



the

EGGLESTON

report

Senator Alan Eggleston: Working for Western Australia

May 2004

Working towards a better future for Indigenous Australians

The decision to abolish ATSIC will be widely welcomed, most importantly among indigenous Australians.

In recent years I have heard many complaints from Aboriginal people in the North West about dissatisfaction with ATSIC and its failure to deliver and now the Government has announced sweeping reforms to the way in which services will be provided to indigenous people.

The new approach is based on all of us accepting responsibility. We all need to do better — the Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the indigenous people themselves. The Government has decided that the ATSIC Board of Commissioners will be abolished. Legislation will be introduced as soon as possible with a view to the new arrangements being in place from July 1 2004. We will not replace the ATSIC Board with another elected structure but will appoint a national Indigenous Council on the basis of merit to interact with the Government and provide

Indigenous-specific advice and advocacy. Specialist Indigenous programs will be retained. However the programs previously delivered by ATSIC and more recently by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ASIS) will be devolved to mainstream departments.



A new Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination will provide policy advice and monitor the performance of mainstream agencies, Existing Regional Council arrangements will continue until June 30 2005 in a mainly advisory capacity. We will work with state and territory governments and Indigenous communities to find the best mechanism for input at the local and regional level.

Our focus will continue to be on better service and better outcomes for indigenous people.

Kind regards

Alan Eggleston

What's Inside?



Increasing the wine tax could save billions

The Queensland Government has again dropped significantly. It concluded that taxation raised the issue of the devastating impact of alcoholism, particularly in Aboriginal communities. It has long been my belief that if a wine tax were based on volume rather than price many of the problems would be lessened.

Currently, wine from flagons (average 12 per cent alcohol) is taxed at about six cents per standard drink, compared to beer (average three per cent alcohol) which is taxed at about 43 cents.

According to research published in the Medical Journal of Australia two years ago, more than two-thirds of the alcohol consumed in Australia is being drunk in a way that is potentially dangerous to health.

In 1999, a Curtin University study into cask wine more than \$8 billion a year and the existing drinking patterns in the NT found that, with the introduction of a levy, average consumption wine tax could save billions!



It seems obvious that increased tax on cask wine would reduce consumption of alcohol because for example there is 75 per cent less alcohol in the same volume of beer so that four times as much beer has to be drunk to get the same alcohol dose as one glass of wine. The human cost of alcohol abuse is incalculable, particularly in remote and regional Australia. During my two decades as a GP practising in the North West I often witnessed the destruction alcohol brought on families and communities.

Alcohol abuse is costing Australian taxpayers

more than \$8 billion a year and the existing system encourages alcohol abuse. Increasing the average consumption wine tax could save billions!

Say "no" to plastic shopping bags

The Federal Government has joined forces with Clean Up Australia chairman and Founder Ian Kiernan AO to launch the Say NO to plastic bags campaign, urging retailers and consumers to cut back on plastic bag use. The campaign has been supported by a \$40,000 Natural Heritage Trust grant. As chairman of the Senate environment committee, which considered a private member's Bill to impose a level on plastic bags, I am very keen to see our plastic bag usage cut down, and it is interesting to note that the major supermarkets have already cut plastic bags by 200 million in the past year, or 12 per cent. The Government's position is to give industry the chance to self-regulate before considering imposing restrictions. For more information on plastics in the environment, visit www.deh.gov.au/industry/waste/plastic-bags



Royal Flying Doctor Service boost for Kimberley region

Recently I attended the commissioning of a new \$5.5 million "Pilatus" aircraft by the Commonwealth Health Minister Tony Abbott at Jandakot Airport.

It will replace a 25-year-old Beechcraft C90 and will operate from the RFDS base in Derby.

