

Wednesday 11th July 2007

FINANCIAL COUNSELLOR FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Jennifer Rankine, together with the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, is today announcing the appointment of a dedicated financial counsellor to work with members of Aboriginal Communities in both the Pt Augusta region and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

“Officers from Consumer Affairs and ASIC have been working closely over the last two years to address credit issues facing Indigenous people,” Ms Rankine said.

Investigations exposed a range of issues found to be impacting upon Aboriginal people, specifically those encouraged to take out finance to buy second hand vehicles of poor quality and below-average performance levels.

“It was disturbing and unsettling to learn that some members of the Aboriginal community had entered into credit contracts without fully understanding the terms and conditions of the agreements they’d signed,” Ms Rankine said.

Both agencies are also very concerned with the apparent provision of a form of indigenous credit called ‘book up’, whereby some traders provide short-term credit to customers while retaining their debit card and PIN.

Through community consultation, officials have been working towards establishing a special purpose financial counselling service and designating an adviser to liaise with these communities.

“I am pleased that the Commonwealth Bank has agreed to sponsor the appointment of financial counsellor, Renee Ellis, who has three years experience working with Aboriginal communities as a lawyer with the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc at Pt Augusta.

She’ll be assisting with budgeting advice and provide services and information aimed at dealing with day-to-day financial matters. This is an important step towards educating residents in these areas of their consumer rights, particularly in relation to credit issues,” Ms Rankine said.

Renee will be based in Port Augusta with the ALRM, which provides legal services, financial counselling and other support services for the Aboriginal people of South Australia.

Indigenous people experiencing financial hardship are encouraged to contact ALRM at their office at 12 Church Street, Port Augusta or phone on (08) 8642 4366 to arrange an appointment.