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Ms Cheryl Scarlett
Secretary
Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Scarlett

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the employment issues raised in the terms of reference for the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations.

Increasing employment opportunities within the Northern Territory has been and always will be an important issue for the NT Government. Various initiatives that have been implemented to achieve this outcome are outlined below.

Northern Territory Public Sector

The recruitment and retention of people into the workforce is a major focus for the Northern Territory Public Sector (NTPS), particularly since the removal of age retirement from the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act*. Information seminars are being conducted and support material is being developed to address the misconceptions and stereotypes incorrectly attached to older workers.

Research conducted by Access Economics also predicts a dramatic decline in the working age population over the next 10 to 20 years. Measures to attract people to the NTPS are at various stages of being developed and implemented, such as:

- Indigenous Employment and Career Development Strategy designed to address the critical under representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait



Islander people within the NTPS workforce by providing a range of appropriate recruitment, career development and retention initiatives;

- A range of flexible work practices to enable employees to balance work and family commitments, eg. part-time employment, job-sharing, home-based work and flexible working hours;
- Willing and Able policy designed to assist people with disabilities to realise their potential in the employment arena, focussing on the *abilities* of employees and potential employees rather than on any disability that they may have;
- Enhanced remote locality incentives that recognise the difficulties and isolation of working in remote areas and that support employees and their families;
- Salary packaging and other incentives for individuals and occupations in areas that are difficult to fill;
- Broader advertising and marketing of NTPS job vacancies;
- Implementation and promotion of career entry programs such as School to Work, work experience placements, vacation employment for university students, scholarships, apprenticeships, cadetships and graduate traineeships; and
- Remote Workforce Development Strategy supported by NT Government funding of \$1M aimed at increasing recruitment and retention rates in remote areas, improving service delivery in remote areas and providing new and innovative approaches to remote workforce development.

The Remote Workforce Development Strategy will be working to develop stronger partnerships with Charles Darwin University, greater access to information about the challenges and benefits of working in remote NT, strategies for the better delivery of remote area communications and linking into Commonwealth programs and infrastructure.

In many of the above measures, access to Commonwealth programs and funding is a critical component.

Northern Territory Police Force

An 'Assessment of Resource Requirements of the Northern Territory Police Force' recently completed by the former Commissioner of Police in Queensland, Mr James O'Sullivan (the O'Sullivan Report) has identified the need for over 148 constables and above by the end of 2006. The NT Government has accepted the O'Sullivan Report's recommendations and has implemented a recruitment campaign to increase staffing levels over the next 3-4 years including:

- over 80 civilian administrative, technical and professional personnel, and
- 28 Aboriginal Community Police Officers (ACPO).

The ACPO scheme is under review to ensure that the relevant recruitment process and employment conditions provide the maximum outcomes for recruitment from within regional and remote areas.

Broader Northern Territory perspective

In my Ministerial Statement delivered in August 2002, the problems faced by the Northern Territory if the barriers encountered by Indigenous Territorians to participating in employment and training were not addressed were highlighted. With Indigenous Territorians comprising almost 30% of the Northern Territory's population, government could not afford to have one third of its potential workforce unemployable through lack of education and job skills.

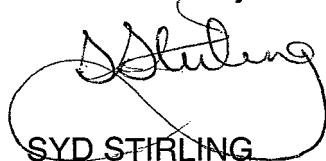
The diversity amongst Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is well known and Government's focus is on the following three areas to improve employment outcomes in remote communities:

- Training for employment
- Community capacity building
- Enterprise training

Clearly a 'one size fits all' approach to employment and training cannot work. The Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) is working towards a significant increase in cooperation and collaboration between various stakeholders in relation to employment and training issues. In addition to working closely with community stakeholders, DEET is also negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, to maximise cooperation between the two agencies, to provide for increased coordination of services and ensure that the best possible employment outcomes are achieved for Indigenous Territorians.

While DEET must always retain a sensitive and flexible approach to meeting community needs, it is imperative that the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments approach the problems of unemployment facing remote communities collaboratively and with common objectives.

Yours sincerely



SYD STIRLING

3rd September 2003