to inspire and to drive change.

Leadership authority must be culturally sanctioned and transferable into wider contexts and environments.

There are not enough Indigenous leaders currently, there are certainly not enough Indigenous leaders emerging.

The Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre, of which I am Chair, goes some way towards targeting emerging leaders and supporting those already participating in various forums around the country.

It is not enough.

The Discussion Paper that we are here to debate today also features Leadership as a significant issue. Questions 5 and 6 ask how to support effective Indigenous leaders and how leadership is contested.

Before community members can challenge unsatisfactory leadership, they must be able to identify what it is. The development of skills and knowledge and exposure to positive role models that occurs during AILC programs empowers community members to become better leaders themselves and to seek the same in others.

However despite enjoying growing support from government and industry, it is not enough.

Resourcing

There is a need for:

- secure, ongoing sources of operational funding which provides for the employment of adequate numbers of qualified and experienced staff and maintenance of appropriate facilities.
- project funding that is realistic and responds to project aims and objectives as well as budget cycles.
- a willingness by Governments and others to try new ways to better coordinate and meet their responsibilities.

We now have a valuable opportunity to improve the way that Indigenous peoples, families, organisations and communities are supported to effectively direct and manage their futures. We must use it.