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Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory: Productivity Commission Submission

Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) is a remote, mobile playgroup and parent information service that travels vast distances to bring the joy of play-based learning to children and families who are socially and/or geographically isolated. KICS is an Incorporated Association A1496 under the NT Incorporated Associations Act and has a Board of Management made up of parents of children living remotely in the Northern Territory, including an Indigenous Representative and representatives from Katherine School of the Air (KSA) and the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA). KICS has been operational as a remote, mobile supported playgroup and parent information service since its inception by the Isolated Children's Parents Association in 1988, becoming an Incorporated Association in 1989. KICS is a Registered Charity and is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation that is currently funded by the Prime Minister and Cabinet Indigenous Advancement Strategy for the provision of a supported playgroup to children who are socially and geographically isolated with little or no access to services.

KICS has 2 Field Teams made up of a Playgroup Leader and a Playgroup Support worker who facilitate a supported playgroup for socially and geographically isolated children and families. As a mobile service, the KICS teams travel to remote families in their own community or property, where they can come together in a common space to share experiences of child rearing, child development and share in their children's early learning journey. KICS playgroups are set up outdoors in a familiar environment so as to be inviting and accessible to families with young children and as such reduce barriers to participation. KICS playgroups are a 'soft entry point' to education. KICS is a Universal or Primary preventative initiative that supports all children and families, targeting those living remotely who are socially and geographically isolated. In 2016 KICS won the NAPCAN Play Your Part Award and the NT Education and Care Award for Outstanding Education and Care Service in a Budget Based Funded Service.

The Constitution of Katherine Isolated Children's Service states:

2. Objects and purposes (clause 2)

The objects and purposes of the Association are as follows:

- (a) To travel throughout the prescribed area assisting families of children aged 0-12 (with children aged 0-5 a priority) who live in isolation by:*
- (b) providing information resources about children's education, health and development;*
- (c) assisting with children's intellectual, social, and physical development by conducting playgroups and other activities; and*
- (d) providing support to parents on matters relating to child development*

2.1 Geographical Region of the Association

The prescribed area of the service shall be that part of the mainland Northern Territory bounded east by the

Queensland border, west by the Western Australian border, south by a straight line joining Birrindudu Homestead and Benmara Homestead and extended to the east and west boundaries, to the north by a straight line from Katherine to the WA border through Legune Homestead, and another straight line from Katherine north-east to Bulman then in a straight line south-east to Numbulwar.

2.2 Priorities for service by the Association

- (a) *If requests for service are received, service shall be provided according to the following priorities.*
 - (i) *Socially and geographically isolated children under 5 with no onsite service.*
 - (ii) *Socially and geographically isolated children 5 - 12 with no onsite service/school.*
 - (iii) *Geographically isolated children under 5 with no onsite service.*
 - (iv) *Geographically isolated children 5 - 12 with no onsite service/school.*
 - (v) *Geographically isolated children under 5 with an onsite service.*
 - (vi) *Geographically isolated children 5 - 12 with an onsite service.*
- (b) *Requests for service for higher priority children may mean a decrease in service for lower priority children. As ages of children at a venue change, so does the priority of visiting that venue.*
- (a) *A list of requests for service which are not met because their priority is too low will be kept. It will record the location requesting service, the number and ages of children, a contact person or persons, existing services at the location, and a description of special needs children may have.*

