

12 July 2023

Low Aromatic Fuel Act Review  
Health and Wellbeing Branch  
National Indigenous Australians Agency  
PO Box 6500  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: [lowaromaticfuel@niaa.gov.au](mailto:lowaromaticfuel@niaa.gov.au)

### **Submission to the review of the *Low Aromatic Fuel Act 2013***

Dear Sir / Madam,

Please accept this as a submission to the second statutory review of the *Low Aromatic Fuel Act 2013*.

AMSANT is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory. We represent 12 full member organisations and 13 associate members across all areas of the Territory. We aim to grow a strong Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector by supporting our Members to deliver culturally safe, high quality comprehensive primary health care that supports action on the social determinants of health; and by representing our Members' views and aspirations through advocacy, policy, planning and research.

**Given our sector's focus on the prevention of harm to the Aboriginal communities we serve, AMSANT strongly supports the continuation of the Act.** The roll out of low aromatic fuel (LAF) has contributed to a significant reduction in volatile substance abuse (VSA) and related harms in the Aboriginal communities in the designated areas under the Act including Tennant Creek, Daly and Katherine regions of the Northern Territory.

As the most recent study on the prevalence of VSA in Aboriginal communities concludes<sup>1</sup>:

*LAF continues to be widely valued in communities as an initiative that has helped to reduce petrol sniffing and the harms associated with it ... The main benefit is the contribution of LAF to reducing petrol sniffing or ... to maintaining current low levels. These benefits flow on to other domains, in particular in reduced social disruption in the community and less harm to sniffers themselves. In most communities studied, these changes are now well entrenched.*

This report documents an 80% decline in the number of petrol sniffers in the Barkly region (which includes Tennant Creek) from 2013-14 to 2018 following the introduction of LAF.

Anecdotally, we hear that since 2018, the number of sniffing incidents in the region has declined even further.

We also understand that the reduction in the number of petrol sniffing deaths in Central Australia has contributed to the significant reductions in 'years of potential life lost' being documented in the region through research being carried out by one of our members, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress.

While AMSANT strongly supports the continuation of a regional approach to the supply of LAF through the implementation of LAF areas and fuel control areas, we also note that:

- LAF is just one part of the solution to addressing petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities and should be implemented along with other measures including adequately resourced early intervention services, youth and recreation programs and training and employment opportunities; and
- Urgent and sustained action is required on the determinants of VSA specifically and addiction in general, such as through addressing poverty and inequality<sup>2</sup>; poor housing and overcrowding; and the lack of access to education.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.

Yours sincerely



Donna Ah Chee  
Ag Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>1</sup> d'Abbs et al (2019) *Longitudinal research into petrol sniffing and other substance abuse trends in Indigenous communities: final report*. University of Queensland, School of Public Health.

<sup>2</sup> In remote areas in Australia both poverty and inequality are *worsening* for Aboriginal people, with incomes falling and the income gap to non-Indigenous people widening (Markham F and Biddle N, *Income, poverty and inequality*. 2018, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research,; Canberra).