The First Assistant Secretary
Community and Economic Development Division
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Canberra ACT 2600

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Response to PM&C Discussion Paper: Remote Employment and Participation

Dear First Assistant Secretary,

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper (DP) on Remote Employment and Participation.

I make comments here to supplement those already made (and available online) to the *Senate inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program* (Jordan 2017) and the *Senate inquiry into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Community Development Program) Bill 2015* (Jordan 2016).

My response is based on eight years of research into the former CDEP program and the transition to RJCP and CDP, including fieldwork in central Australia, South Australia, Arnhem Land and the far west of NSW. I am happy for my submission to be made public.

I focus here on two broad themes: a concern about process; and my views on an appropriate way ahead. I also respond briefly to a number of the discussion questions.



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Response to PM&C Discussion Paper: Remote Employment and Participation

Substantive comments

1. Process for designing a new scheme

Fundamentally, the effectiveness of a new model will depend as much on the consultation process as on the design elements of the scheme. I commend the Government's intention to 'seek input from a broad range of stakeholders' in the design process. However, I am concerned that the proposed consultation model is insufficient to adequately engage with people living in remote communities whose lives will be profoundly influenced by the Government's decisions.

The two avenues for individuals in remote communities to have their say appear to be

- Commenting on this Discussion Paper
- Targeted community consultations

This standard model of consultation is inadequate. Providing informed comment on a discussion paper demands more time than many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations can commit. It also requires a level of confidence with English language literacy that excludes many individuals in remote communities. My contention based on long periods of remote fieldwork is that few individuals in these communities would know that this DP has been released and is open for comment; or be able to engage with its style of communication.

Targeted community consultations are also insufficient given the overwhelming influence that CDP and its replacement will have on the lives of tens of thousands of people in remote communities across the country.

A more appropriate consultation process would accept the need for a longer-term approach that engages with more than just a few target communities, and that ensures those affected by the scheme have a genuine opportunity for input into its design. At a minimum, communities need to be informed well in advance that a consultation will be happening, the information provided must identify both the risks and potential benefits of any proposed option, and time and resources must be allocated to ensure individuals understand how the proposed options would personally affect them before they are asked to provide feedback. Care should also be taken in each community to determine how a consultation should be held, taking local cultural protocols and preferences into account.

This more substantial approach to consultation is no doubt more difficult and resource intensive than the current model, but it is necessary if governments are determined not to repeat the policy mistakes of the past, particularly in the absence of an elected national body with organisational and political capacity to represent the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A further concern with process is that it is unclear why the Government is seeking feedback on preferred options prior to proper consideration of the report of the Senate inquiry recently held into CDP throughout 2017. It is also unclear why the APO NT model is not presented as an option, especially given that its development has been led by the Indigenous community sector and it already has the support of over 30 organisations (most of which are Indigenous

community organisations or peak bodies). The model proposed as 'Option 1' seems to combine some elements of the APO NT model with other elements (such as a 'show pay' system and proposed 2 year limit on waged positions) which are less suited to remote areas and are likely to work to the detriment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The DP is also ambiguous about whether the three options identified are the only options under consideration (i.e. it states that the Government is 'open to all ideas for a new approach,' but also that 'there are a number of options and approaches available. This paper outlines these options'). It would be a great shame if the Government were to limit the options for consideration prior to engaging with the Senate report and widespread community consultation.

I commend the Government's commitment to trialling a new model in a number of locations, and note that genuine community consultation may lead to different preferred models in different locations that align to the local context. There should be nothing to preclude a number of trials with different parameters, noting that many of the design elements of new trial schemes could be introduced without legislative change. Genuine *local* community control of important features (such as types of paid work available under the scheme and compliance arrangements for those on income support) could also facilitate the necessary flexibility in a single program.

I also note that changes to the current CDP can and should be introduced as a matter of urgency as an interim measure, in particular to reduce the activity requirements of participants and place a moratorium on penalties, especially in light of evidence of the disproportionate application of penalties to CDP participants and growing poverty in remote communities in the last intercensal period. This should be done now, while a substantial and genuine consultation process is undertaken and trials of a new scheme are implemented and evaluated.

2. An appropriate way ahead

In regards to the three options presented, I do not support Options 2 or 3. I have elsewhere made my views clear that CDP needs to be abolished and replaced by a fundamentally different institutional arrangement (not just reformed), and that 'CDP 2' does not reintroduce the positive elements of CDEP and risks making outcomes worse (Jordan 2016, 2017; Jordan & Fowkes 2016).

