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INDIGENOUS CONSUMER STRATEGY TO HELP DISADVANTAGED

Trading practices, housing and consumer literacy will be key priorities in a new national consumer protection strategy developed for indigenous consumers.

Consumer Affairs Minister, Gail Gago, said the newly refined National Indigenous Consumer Strategy, called 'Taking Action – Gaining Trust' will run from mid-2010 until 2013.

"Consumer agencies throughout Australia acknowledge that the needs of Indigenous communities are unique when it comes to consumer protection," Minister Gago said.

"Due to factors such as geographic isolation, low English literacy levels and fewer choices when it comes to what is available for purchase, Indigenous consumers in remote areas can be exploited more easily.

"That's why, for the next three years, the 'Taking Action – Gaining Trust' action plan will focus on three core priorities: trading practices, housing and consumer literacy.

"These areas tend to have the most adverse impact on Indigenous consumers, so fair trading agencies across the nation will work with the Indigenous community, traders, landlords and utilities companies to address this disadvantage."

NSW Fair Trading had the lead role in developing the strategy with input from all other jurisdictions.

Under the plan, Commonwealth, state and territory consumer protection agencies are committed to:

- the promotion of basic consumer rights recognised by the United Nations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- improving market outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers; and
- ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers have equal access to the services each agency provides.

"All state and territory consumer protection agencies will work together on the strategy, will regularly review progress and further develop the plan accordingly," Minister Gago said.

"There are many other stakeholders who make significant contributions to improving Indigenous consumer affairs performance. I invite traders to take every step possible to make sure they are doing the right thing when it comes to Indigenous consumers.

“I’d also like to see Indigenous legal and medical services, land councils and housing providers adopt this action plan and put forward suggestions on how real improvements can be achieved for Indigenous people,” she said.

For information relating to the National Indigenous Consumer Strategy visit the website: www.nics.org.au