

Indigenous Education and Economic Opportunities Youth Bill 2009

Explanatory Notes

The overall objective of the *Indigenous Education and Economic Opportunities Youth Bill 2009* is to decrease alcohol abuse and chroming in Indigenous youth. These issues were linked back to the problem of boredom in the DOGIT Indigenous communities of Queensland and in the Torres Strait Islands. This Youth Bill addresses the problem of boredom by implementing a range of initiatives, including education and employment creation programs.

The establishment of cultural schools in all Indigenous communities and Torres Strait Islands is a method of bringing back traditional culture that has been lost through time. Culture is an important aspect of all societies and communities. It is often the link that brings people together. The cultural schools will not be compulsory for all Indigenous youth to attend but will be available as an activity where youth will learn their traditional culture taught by elders of that community. The activities will include learning the oral history of that community, traditional food, art, music and further activities deemed appropriate by the elders of the community. The intended outcome of the cultural schools is to reunite culture with youth and hopefully identify the problems of alcohol abuse and chroming in youth.

Educating youth of Australia's Indigenous past is important. This Youth Bill introduces a contract between students, teachers and parents to encourage students to stay in school. This will be essential for all students in Queensland high schools that participate in extracurricular activities. The contract outlines a number of days students must be present at school to remain involved in the extracurricular activities. This contract will ensure students attend school and help reduce truancy rates in the student population.

The Youth Bill also introduces a compulsory core subject—Indigenous Studies. This subject will be mandatory for all students in Queensland state high schools from grades eight to twelve. There is a poor understanding of

Indigenous culture and Australia's Indigenous past. This subject will increase understanding and also help Indigenous youth understand their past. The subject will be overseen by a board that will monitor subject matter and examinations.

To encourage Indigenous youth to stay in school and provide extra support, a youth engagement officer will be available at every state school in Queensland with an Indigenous student population of 1% or over. It is important that education problems are addressed and, if help is not available at home or the teacher is occupied with other students, the youth engagement officer will provide guidance and support.

To provide jobs in Indigenous communities, a business incentive has been introduced to encourage businesses to set up in the communities. A tax break is available for the first 7 years of a business operating in the community. The business must employ 60% of the workforce from the community in which it is placed. Many communities across Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands have little to no jobs available and residents have to travel to the nearest town which can be many kilometres away for work. The tax break is to support businesses that want to start but find it difficult. This will bring jobs to the communities and help economic growth and opportunities for not only youth but all members of the community.