There is insufficient detail in the DP to comprehensively respond to Option 1. Instead I comment here on the proposed design principles. I note in particular that a new program should be strengths based and focus less on an imagined transition of all participants into other work; that governments should do more to remove barriers to public sector employment; and that I do not support a 'show pay' system, a two-year limit on wages, or a two-year limit on enterprise support.

Strengths based

'Starting from community strengths' should be a key design principle for a new program and should inform a reworking of the existing design principles. For a new program to be strengths-based, it must:

- facilitate genuine local community control so providers are seen as part of the community and acting in the interests of participants;
- facilitate local planning to identify community skills, values, assets, aspirations and opportunities;
- identify a local vision for how the community wants to grow cognisant of what is possible;
- identify projects that link community aspiration to opportunities for community development, enterprise or employment;
- identify the staffing and resourcing required for these projects, and provide appropriate wages and capital support to meet this need; and
- create a positive working environment in which all participants feel they are respected, valued, and able to do meaningful activity in their community for fair pay.

A genuine commitment to working with community strengths and aspirations would acknowledge that the jobs created may require Commonwealth wages support beyond two years where alternative jobs are not available. This is preferable by far to the alternate scenario which in many cases would be a return to long-term reliance on social security payments. The small enterprises identified by the community as priorities may or may not align with the delivery of Commonwealth contracts.

While the DP acknowledges the need to support community aspirations, it is framed principally from a 'deficits' approach: it starts from an assumption of 'lack,' and remains wedded to the notion that the biggest problem is behavioural. It frames all CDP participants as 'job seekers' who need to be incentivised to move 'off welfare and into work.' It is this thinking that led to the demise of CDEP and, paradoxically, the increased reliance on welfare we see today.

A new program should recognise that participant motivation is likely to be improved where the focus is on strengths and opportunities rather than a punitive approach based on seeking to control perceived 'bad behaviour.' While it is true that incentives (appropriate wages and top up) are necessary to support increased opportunity for flexible waged employment, it cannot be assumed *a priori* that all CDP participants should be on a 'pathway' to unsubsidised jobs.

Removing barriers to employment in Commonwealth and State government agencies.

An additional design principle should focus on the removal of barriers to employment in Commonwealth and State government agencies. Most employment in remote Indigenous communities is in the provision of services delivered through government agencies (or the non-government organisations contracted to them). These employers often have inflexible requirements such as lengthy record checks and clearances which unnecessarily exclude many people in remote areas from employment where they have a history of relatively minor offences. Improving the timeliness of these record checks, and removing blanket exclusions from employment where appropriate, may significantly increase the employment opportunity in remote regions.

Similarly, employment opportunity could be substantially improved by increased public investment in successful programs that have broad local support, such as the Indigenous rangers program. Ranger organisations often have unmet need for additional staff which could be filled with additional wages funding. Evidence on species loss and threatening processes indicate that much more could be done to protect or restore the environmental and cultural values of Indigenous titled lands.

A more simplified system, relying less on a national welfare system, and more on local control and decision making.

It is true that 'There has been clear and consistent feedback that remote communities want increased local service delivery and decision making.' However, the DP suggests this can be delivered by ensuring all providers are 'majority Indigenous owned and controlled' through a 50 per cent or more interest in the organisation or partnership arrangements. I note that this principle has also been adopted in the new Indigenous Grants Policy. However, it is insufficient to ensure local decision making and the 'community based' approach the DP says it supports.

Many CDP providers cover large regions and, even if they are Indigenous owned and controlled organisations, may not represent the Indigenous populations or interests of each community within their region. In some locations the relationships between Indigenous owned and controlled providers and small communities within their regions who *do not feel they are represented by those organisations* are outright hostile. A new program must devolve planning and decision making to the local community level. The DP suggests that local community boards and community leaders would 'work closely with service providers,' but to be effective they would need significant authority in decision-making. Different boards would be required for each community in the CDP region, or at least adequate representation from each community on a regional board. Consideration should also be given to contracting services to local Indigenous community organisations where this is a community's preferred option and they have or can develop adequate capacity.

In addition, regardless of ownership of the organisation, providers (and boards) will need much greater flexibility in interpreting and implementing program rules to better align with local circumstances. This might include local community decision-making about appropriate hours of work, activities, work projects, cultural leave, and flexibility of work hours (e.g. to allow participants to 'swap' shifts with others when required or catch up on hours missed).