In a practical sense, the venues that KICS visit have small variations from year to year due to the birth, growth and movement of children and families. As a mobile service, KICS can adapt its service provision to ensure young children who are socially and geographically isolated have access to a playgroup. In 2019, KICS has 44 pastoral stations, 21 Indigenous Communities and 3 small townships on the itinerary. (Appendix 1) Please note, that all the stations with small children have been listed, but often 2 or 3 neighbouring stations will join together at a host station for playgroup. With 2 full time Field Teams, KICS aims for 2 visits a term to each venue or 'cluster' of stations, or 8 times a year. This is entirely dependent on weather and access factors in the first and fourth terms due to the wet season, dirt roads and rivers in remote locations. KICS operates its remote, mobile playgroup service during school term time, with each team leaving Katherine on Monday as a travel day and facilitating playgroup in the morning session at a different venue each day, returning to Katherine on Friday or Saturday. The KICS Field teams each have a Toyota Landcruiser fitted out with after-market bullbar, winch, sunraiser tyres, dual batteries, UHF radio, satellite phone, satellite tracker, suspension seating, ARB fridge, rear wheel carrier and tow ball and a roof top camper towing a purpose built trailer with solar panels, dual batteries, engel fridge, water tank and filled with boxes and boxes of toys and resources for playgroup. KICS currently has a 2013 Toyota Landcruiser vehicle with 250K kms on the odometer towing a trailer built in 2010 and a 2015 Toyota Landcruiser vehicle with 130K kms on the odometer towing a new trailer purchased with a grant from the NT Community Benefit Fund and topped up with KICS funds. KICS has repeatedly asked for an application for funding to make a capital purchase of a new vehicle to replace the 2013 Toyota but was recently told by our newest funding manager that "As a vehicle is not classified as an activity your request for funding has not been supported." (Tracy McLeod PMC 13/06/2019) I'm not sure how KICS can operate it's remote mobile playgroup service without vehicles to get to some of the most remote families in Australia.

KICS is federally funded as a supported playgroup. When I joined the KICS family in June 2015, the funding came from DEEWR, which changed to the Dept. of Social Services. KICS was funded as a Budget Based Service (BBF) and was then moved to the federal Education dept. portfolio. The changes last July means KICS is funded entirely through the Prime Minister & Cabinet Indigenous Advancement Strategy. Since moving to the PMC IAS funding stream in July 2018, KICS has had 6 different funding managers in less than 12 months. The acquittal process is significantly different and not at all focused on KICS service provision. KICS keeps a demographic record of playgroup

attendees including ages, genders and whether they identify as Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Funding Acquittals through the Dept. of Education asked for a four week snapshot of venues, playgroups and attendance data to show that KICS was performing its service provision effectively. The PMC IAS acquittal asks for success stories, barriers to service provision and the only specific questions are in regard to Indigenous employment, hours worked, how many hours all staff have worked and the percentage of total hours that were worked by an Indigenous employee. I understand that this is a KPI of the IAS funding stream, but it takes the focus off the service provision as a remote, mobile playgroup and parent information service for children and families who are socially and geographically isolated. This KPI was added to our contract in July 2019 despite assurances that nothing would change to the BBF contracts when they were transitioned to a new department in July 2018. The KPI states that KICS must employ 2 part time Indigenous employees, however the contract failed to include funds for the employment of the new positions. KICS already had 4 full time employees in the Field Team positions and is lucky and thankful to have retained those staff in 2019. The Field Team positions are unique in that they must be applied for as 2 people who already know each other and can work well together because of travelling long distances over dirt roads, very remote locations and camping in the field. The Playgroup Leader must have Early Childhood qualifications or experience and the Playgroup Support Worker must have off road driving and mechanical experience. The nature of these positions means that the Field Teams are given some training and then travel and facilitate the playgroups with a great deal of independence, checking in with the Coordinator each afternoon when they make camp at their next destination. As KICS is not centre based, but a mobile service, it is not possible to train a person, nor would it be fair to expect the teams to have a person travel with them whom they didn't know because of the travelling and camping circumstances. KICS markets the Field Team positions as a lifestyle and advertises Australia wide in rural newspapers and online to attract applications from people with the relevant experience. KICS has always encouraged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for the Field Team positions. In order to take steps to address the Indigenous employment KPI, KICS employs 2 young Indigenous employees on a casual basis to help facilitate the Playgroup in the Park events in Katherine funded through the NT School Holiday Program. Both of these young people are in High School and it gives them an opportunity to gain experience in large scale playgroups and a reference for their resume.

