

Media Release

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Further improvements to NT Indigenous housing program

A new independent, expert quality assurance team will be established to inspect and assess new houses and refurbishments delivered under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) in the Northern Territory (NT).

The new team will make sure all work is completed to appropriate standards, and will operate in addition to existing checks already regularly made over the course of SIHIP construction and refurbishments.

An assessment of SIHIP by independent consultants Dr Owen Donald and Julia Canty-Waldron found that the changes and recommendations of the 2009 review have been implemented, and have put the program on track to achieve its targets of 750 new houses, 230 rebuilds and 2500 refurbishments over the period to 2013.

As recommended in the August 2009 review of SIHIP, the assessment examined the program's progress to date.

The Australian and NT Governments are committed to continuing to improve the delivery of Indigenous housing in the NT.

The new inspection and assessment team is one of a number of measures being introduced by the Australian and NT Governments, as part of additional steps to continue improving SIHIP.

These include:

- The employment by the NT Government of an additional 20 asset management officers and tenancy officers to operate in remote communities. This will align the refurbishments under

SIHIP with ongoing repairs and maintenance programs.

- The Australian Government will provide additional resources to assess the existing condition of houses and improve baseline data. This will supplement the NT Government's data collection and help to accurately measure improvements achieved through refurbishments.

The assessment found there had been improvements in the administration and delivery of SIHIP as a result of changes implemented following the 2009 review.

These include the Australian Government's more hands-on leadership role, simplified governance structures, a reduction in program costs and red tape and the establishment of clear and accountable targets.

The assessment found that these changes have resulted in:

- More efficient decision making following changes to governance structures;
- Better processes for planning and scoping construction works that are linked to clear program parameters relating to targets and cost;
- A shared understanding and strong adherence across the program to targets and budget;
- The recruitment of appropriately skilled people into new and pre-existing positions in the program management team;
- Development of clear policy guidelines to clarify and support the achievement of SIHIP targets; and
- Communication with communities about the new housing targets.

The assessment also found that administration costs of the program are currently below 8 per cent and that the end of year target to complete 1000 rebuilds and refurbishments and 150 new houses is achievable.

The program is also delivering new training and job opportunities for Indigenous people in the NT. The program is exceeding the Indigenous employment targets of 20 per cent with more than 35 per cent of the current SIHIP workforce made up of local Indigenous workers.

The assessment highlights the challenge of delivering a housing program on the scale that is required in the Northern Territory.

Housing in Indigenous communities is in an appalling state of disrepair.

SIHIP is focused on building new houses and refurbishing existing houses, through an extensive 'fix and make safe' program. As a first priority, SIHIP is making bathrooms and kitchens useable and fixing unsafe electrical faults and wiring in existing houses.

The Australian Government will continue to take the necessary steps to drive continuing improvements in the delivery of Indigenous housing programs across Australia.

A copy of the SIHIP Post Review Assessment is available at www.fahcsia.gov.au

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