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the program must also include 'downward accountability,' asking participants and community members to evaluate program performance according to their own identified measures. This community-based evaluation framework would need to be established within local communities prior to the commencement of any trial.

Centrelink as it is currently resourced does not have the capacity to appropriately service the CDP caseload. To this extent, it is appropriate that a new program relies less on a national welfare system. However, this should be through the creation of waged work rather than any attempt to devolve the functions of a social security system to CDP providers. This would ensure the continuation of a 'safety net' for all participants administered within the existing social security legislative framework.

Because many people in remote regions will remain reliant on the social security system, improvements in this system are also required as a matter of urgency: for example, to reduce wait times on phone calls, provide better assessments of work capacity with a default of face-to-face assessment, implement systems to ensure postal communications are received and understood by intended recipients, improve privacy in Centrelink agent offices, and increase availability and use of interpreters.

Reinvesting any efficiencies back into communities, for example through 'top up' arrangements for job seekers.

'Top up' was a positive feature of CDEP that provided incentives to participants to take on extra work or responsibilities. However, it should be designed to ensure it does not penalise participants who engage in part time employment outside the program. For example, the design of top up under the proposed CDP 2 model would have meant some people choosing to engage in paid employment instead of Work for the Dole activities may have been worse off. It should be noted that CDEP top up had no taper and that to receive the full CDEP base wage participants were required to do approximately 15 hours (not 25) of work per week.

A wage-based or 'wage-like' model providing weekly payments to job seekers.

It is not clear what 'wage-like' means. If it means weekly social security payments, this is not sufficient. Wages afford people some freedom, provide incentive and motivation, are associated with a range of employment conditions such as superannuation and leave provisions, and allow people the ability to work and earn without reliance on the social security system.

The proposal to create 'subsidised jobs' for a maximum of 2 years, and match these to 'unsubsidised jobs within the region to create a pool of skilled workers able to transition into these roles' risks undermining the professed commitment to supporting local community aspirations, and indeed the professed desire to assist people off welfare and into paid employment. In many remote communities, sufficient 'unsubsidised' jobs will not become available within that period, and to expect them to do so will likely lead to policy failure.

The proposal to match 'subsidised' jobs to 'unsubsidised' jobs also places great limitations on the kinds of paid work people would be able to do under the scheme. For example, people in many communities have ideas for small enterprises (mechanic services, feral animal abattoirs, cultural tourism etc.) that have the potential to build community pride, skills, income and motivation but will not necessarily lead to 'unsubsidised' jobs in the region.

Streaming jobseekers to enable tailored assistance according to need.

Streaming participants into different tiers according to need is appropriate, but effective implementation relies on at least four factors:

- an appropriate process for assessing participant needs and work capacity;
- flexibility for providers to move people between tiers and adjust their participation and work requirements as necessary to match individual need;
- the opportunity for participants to 'self-select' where appropriate such as through an application process for waged positions;
- a recognition of community and participant aspiration in the activities and work funded.

As above, there is too much emphasis in the DP on moving all participants on an assumed evolutionary trajectory towards paid employment. For example, it states that 'regular reviews of a person's work capacity' in Tier 1 would 'prevent this tier becoming a destination.' The nature of barriers faced by some people in Tier 1 means that it may be their best long-term option.

The 'show pay' system proposed for Tier 2 appears similar to the proposal in CDP 2. It risks unfairly penalising people who opt for part-time paid employment if this means they miss a day of 'activities.' A fairer system would allow part-time paid employment to count as an allowable activity, and give providers flexibility to encourage participation and re-engagement in different ways on a case by case basis.

The DP proposes that Tier 2 participants would be paid 'an enhanced welfare payment or a training wage,' but that both Tier 2 and Tier 3 would 'sit outside the national Income Support System.' Providers should not be responsible for administering social security payments outside the national social security system.

In the proposed Tier 3, it is not clear what the DP means by setting the number of 'Indigenous-specific subsidised jobs … to address the shortage of jobs and intermittent nature of work.' It would be appropriate to fund wages for the number of jobs identified by local communities as needed for priority projects and small enterprises. However, altering the number of jobs funded 'due to the intermittent nature of work' seems counterproductive, e.g. if people are regularly pulled from projects or enterprises where they are developing skills and that rely on their labour.

