

NAIDOC Breakfast
Hosted by IBA
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Speech by Leah Armstrong

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to pay my respect to the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people, and thank Aunty Agnes for her warm welcome here today.

I am Leah Armstrong and I am a Torres Strait Islander from Mackay in Queensland. For the past 20 years I have called Newcastle home, 18 years of these I have worked in the Aboriginal community in Newcastle and 16 of as the Executive Director of Yarnteen, a not for profit Indigenous organisation, located in Newcastle, NSW.

I am also a Director of the Board of Indigenous Business Australia, a position I have held since 2001, and a non member Director of the NSW Native Title Representative body.

Today, I am very pleased to be here to tell you about the development of IBA's Corporate Plan and officially launch it as well as share with you what NAIDOC means to me.

As every NAIDOC is celebrated around a theme, this year "Advancing Australia Fairly" it is the 2000 NAIDOC theme "Building pride in our communities" that I believe sums up NAIDOC. This is a time we as Indigenous people and communities have together to celebrate our resilience and a time to encourage the broader community to acknowledge their Aboriginal history and build pride in the whole community.

In my community, Newcastle, the chance to march down the main street, chanting for rights, gives the younger generation a chance to experience a part of the struggle that our people undertook to achieve the hard fought rights they are benefiting from today.

My children feel a sense of pride in participating in these peaceful actions of protest.

The opportunity for the broader community to participate in this celebration is also an important element to building pride in our communities. Certainly, again in my community, for many non Indigenous people the chance to interact with Indigenous people at these times may be their only opportunity and I believe that only through sharing an experience can we start to break down the barriers.

I was reminded again just recently of my first conversation on Aboriginal people in Newcastle with a non Aboriginal person and their clear surprise and reaction to learning that Aboriginal people lived in Newcastle. That was

20 years ago, and the same was recalled by someone new to Newcastle 2 weeks ago.

But for my organisation, Yarnteen, NAIDOC is not the only opportunity for acknowledging community building. Yarnteen for the past 16 years has maintained a focus on encouraging Aboriginal people to be active participants in the whole community system through economic empowerment and Yarnteen, I believe is an example of what can be achieved by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a clear purpose in mind.

First, by way of background, Yarnteen was established in 1991 in Newcastle, NSW.

The Aboriginal community of Newcastle comprises a largely resettled group of families with ties to rural towns and cultural groups across NSW. There is an ongoing mobility around these rural locations. There is also a stable core of extended families who have called Newcastle home for over three decades.

Yarnteen has a clear purpose: to encourage and empower Aboriginal people to become full and free agents in their own development and to enable them to prosper.

To achieve our purpose we create employment, training and enterprise development opportunities for Aboriginal people.

From the beginning we sought to become economically independent and a real player in the mainstream economy of our region. Independence from government funding was thought fundamental to achieving our objectives and for long term sustainability.

Today, Yarnteen operates several commercial enterprises and operates other community development initiatives.

Our wholly owned commercial enterprises consist of:

Port Hunter Commodities – a purpose built bulk warehousing operation with storage capacity of over 60,000 tonnes of agricultural commodities in the port of Newcastle; and

Riverside Car & Boat Wash – a modern eco friendly car and boat washing service which we recently built in Port Macquarie.

We have also built a solid asset base. We have a number of property investments including a stake in Scarborough House, a commercial office complex in Canberra, together with IBA and four other Indigenous groups.

Alongside our commercial investments, we have developed training and capacity building enterprises. We established Yarnteen College – a nationally recognised and registered training organisation. We also recently developed the Yarnteen Creative Enterprise Centre that included our purchase of a building for ICT training and social enterprise development.

We also support a number of cultural and youth programs for our people.

We support these initiatives with some Government funding and through corporate partnerships, for example we are the only Australian Indigenous group have a partnership with Microsoft and their Global Unlimited Potential community program. However, because our organisation makes a commercial profit we are also able to subsidise innovative projects that are outside normal program guidelines.

My Directorship of Yarnteen has many synergies with my participation as a Board member of Indigenous Business Australia. Like Joseph, I value the opportunity to apply my local commercial development experience in a national organisation - to encourage economic sustainability for Indigenous Australians across Australia.

Today gives me the opportunity to talk about an important part of my job as an IBA Board member – setting the organisations' vision, goals and objectives for the next five years through our Corporate Plan for 2008 to 2013.

Whilst a Corporate Plans is required as part of IBA's enabling legislation, IBA like other innovative and responsive organizations believes a good Corporate Plan should tell the story of the organisation and is essential to developing the RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS and getting the RIGHT PEOPLE on board to take the journey forward in achieving our goals.

We see the plan as providing essential guidance to ensure the greatest impact from our existing programs and future initiatives to provide opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the mainstream economy. The plan provides our people with a road map for implementing the Board's policies.

As Joseph outlined earlier, IBA has undergone significant growth in recent years. We have developed from a single issue agency focused on building assets and developing joint ventures with the private sector, largely in urban and regional areas, to an organisation with several programs aimed to promote the sustainable economic development of Indigenous people across Australia, including in remote areas.

The Board met for two days in September last year to develop the plan and again in December of that year to refine our approach.

It gave members of the Board, both Indigenous and non Indigenous who come from urban and remote regions and from commercial banking and small business an opportunity to re-examined our objectives and strategies taking into account changes to IBA as an organisation and changes to the external political and economic environment.

Our new corporate plan needed to reflect these rapid changes to the organisation, as well as take into account the significant shift in the Government's overall approach to Indigenous development.

As we have heard, the current government is focused on closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage and sees economic development as a critical pathway to achieving this.

We see IBA, with its commercial focus, as uniquely placed to assist Indigenous Australians to participate in the mainstream economy.

With this in mind, the Board developed a new vision to take the organisation forward over the next five years. The new vision, and the plan itself, represents a powerful statement that we, as a Board, are very proud of.

Our guiding vision is for:

A nation in which the First Australians are economically independent and an integral part of the economy.

The corporate plan continues to focus IBA's activities on commercial opportunities that provide choices for economic participation and wealth creation for Indigenous people.

IBA's objective is to provide quality leadership in engagement in the wider economy and the strategic pathways focus us on the professional delivery of our programs and applying a commercial discipline to our decision making processes.

As an IBA Director, I am confident that in 2013 we will be able to measure the success of the Plan and be proud of our role in growing the economic assets owned by Indigenous partners; of increasing the number of Indigenous small business owners and improving home ownership for Indigenous families.

We will also be acknowledged as a respected leader in developing solutions through our commercial approach to achieving a social impact.

On behalf of the IBA Board, it is with great pleasure that I present and formally launch IBA's Corporate Plan, for 2008 to 2013.

Thank you