KICS leases a combined shed and office space in Katherine that is used as a base for the coordination of the remote mobile playgroup service and storage of toys, resources and vehicles. KICS has the capacity to mobilise resources so has received small funding grants through the Office of the Chief Minister School Holiday program for its KICS 'Playgroup in the Park' events at the Low Level Nature Reserve Frank Streten Park in Katherine. These events attract >250 children plus adults and increase KICS' profile in the community. As these large-scale playgroup events are held in the school holidays, KICS has negotiated with staff to utilise a day in lieu, employed casual Indigenous staff and utilised volunteers from other service providers including Kentish Family Daycare, Anglicare's HIPPY program, The Smith Family, Australian Breastfeeding Association and Dept. of Tourism's Crocwise program as well as engage private enterprise for the hire of inflatable water slides. KICS has so far facilitated 7 of these events aimed at families with children aged 0-10 in Katherine and won the Katherine Town Council Australia Day Award for Best Community Event this year for this program which has been added since the Royal Commission and is not part of KICS' usual service provision.

Although KICS is a Registered Charity we apparently do not qualify for Deductible Gift Recipient Status as KICS visits both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and families living remotely. KICS' application for DGR status was not supported "because non-Indigenous children living in isolation are not considered to be a group that has benevolent needs." (Marion Hopkins ACNC 5/06/2018) DGR status would help KICS access philanthropic funding which would benefit us greatly by reducing dependence on Federal government funding. This decision by the ACNC (which is linked to ATO reasoning) that non-Indigenous children living in isolation are not considered to be at

a disadvantage contradicts the most recent Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018 published in March 2019. The AEDC National Report 2018 measures the development of children on Australia in their first year of full-time school and has five key domains:

- *Physical health and well-being*

There has been a steadily increasing gap in the percentage of children living in Very Remote Australia who are developmentally vulnerable on this domain, compared to children living in major cities from 12.3% in 2012 to 14.6% in 2018

- *Social Competence*

The percentage of children developmentally vulnerable on this domain in Very Remote Australia decreased from 24% in 2015 to 22.4% in 2018, whilst the percentage living in Major Cities remained unchanged at 9.3%, resulting in a narrowing of the gap but remaining wider than the baseline.

- *Emotional maturity*

In 2018, children living in Very Remote Australia were at least twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the emotional maturity domain than children living in Major Cities. This gap has narrowed since 2015 when the difference was nearly three times.

- *Language and cognitive skills*

The NT had a significant decrease in vulnerability from 21.5% in 2015 to 19.6% in 2018.

Children living in Very Remote Australia were more than five times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on the language and cognitive skills domain than children living in Major Cities in 2018, a gap that has been steadily increasing since 2012. The gap is the most marked on this domain.

- *Communication and general knowledge*

In 2018, children living in Very Remote Australia were nearly three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on this domain than children living in Major Cities, a gap that has been widening since 2012.

Children living in Very Remote areas in Australia in 2018 were more than twice as likely as those living in Major Cities to be developmentally vulnerable on one or two domains (45.5 and 20.8%). They were also three times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains (30.3 and 10.2%). Following an increase in 2015, the percentage of children who live in Remote or Very Remote areas who were developmentally vulnerable on one or more or two or more domains decreased in 2018, albeit not back to 2012 levels. This gap had been widening since baseline but has now narrowed slightly. Quite obviously these developmental vulnerabilities for remote children need to be addressed before a child gets to school age. Please note that I have only taken note of geographical location of remoteness as an indicator of developmental vulnerability to highlight the reason KICS visits all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous who are socially and geographically isolated in the greater Katherine region. Indigenous children face further disadvantage of which I am sure the Productivity Commission, Federal and NT governments are all too aware.