<u>Improved access to locally delivered health services to ensure job seekers' barriers and capacity for work are properly identified and appropriate support is provided.</u>

Improved access to health services, including specialist services, is needed in remote communities. This is an important component in ensuring that peoples' capacity to work is properly assessed, and in providing medical assistance and documentation for medical leave. There is evidence of high rates of undiagnosed serious physical and mental health conditions in some remote communities.

In addition to improved access to services, providers need to have more flexibility to ensure participants have the right participation requirements to suit their needs, and to encourage compliance in the ways they see as most appropriate on a case by case basis (this may, for example, include referral to specialist medical services rather than automatic application of an income penalty).

<u>Establishing better arrangements for job training and a pathway to real employment.</u>

While there is a strong demand from residents for job training and paid employment in remote communities, the locational, historical, cultural and economic circumstances of these places mean that many individuals may require ongoing public support (including through wages) for the long term and certainly longer than 2 years. This could effectively be considered public sector employment, with wages continuing beyond a 2 year period until alternative, appropriate employment is available.

Where alternative employment exists or can be created through enterprise development, public-private partnerships or Commonwealth procurement, there will be an element of self-selection into these positions as happened under CDEP. Program participants who have been paid a wage for more than 2 years could be encouraged to apply for available positions.

Encouraging businesses to hire and invest in local people.

Providers need more institutional support to develop and take advantage of opportunities in the local and regional labour market. This requires more than access to a 'region-by-region database on the pipeline of jobs available.' Providers also need to be able to spend less time on compliance and administration and more time pro-actively seeking and negotiating partnerships with potential employers as they did under CDEP. This may require additional staff resources so that brokering such partnerships is a dedicated role.

Increasing the number of Indigenous owned and controlled organisations providing services under CDP.

The way that 'ownership' and 'control' are defined in the DP means that providers may still be quite divorced from local community needs, aspirations and challenges. It is not correct to assume that these organisations 'better understand their job seekers and the communities they serve.' This is especially the case where providers service a large region comprising several different communities. In these instances a regional provider may be experienced as unrepresentative of the local community and unresponsive to its needs.

For some communities, a smaller local community organisation may be better placed as a provider. Local boards may also have a useful role where they have legitimacy in the community, a clear understanding of the possibilities of the program, and real influence in decision-making about the interpretation and flexible implementation of program rules.

Supporting Indigenous enterprise development, particularly in the delivery of Commonwealth contracts.

Support for enterprise development is consistently called for in many communities across remote Australia. A new program should recognise the diversity of these communities, noting that some locations (particularly in the most remote regions) have very few opportunities for sustainable commercial enterprise and will likely require ongoing public support for social enterprises that add social, cultural and economic value to the community.

Enterprise support should not be limited to enterprises involved in the delivery of Commonwealth contracts. Nor should it be limited to 24 months in the case of small enterprises, as currently proposed through the 'microfinancing' proposal under the Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund (IEF) and Indigenous Business Sector Strategy. Continuing support for small enterprises should be available on a case-by-case basis, where such enterprises provide valuable services, capacity building and community development as an alternative to long term reliance on social security and Work for the Dole activities.

3. Additional discussion questions

Do the objectives and design principles outlined sound right? Is there anything else that a remote employment and participation model should aim to achieve?

The objectives are a significant improvement on CDP, i.e. they recognise the diversity of participants' needs, and the need for 'subsidised' jobs, incentives and local decision making.

However, they remain too limited. Not all CDP participants should be classified as 'job seekers.' A new program should recognise that for some participants there will not be a pathway into employment without ongoing public support for wages. It should also focus more broadly on improving the wellbeing of people in remote communities and not just on employment outcomes.

The option of a 'three tiered' approach in a new model is designed to stream job seekers according to work capacity – will streaming assist in better servicing the caseload and moving people along a pathway to employment?

Streaming may assist in providing more appropriate services. To be effective, this will also rely on a much better (and better resourced) process for assessing participant needs and work capacity; much greater flexibility for providers e.g. to adjust participation and work requirements for individuals as needed; and the opportunity for participants to 'self-select' into' a wages-based stream where appropriate.

A focus on 'moving people along a pathway to employment' is too simplistic and will not best serve some of the CDP caseload who will require longer term public investment e.g. in community development and social enterprise.

