

INQUIRY INTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Eurobodalla Shire Council

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Inquiry into economic development in Aboriginal communities

by Eurobodalla Shire Council, South Coast NSW

Contact: Sarah Cooper
Business Assistance Manager
Eurobodalla Shire Council



Wallaga Lake Clean-up Work Crew

Inquiry into economic development in Aboriginal communities

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. That the Standing Committee on State Development inquire into and report on strategies to support economic development in Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, including but not limited to:

- (a) options for sustainability and capacity building of NSW Aboriginal communities into the future, utilising existing community networks and structures
- (b) leveraging economic development support, including provided by the Commonwealth Government and the private sector
- (c) establishment and sustainability of Aboriginal owned enterprises.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategies to support Economic Development in Aboriginal communities in Eurobodalla include:

- Community and individual healing programs are needed to improve the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of local aboriginal people affected by intergenerational trauma and addictions
- Tailor small business assistance programs such as Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) programs and New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS), to help those indigenous small business entrepreneurs develop and start their business
- Set up an Aboriginal mentoring program with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mentors willing to assist with developing and implementing business plans
- Grant funding to be made available for feasibility studies of community enterprises. Submissions from Local Aboriginal Land Councils can help identify community enterprises worth supporting
- Commonwealth and NSW government to fund selected appropriate local Aboriginal community enterprises

- Commonwealth and NSW government to fund local Aboriginal Social and Economic Development Officers to assist Lands Councils with community and individual enterprises for 3 to 5 year terms
- Education support from preschool funding to study centre, high school retention programs, transition to work preparation up to university scholarships are necessary to continue improving opportunities at closing the gap
- More tailored traineeships and apprenticeships to be made available to complement vocational training and the development of long term real jobs
- Incentivise local businesses to employ aboriginal people and offer a mentoring program to support the business owner
- All recommendations above can only be successful if there is long term commitment by all involved. Cultural differences need to be understood and programs tailored to suit. In addition, training, mentoring and ongoing support are important elements for success

Snapshot of Eurobodalla's Aboriginal population

There are 1,814 people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) origin living in the Eurobodalla Shire. (ID Profile) Aboriginal people represent 4.7% of the total population. Aboriginal people in the Eurobodalla are generally much younger than the Shires population, with proportionately double the number of Aboriginal youth (under 15 years of age), and a median age of 21 years as compared to 48. There are substantially more non-indigenous people over the age of 65 years, 5.5 times more than the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people are earning over a third less than the non-indigenous population in individual weekly income, and 7% less in household income. Monthly loan repayments are similar, being 8% less for Aboriginal people. Median rent paid by Aboriginal people is 37% less, which reflects the difference in individual income.

There are more people living in Aboriginal households than non-indigenous households. The size of households in general follows the life-cycle of families. The large household size for Aboriginal people is consistent with a younger population. Proportionately, the unemployment rate is four times greater in Aboriginal people; there are 3 times the number of Aboriginal single parents, and nearly double those receiving some type of income assistance.

Council recently managed a 2.5 year Social and Economic Development program in the Aboriginal Village of Wallaga Lake. Some of the information contained in this submission is based on the Wallaga Dreaming: Plan for the Future of Wallaga Lake Koori Village (see Appendix A) but is also representative of the region.

Wallaga Lake Koori Village is a community of approx 80 Aboriginal people living in 22 houses.

Key issue

Before recommending how government programs could enhance economic development opportunities, we would like to touch on some observations made in the wider Aboriginal communities.

One the greatest need throughout Aboriginal communities is the healing of trans-generational and inter-generational trauma. Mental and physical health issues along with addictions are one of the main impediments to economic development.

Healing has been identified as a key need within the Wallaga community to avoid the ever-present conflict that has occurred between family groups in the past. To this end, Council in conjunction with Katungul and Australian Red Cross arranged for Red Dust Healing program to be delivered at Wallaga Lake with a day each for men and boys and women and girls. This program has been developed by an Aboriginal group and is used throughout the country to facilitate healing in order to reduce conflict and violence in communities.

Discussions have also been held with Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University regarding their community healing program and an invitation has been extended from Merrimans LALC to the College to come down and make a presentation to the community regarding their program.

There are a number of Aboriginal programs dedicated to addressing this healing need on a community basis including Dr Judy Atkinson's Wi Ali Program. This program has been further developed and refined at Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples at Southern Cross University at Lismore and there are a number of other Aboriginal Healing based programs that are working to address these issues. This Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Resource Sheet by Dr Atkinson provides insight into some of these problems and efforts to overcome them utilising existing community networks and structures.