In 2018, KICS held 220 playgroups, 13 of which were cancelled due to weather, access, sorry businesses or vehicle repairs making 207 successful playgroups. 3125 children attended playgroup, with 2370 or 76% identifying as Indigenous. 1113 adults also attended playgroup with 594 or 53% identifying as Indigenous. Of the >50 venues that KICS visits with its mobile playgroup and parent information service, 10 venues have a Families as First Teachers educator funded by the Northern Territory Education Department. KICS works with FaFT educators, preschool and transition teachers and teaching principals to provide a play based early learning experience for both children and educators. KICS has an excellent working relationship with the FaFT educators, NT dept. of Education, Sunrise Health and Katherine West Health Board, local council and most importantly traditional owners and families on whose land KICS facilitates playgroup. KICS is culturally appropriate and respectful of the Indigenous cultures in the region and the KICS educators have often been included and invited to join in cultural activities such as men's business and recommendations of appropriate camping and fishing spots. Establishing and maintaining relationships with families is one of the most important aspects of the KICS mobile playgroup service

and KICS' 30 year service history and staff retention over the years, despite challenging work conditions including long, off-road driving distances and camping in the field is testament to KICS remote mobile playgroup staff.

It needs to be pointed out that the KICS staff wages are less than half of a FaFT educator and they do not get a housing provision. The KICS staff camp in the field and do not have access to air-conditioned accommodation because none is available. The KICS Field Teams camp in the field with permission or are sometimes accommodated in-house on pastoral properties, in caravan parks where available, can access PMC VON accommodation where available (in 2 venues!) or roll a swag out in a pre-school or creche. The KICS staff accept the long driving distances over dirt roads and camping in the field all week as part of the KICS Field Team working conditions but the Productivity Commission, the Prime Minister & Cabinet and the Northern Territory Government need to understand that the service KICS provides to the most remote, socially and geographically isolated children in our region is excellent value for money. It would not be economically viable to employ FaFT educators at great cost in every Indigenous community as there may not be the numbers of small children living there. Likewise, Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living on pastoral properties have no access to Early Childhood services as the Northern Territory government, nor any other service provider, do not provide a mobile supported playgroup service and Katherine School of the Air begins with pre-school. KICS mobile playgroup and parent information service fill in the gap in Early Childhood services by providing a supported play based learning program that fits in with the working and living conditions of its participants.

KICS currently have 2 concurrent contracts with the Prime Minister & Cabinet Indigenous Advancement Strategy. Both of these contracts end in December 2019 and will hopefully be rolled into one contract. However, KICS has been operating at a deficit in the last couple of years and has made changes to its office space to reduce rent, sold vehicles and has struggled with increased fuel prices, vehicle repairs as they get older, tyres, and staff wages. KICS cannot keep 4 full time staff on as 2 Field Teams with its current amount of funding. A small increase in funding would allow the KICS service provision to continue as it has been with 2 full time Field Teams (of 2 people each) travelling to over 50 venues on rotation aiming for 2 visits a term. A large increase in funding and a capital expenditure grant would allow KICS to purchase another rig of either a Toyota Landcruiser vehicle and trailer or small truck with a Pantec and 2 more full time staff members to travel around the Alice Springs region and be administered by the KICS coordinator from the Katherine office. Properties around Alice Springs and Kununurra in WA have no such mobile supported playgroup service and their small children are missing out on play based learning opportunities at the most important developmental phase of their lives.

Research has shown that investing time, effort and resources in the early years of a child's life has significant impacts on their behaviour, learning, health and wellbeing, as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Supporting early childhood development thus lays the basis for children to grow up with the skills to succeed, bringing benefits for them and the community as a whole. The early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health. (McCain & Mustard 1999) The prior to school years are recognised as a vitally important period of human development in its own right, not as a time to grow before 'real learning' begins in school. The developments that occur in the early childhood years are remarkable for their speed, comprehensiveness and complexity. All areas of development and learning undergo rapid change in the early years and each influences the other. (Bredekamp and Copple 1997 p 97)