The aircraft was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments and the RFDS. Alongside the new air ambulance intensive care unit equipped plane was a small Cessna used by the

RFDS in the 1960s which carried only the most basic equipment while nevertheless saving lives. Not quite so far back in my days at the Port Hedland Hospital when I flew clinic and medical escort flights with the RFDS the aircraft used were Beechcraft — regarded in their day as the Mercedes of light aircraft. The



Mike Board, Barry Haase, myself, RFDS deputy chief pilot Capt. Stuart Airey, the Hon Tony Abbott and Tony Crook at the Jandakot ceremony

level of equipment especially in the Queen Airs, was highly sophisticated but there was far less room than in the Pilatus of the modern fleet.

We should all be proud to support Australia's RFDS. *Donations can be sent to: RFDS Fundraising, 5 Eagle Drive, Jandakot 6164.*

Meeting with the Chinese ambassador and consul-general

“ Late last month, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China Madame Fu Ying, officially took up her position in Canberra. Western Australia has strong ties with China through our minerals industry and in 2000 two way trade between Australia and China totalled \$15 billion — making China Australia's third largest trading partner. Principal Australian exports to China are iron ore, wool, crude petroleum, oilseeds and aluminium. It was my pleasure to be invited to dinner with the Consul-General in Perth Mr Zhong Zi Qi, (top,centre) and the new ambassador (bottom, right) soon after her taking her post, where among other things China's huge and growing investment in WA was highlighted. ”



Environmental boost for Western Australia announced

Almost \$2.5 million funding has been provided for significant environmental projects in Western Australia, under a \$20 million Natural Heritage Trust investment announced recently. The vital funding was announced by Australian Ministers for Environment and Heritage, Dr David Kemp, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, under the \$2.7 billion Natural Heritage Trust's *Regional Competitive Component*.

The aim of the *Regional Competitive Component* was to support multi-regional projects that would lead to significant improvements in the sustainable management of natural resources. This funding will go towards four critical natural resource management and conservation projects across WA.

Over \$1.5 million will fund a project in the Rangelands to engage pastoralists, technical advisers and other stakeholders in a co-learning process – adapting, demonstrating and assessing the value of improved management systems.

Another project receiving \$545,707 will address weed control in the Pilbara region, where the fast-growing invasive weed, Mesquite, is resistant to all but the hottest fires. A major aspect of this will be addressing critical knowledge gaps, including determining whether fire can be used to manage Mesquite in semi-arid regions using various fuel manipulation techniques. The threat of invasive dieback



Environment and Heritage Minister David Kemp and Senator Alan Eggleston discuss the Shark Bay World Heritage area with the shire council.

spreading through WA will also be fought with \$198,000 to develop threat-assessment maps and protect further species from being affected by the pathogen. Dieback is caused by the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and has already impacted severely on a vast number of plant communities throughout the southwest. The rescue of



Senator Eggleston with Kalamunda Shire President Elizabeth Taylor, Environment Minister Dr David Kemp and Stuart Henry at a presentation on the hills' dieback control program

threatened flora and ecological communities at the Geraldton to Shark Bay Sandplain and the Mount Lesueur Eneabba

Biodiversity Hotspots has also been made possible thanks to \$164,000 in funding for a pilot conservation project. This project will increase knowledge, understanding and on-ground involvement of community groups in relation to conserving threatened species and ecological communities, and provide support to landholders and volunteers for fencing, weed control, habitat rehabilitation, dieback control, monitoring and surveys. Threatened flora and ecological communities included

in this project are endemic to these regions, and therefore occur nowhere else in the world.

Emphasis will be placed on conservation actions for threatened flora and ecological communities located on private land or on reserves not currently managed for conservation.

The \$2.5 million for Western Australia is part of a \$20 million investment to be allocated over a three-year period to support 17 multi-regional, large-scale projects Australia-wide. WA will also receive a share in \$50,000 to protect biodiversity in the Great Victoria Desert from feral camels while developing a control program, and \$1.8 million for fire management of savannah communities across northern Australia.

The 17 projects approved under the *Regional Competitive Component* were selected by the Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee, which embodies some of Australia's most respected scientific and natural resource management experts.