Is there merit in moving elements of a new model outside the national income support and compliance system to ensure a simpler and more accessible system for job seekers? If so, which elements?

It is not appropriate to move the provision of income support outside the existing national income support system. The provision of income support should never be devolved to CDP providers. It is appropriate to pay wages to participants who would enter into a formal employment relationship rather than relying on income support.

How many (maximum) hours of required activity would be appropriate in each of the tiers? How should hours be structured (e.g. daily or monthly? Flexibility to schedule outside of business hours)?

The CDEP scheme required participants to work for approximately 15 hours per week to ensure wages were in line with the equivalent hourly minimum wage rate. A new scheme should determine work hours and wages according to a similar principle of fair remuneration that pays employees at the equivalent award or minimum wage, plus pro rata superannuation and leave provisions.

Hours of work should be flexible, as they were in CDEP, so that people can swap shifts or make up for hours missed e.g. when flexibility is required for caring, cultural, economic or other

responsibilities. Some CDEP providers had a standard working week of 5 hours per day for 3 days; others developed alternative approaches to match local need, e.g. rostering participants over shifts of 2 x 7-hour days per week in order to take up contract work effectively at 'full time' capacity. CDP should offer similar opportunity for provider flexibility to suit local circumstances.

Should subsidised jobs only be available to Indigenous job seekers or all job seekers in remote Australia?

This is a difficulty created in the change from CDEP to RJCP and CDP. CDEP was open to non-Indigenous participants in certain circumstances (e.g. if they were a partner of an Indigenous CDEP participant). In an effort to make RJCP and CDP appear non-discriminatory (despite much of the program details referring to Indigenous Australians), they were redefined as applying to 'regions' rather than to otherwise unemployed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which has significantly increased non-Indigenous participation.

The CDP model is somewhat confused – it is ostensibly designed to address locational disadvantage, but the increasing emphasis on Indigenous owned and controlled providers recognises the need for a program specifically tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Resolving this tension will require careful thought and consultation. One option would be to return to something like the CDEP model by reframing the program as Indigenous-specific. On this basis, non-Indigenous participants (and Indigenous participants who so choose) could access a parallel 'mainstream' service. This may be more workable than excluding non-Indigenous participants from a waged 'stream,' which could foreseeably create difficulties both for providers and participants. As under CDEP, non-Indigenous people living in predominantly Indigenous communities where they have ongoing familial or cultural relationships might be included in the program. An alternative option would be to allow non-Indigenous participation in all 'tiers' of a new program, ensure waged positions were sufficient to meet demand and distributed equitably, and include non-Indigenous members in local boards. These are just two possibilities, and the question of non-Indigenous participation should be broadly consulted upon.

The new model is based on a job seeker only being paid for the hours they turn up when engaging in more 'work-like activities (a 'show pay' system') – will this provide an adequate incentive for a job seeker to engage? What does a more incentives-based model look like? How should a model deal with persistent non-compliance (people who are able but unwilling)?

The proposed 'show pay' system is not appropriate as it would continue to unfairly penalise participants e.g. who took up part time paid employment by acting effectively as an income penalty.

There is growing evidence in the private sector that people are motivated as much by a 'meaning motive' as a 'profit motive.' An incentives-based model would:

- include the opportunity to receive fair wages and top up;
- ensure program design and implementation starts from community strengths, eg. facilitates genuine local community control, and ensures activities and paid employment are seen as meaningful;

- increase provider flexibility e.g. to seek to reengage participants without resorting to income penalties;
- ensure that providers can operate in such a way that local communities see them as acting for community benefit and in the interests of participant wellbeing;
- substantially improve interactions with Centrelink for those who remain within the income support system (reducing wait times, improving access to interpreters etc).

Persistent non-compliance can often be an indicator of significant challenges faced by an individual (e.g. undiagnosed or untreated physical or mental health conditions, problematic family relationships etc.) that are better approached through well-resourced case management based on an ethics and duty of care. Punitive approaches are unlikely to assist in these circumstances, and may instead encourage resentment and further disengagement.

Should we move to the proposed CDP 2 model?

No. CDP 2, and elements of it, should not be considered as part of a new model.

Should we retain the current CDP model?
Are there other short-term/small scale changes which we could make to improve the operation of the CDP?

The current CDP model should not be retained. It should be replaced with a fundamentally different approach based on genuine consultation and the principle of free, prior and informed consent at the community level.