Australia is a signatory to The Convention on the Rights of the Child; Article 31 of which states that *'Children have the right to relax and play and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.'* Play-based curricula designed with the developmental needs of children in mind can easily foster the development of academic and attention skills in ways that are engaging and fun. (Duncan et al 2007) Much has been written about the importance of children's play in their learning, especially the federal guiding document of Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early

Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009) Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children, they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and learn. In these ways, play can promote positive dispositions toward learning. (DEEWR 2009 p15) Educators (including parents, carers, nannies, governesses and teachers) who are effective in promoting their children's learning through play often adopt the role of provocateur through which they observe and assess the understandings demonstrated by individual children and then generate situations which challenge these. This may include asking questions, introducing elements of surprise, requiring children to explain their position to others and working with children to consider the logical consequences of the positions they adopt. Through such provocation, children are stimulated to investigate the challenges set by the situations generated. (Edwards, Gandini & Forman 1998)

All playgroups intend to benefit children and their carers by providing developmentally appropriate play opportunities for children and opportunities for carers to develop social and support networks and peer support (FAHCSIA, 2011) Playgroups offer high-quality, fun, structured and unstructured play experiences for children and carers and provide opportunities for play-based learning to support positive child development. Play should be freely chosen, be largely self-directed, intrinsically motivated, spontaneous and pleasurable (Brockman, Fox & Jago 2011) Play has many benefits for children and is associated with the development of language and literacy, sociability and mathematical ability (Hancock et al 2012) Playgroups support positive child development through providing a play based learning environment.

Playgroups can support child development by providing children with access to developmentally appropriate activities and facilities tailored to the interests of the group. Playgroups are a platform for social and community connectedness through the development of informal social networks and by linking families to local community resources and services. In her 2013 report 'Rural, regional or remote: Mothers' life satisfaction and life experiences', Dr Bronwyn Harman recognised that mothers of young children highlighted more difficulties living in rural, regional or remote (RRR) areas. The researchers suggest that organisations intending to provide support for RRR mothers should consider providing services that enhance social support.

The Isolated Children's Parent's Association identified a need for families with small children living in remote Northern Territory to gain access to an Early Childhood service more than 30 years ago. Katherine Isolated Children's Service has continued since then to bring a successful and energetic remote, mobile playgroup and parent information service to small children and their families, carers and educators who are socially and geographically isolated living on pastoral properties, in Indigenous communities and in small townships. KICS successfully establishes and maintains relationships and communicates with families and stakeholders including the NT Ed Dept, FaFT, Health services, local governments, traditional owners and other incorporated associations to bring play based early learning opportunities to children in a culturally appropriate way in a familiar environment.

Written by Amanda Tootell
KICS Coordinator

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Appendix 1 Katherine Isolated Children's Service Venues list 2019

Pastoral Stations	Indigenous Communities	Townships
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Alexandria Station Alroy Downs Amungee Mungee Aroona Station Auvergne Station Big River Station Birrundudu Brunette Downs Bullo River Station Camfield Station Calvert Hills Station Carpentaria Station Delamere Station Dry River Station El Questro Station Eva Downs Hayfield Station Helen Springs Station Hi-Way Inn Daly Waters Inverway Station Kalala Station Larrizona Station Legune Station Lissadell Station Malapunyah Springs Margaret Downs Mathieson Station McArthur River Station Montejinny Station Moolooloo Station Moroak Station Mount Sanford Mountain Valley Station Nelson Springs Newcastle Waters Station Newry Station Pigeon Hole Station Sophie Downs Sturt Plains Suplejack Station Ucharonidge Station Victoria River Downs Willeroo Station Zebra Rock Mine <p>Please note neighbouring stations are often visited as a cluster so children, parents, carers and educators can join together for playgroup</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Amanbidgi Barunga* Beswick / Wugularr* Bulla Camp Bulman Campbell Springs Corella Creek Jilkminggan* Kalkaringi* Lajamanu* Manyallaluk Marlinja Marralum Minyerri* Myatt Ngukurr* Numbulwar* Pigeon Hole Community Robinson River Urapunga Yarralin 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Elliott* Mataranka* Timber Creek <p>*10 FaFT sites</p>

