

QUESTIONS – Thursday 4 May 2017 - Aboriginal Economic Development in Homelands

Mr GUYULA to TREASURER referred to MINISTER for TRADE, BUSINESS and INNOVATION

The 2017–18 budget includes \$2m for the Remote Aboriginal Economic Development Fund. Many Indigenous people in the homelands in North East Arnhem Land want to start small businesses, but they are in need of support to get their initiatives off the ground. So often funds have been allocated in budgets for remote Aboriginal economic development but programs never connect to people at the homelands level. So often people at the homelands know nothing about these programs.

What plans are in place to ensure people at the homelands level are able to benefit from these economic development funds?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from the Member of Nhulunbuy because it goes to a body of work that we want to do. As you say, there are grants available for remote Indigenous economic development. Not everybody is aware of them or how to access support to take advantage of those grants.

I am doing a body of work—probably more within the Department of the Chief Minister than DPTI, but between the two—on how we can better coordinate what we do across the Territory remotely. There has been some good work done on this in parts of the Northern Territory already. The model through DCM that is in place at the moment in Wadeye, for example, and has been quite good at coordinating and informing locals in Wadeye and in the homelands about access to services.

We are looking at how we can work with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the regional economic directors to form a better connection with remote Territorians about what is available to them. It is not just, 'Here is a regional Indigenous economic development grant', for example. There is the capacity to build other things that can go with it. NDIS provides a very good example of how we can do this in practice and help shape some of our investment.

We recognise that social need provides economic opportunity. It is a positive thing. We are looking at it through our housing program as well. NDIS provides an economic opportunity and delivers on a social need. As a government, we want to work with locals to be able to deliver on that.

It provides a good example of how we can provide some capacity building to then build into the development of a business that might receive grant support to get up and going. Then it has a sustainable base through the social money that is provided against that social need—in that instance NDIS.

If you go to the housing example—how can we work with Indigenous business enterprises to build, grow, have greater capacity and involve the homelands in those opportunities. These are things we can do if we work better as a government. It is not, in this instance, necessarily about the grant pools or the size of them. It is about how we better work with, and communicate with, remote Territorians. It forms part of our local decision-making frame work and how we can transfer this over.

It is about greater capacity and recognition that people in remote communities are capable of this economic and entrepreneurial opportunity. We just need to ensure we work to support them better, pull in that capacity of capability when it is necessary and provide access to grants. At the very heart of your question, we need to communicate with them so they know those opportunities are there.

This is something we are taking on as a government. I am working with my department on how we can better arrange ourselves to deliver on that.

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