In the interim, the most damaging aspects of CDP should be repealed immediately by reducing work hours to levels commensurate with CDEP, increasing provider flexibility (e.g. in how work hours are spread over a week), and ensuring providers face no penalty for seeking to re-engage participants without recourse to referral for income penalties.

Is there merit in staying within a national income support and compliance system?

Income support payments should continue to be made within the national income support system.

How can current interactions with the Department of Human Services and/or CDP providers be improved and simplified?

There is significant need to improve interactions with DHS as described above (e.g. to substantially reduce wait times on phone calls, provide better assessments of work capacity with a default of face-to-face assessment, implement systems to ensure postal communications are received and understood by intended recipients, improve privacy in Centrelink agent offices, and increase availability and use of interpreters).

Which of the model options best suit the needs of remote communities?

None of the proposed models are appropriate as currently configured (see comments on design principles).

Is there another option or additional design features than need to be considered?

Identifying the most appropriate design features and the most suitable options will require substantial further consultation with CDP participants and residents of remote communities, as well as reflection on the submissions and report of the recent Senate inquiry into CDP.

Community consultations should include explanation of the APO NT model and seek feedback on this model among the range of options, as well as allowing communities to propose alternatives not yet considered in this DP.

Adequate consultation and program development may not be possible before 30 June 2018. In this instance, CDP should be rolled over (with reduced work hours and a moratorium on penalties) as a new model is properly designed and small trials implemented and evaluated. It is more important that a new program be properly designed and trialled than it is to meet this deadline.

How could a new model better take into account community, family and cultural responsibilities?
How do we ensure greater accountability to community and stronger cultural authority?

Community, family and cultural responsibilities differ markedly within the current CDP regions. A new program should ensure *local* community control over decision-making (e.g. around work projects, cultural leave, flexibility of work hours, compliance arrangements), as it is only at this local level that participant and community needs can be properly understood.

Accountability to community must first include appropriate consultation that facilitates free, prior and informed consent. It must also include 'downward accountability' in evaluation of the initial trials and the program eventually rolled out. This means that performance must be measured against identified community priorities, which are likely to include a range of social, cultural and economic outcomes beyond the transition of participants into other employment.

Does Government have a jobs creation role in remote? If so, how do we ensure subsidised jobs don't become a destination?

The locational, cultural and economic circumstances of many remote communities mean that sufficient employment will never be generated without government support. Publicly funded job creation (through public investment in a waged alternative to CDP, investment in social and commercial enterprises, and funding of wages for services including Indigenous rangers, teachers, health workers etc) is preferable to the alternative which for many people would be long term reliance on income support. Governments also have a role in reducing barriers to employment such as unnecessary exclusion of people with records of minor offences.

How can we further stimulate the local job market, beyond the inclusion of subsidised jobs in a new model, to incentivise employers to hire local people and support them to stay in work?

Providers need greater opportunity to seek out partnerships with potential employers, e.g. to broker labour hire arrangements or establish ongoing relationships based on 'guaranteed' jobs on the completion of training, as was often done under CDEP where possible. This opportunity

could be improved by reducing administrative workload and ensuring there are dedicated staff responsible for brokering these arrangements.

Job retention is often difficult, but can be aided by:

- improved resourcing for intensive mentoring and case management;
- ensuring the work is meaningful and seen as benefiting the community and individual;
- flexible work arrangements such as labour hire, the ability to work in supportive teams, and the ability to split jobs into flexible rostered shifts.

How do we create incentives and better connections within a remote employment model to support the establishment and growth of Indigenous businesses?

The new Indigenous Business Sector Strategy recognises that 'Businesses in regional and remote Australia are more likely to be microbusinesses aimed at servicing the local community.' The pilot 'incubation' model for some CDP regions is welcome, with access to microfinance and specialist business advisors.

However, many enterprises in remote Indigenous communities may not become commercially sustainable particularly within the designated 24 months. A new program should include specific, tailored wages and capital support for these small, social enterprises that provide valuable cultural, social and economic services.

What supports do providers, communities and job seekers need to effectively transition to a new approach? How should implementation be staged?

After a more substantial period of consultation in which CDP participants and local community organisations are able to inform proposed options, a sensible approach would be to facilitate several small trials where there is strong community support for a given model. Such trials will need to be carefully evaluated to assess their ability to meet government and community expectations. It should be possible to trial different models or parameters in different locations to suit local need.

References

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