Appendix 2 Parent Testimonials

"Having been a shy, isolated child before becoming a parent of isolated children, I believe that the importance of KICS in the lives of bush families with young children can hardly be overstated. The playgroups are a vital opportunity for young children to learn social and 'classroom' skills from a young age, skills such as sharing toys, painting and playdough, taking turns, playing group games, sitting quietly to listen to a story, and handling conversations with peers and new adults. These skills and experiences are such a matter of everyday for urban children that it is easy to overlook the fact that many kids in remote areas miss out, leading to stressful school experiences, poor academic performance and problematic personal relationships. I believe that limited social skills can easily sour every facet of a young person's life, and that early socialisation can pre-empt the difficulty. Also of great benefit to families is the availability of KICS coordinators to advise on behavioural or developmental problems children may be experiencing, and the playgroups are a great opportunity for young parents and carers to network, chat and feel a little less alone in the great undertaking of raising a new generation of NT bush children."

Bev Stockwell

Sunday Creek Station, Daly Waters.

KICS attendee for 15+ years

"We first accessed KICS in 1994 when we began our family, 4 hours from Katherine NT in the VRD (Victoria River District) and our daughter had her first water play adventure. As we were new to parenting, the KICS team were an invaluable source of information and gave us a bit more confidence and helped create a network of parents and kids around us. KICS has always provided a great opportunity for our children to socialize, experience new people, play and stories and for parents to swap yarns and information. For remote parents and especially new parents, this interaction focused around KICS visits is almost as important as the early childhood development experiences of our kids. Even when the last of our five children went to school in about 2006, I would still go to KICS occasionally on my own to catch up with other parents, play with playdough and say hi to the KICS crew!"

Sally Sullivan

Cave Creek Station

"KICS has been a very important part of parenthood life, it all started with one little baby here at Kalala Station, now we can get up 10- 12 kids at one play group! The kids absolutely love it, it's a great time to be together with other kids in the surrounding areas, doing things they don't normally do with people they don't normally see. The Field Teams have become our friends and us Mum's look forward to the chatting and the time with them also! To lose KICS would be a tragedy, as so many families across the Top End of Australia count down the days to see the familiar four wheel drive and trailer coming through the front gate. Early childhood education is so very vital to a child's development and KICS delivers this to young children in the NT and so much more."

Amanda Murphy

Kalala Station

"KICS makes each child feel special by travelling huge distances to remote places to hold their play groups. For our family it helps to break up the year, giving our kids a reprieve from the daily grind of station life - mustering, school, wet season etc. It's one of their outlets to help maintain them to just be kids and play!"

Murray and Tanya Hockey

Hodgson River Station

"As a child I remember when KICS arrived with their Troop Carrier and Trailer at our place. All the other families would arrive from nearby station and communities 100km away. It was the only social event that was just for the kids. Both myself and husband grew up with these visits. Now as our 5 children are enjoying the same excitement when the KICS car arrives. As I am the parent now I realise that it is not only for the children but for the parents as well, in cases like ours we have no other families around us and the joy that KICS brings to the children is unexplainable. They provide the children with activities that I would never think of and myself with an ear to listen. KICS is freedom and enjoyment for bush children to help support and care."

Annie Craig

Mistake Creek Station

"Hi just wanted to let you all know what KICS means to our family.....Living out here on the station can be very over busy and having lived here know for 12 yrs we do not get much time at all to travel into town and provide our kids with playgroups or social outings as much as we would like. When KICS came along to us for the first time so many years ago we thought what a wonderful precious thing to have, my girls have grown up loving and learning so many wonderful things from KICS and me as well I love the time to pull up have a cuppa and chat . This program and the wonderful people who work the strings of Kics needs to stay and still keep running so many families would be so lost without it"

Emma Miller

Margaret Downs Station

"Yes we all have very fond memories of KICS its always been an awesome group of people creating everlasting memories children take with them forever. My kids love it and Mr Daniel our tutor makes sure my older two go along as well. Our scenario is a little different here at the Hotel than we had on Rosewood Station but the kids have settled in with School of the Air and life here at Timber Creek is very different from our life in Kununurra and school as they knew. It's all a big adventure and were all growing."

Fiona McDonald

Timber Creek

"Yesterday we had another fabulous visit to Kiana Station by your KICS team. This will be our 7th year of receiving the happiness that the KICS playgroup brings to our small but remote community and we are so grateful. What would we do without KICS?! The children here at Kiana all wait in great anticipation for each visit and always run out to greet the team when the amazing KICS truck rolls in the gate. So enjoyable to watch the elation. KICS represents so much fun and excitement for these isolated outback children who would otherwise be devoid of such interactive and novel playtime for extended periods of time. We are 9 hours away from town and the KICS truck is a wonderment to all the kids here. I must say also that you do such a marvellous job in recruitment. All the KICS teams have been so fabulous to the kids in their co-ordinated playtime. The activities are always new and stimulating and watching the kids flying KICS kites and playing with new toys and creative games is a joy each visit. Again thank you so much to all at KICS for making such positive change to the lives of our outback kids. We look forward to seeing KICS on the next visit."

Nicky Lorimer

Kiana Station

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Our ref 50:MIN19:430

Ms Mandy Tootell
Coordinator
Katherine Isolated Children's Service

21 May 2019

Dear Ms Tootell

Re: Funding request for Katherine Isolated Children's Service

Thank you for your letter of 1 May 2019 to the Minister for Education, the Hon Selena Uibo MLA, regarding ongoing funding for the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS). I am responding on the minister's behalf.

The Northern Territory Government understands the importance of supporting the developmental needs of children in their early years and the positive effects that this can have on a child's life. This is the foundation of the *Starting Early for a Better future Implementation Plan 2018-22* and is consistent with the government's existing early childhood commitments such as the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, the Families as First Teachers Program and administration of the National Quality Framework.

While the department acknowledges the benefits of the mobile playgroup program provided by KICS, it does not have any funding capability to support the service. However, I have been advised that you should continue to liaise with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Katherine Regional Office on telephone 1800 079 098 about this matter.

The Department of Education will continue to advocate ongoing support for Northern Territory early childhood remote services such as KICS through its engagement with the Commonwealth Government both nationally and locally.

I wish the KICS Board of Management success in securing ongoing future funding.

Yours sincerely

Vicki Baylis
Chief Executive



NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC.

Advancing and protecting the interests of cattle producers in the Northern Territory

Member - National Farmers' Federation & Cattle Council of Australia

7 May 2019

To Whom it May Concern,

Re: NT Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) support of KICS

I write to you to express our support and endorsement of the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS).

KICS staff are professionally trained in early childhood education and travel thousands of kilometres to deliver play-based learning to geographically and socially isolated children on pastoral stations and Indigenous Communities.

It has been brought to our attention through our membership that, due to structural changes to funding streams, the future of the Katherine Isolated Children's Service is uncertain. This would be of enormous detriment to the Northern Territory, and to isolated disadvantaged children, as lack of early-childhood development has significant impacts on entrance and success in the formal education system.

KICS provides all children with a safe place to play and learn that is developmentally appropriate for their needs. For many children, KICS is the only opportunity children receive for early childhood development under 5 years of age.

In 2018 KICS had 3,125 children attend playgroup, 76% of these children identify as indigenous. KICS visit over 30 pastoral stations, over 20 Indigenous communities, and 3 small townships on rotation each year.

Children's education plays a critical role in the future of industry, communities, and the economy. This fundamental service provides social and educational development pathways for the people who are the future of the Northern Territory.

Please don't hesitate to contact me to discuss further.

Ashley Manicaros

CEO

Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association

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