We have noticed in the community that working with Aboriginal service providers in getting these services into Aboriginal communities has been successful in the past e.g. Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Community & Medical Services / Red Dust. It is essential that such programs are targeted, preferably in one discreet community pilot, well managed with ongoing support and monitoring and sustained until a way through that is meaningful to many within that community is found. We believe that such a success would infiltrate out into the wider Aboriginal community and change could spread quite quickly.

Once these programs are well advanced, serious moves can then be taken for communities to work together co-operatively between family groups for the betterment of the whole community and co-ordinated economic development can occur without interference.

Government Assistance

There are many Commonwealth Government programs aimed at supporting Aboriginal communities in their economic development and we believe that the NSW Government can take a leadership role in leveraging off some of these programs with additional funding through Aboriginal Affairs NSW and local councils to kick-start Aboriginal businesses and provide support through their developmental phases.

It is a belief that significant opportunities will open up in the resource management industry in the future for Aboriginal people to be involved in managing our State's forest resources once the subsidised logging of native forests comes to an end. With earlier talks of the possibility of Lands Councils to be involved in some form of carbon trading, funds would become available for the sequestration of carbon in our dense eucalypt forests as they recover. This recovery could be facilitated by a large force of Aboriginal people who could learn and teach their traditional land management techniques as well as share their cultural knowledge with the wider world through cultural tourism ventures.

Funding is the main catalyst and in the long term, could come from carbon trading. However, in the meantime, there are lots of opportunities for Aboriginal enterprises to take up government contracts for environmental work. Specific funding (Commonwealth) could be made available to establish local Aboriginal community enterprises who can take up some of these contracts, particularly in weeds management. Training in all aspects of such an enterprise should be provided from on-the-ground work to planning and administration. As more entrepreneurs come through this system and possibly entice the workers away with higher wages and more opportunities, these community enterprises may be challenged however they will have provided a vehicle for Aboriginal owned private enterprises to take off.

Most resource management private companies have an interest in funding Aboriginal community development as a way of giving back to the traditional owners of the land. Here in NSW where there are far less Aboriginal owned lands, it is the native forests in our State Forests and National Parks that are the resources where Aboriginal people have a great opportunity to participate such as in Green Teams. Opportunities exist to fund training in silviculture, planting, care and maintenance and harvesting of timber in these plantation forests should Aboriginal people wish to take up economic development projects. Many Aboriginal people have worked in timber harvesting and sawmills in our region over the past few decades as this was virtually the only steady employment available to them apart from seasonal picking work.

Community Enterprises

Community enterprise would be a great start e.g. environmental repair crews. The Gulaga Board currently has a Green Army crew working on country and the number of young people who want this work is substantial. As community members develop a more entrepreneurial spirit, they can further develop those skills and take off on their own with appropriate assistance from Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) and other such programs.

Once a community enterprise has been set up with direct assistance from Government or Non-Government Organisations, the best assistance would be in providing an "incubator" environment where "experts or mentors" provide regular input into training and project development with overall "guidance" from a funded "manager" whose role is to guide and train rather than manage. This would include input from existing successful Aboriginal enterprises as mentors.

Individual businesses would flow from entrepreneurs finding opportunities and exploiting them with IBA or NEIS assistance and funded mentoring from existing Aboriginal enterprises.

The ultimate development to come from example, forest enterprises, would be the training of cultural tourism guides to take visitors into local forests and share their ancient culture, dreamtime stories and sacred places in an income generating business, be it community or privately managed.

Examples of Community Enterprises

Umbarra Cultural Tours was a community enterprise conducted at Wallaga Lake providing an Aboriginal Cultural Centre for the Aboriginal people of the Yuin Tribal Nation with cultural teaching tours to sites at Gulaga, Biamanga and Mystery Bay. This venture was highly successful in attracting schools and tourists and reached their break-even point after 8 years of growth and development. Unfortunately, the unexpected drastic increase in insurance costs in the 1990s managed to wipe out this growing business.

During the 1990s, there was an environmental management team developed through Wallaga Lake CDEP that took up contracts in weeds management, particularly with willows along the Bega River. This was a successful enterprise whilst the funding was available.

In past years Wallaga also received grant funding and support to start an Oyster Farm enterprise and Market Garden enterprise. Both these worked for a period of time but would have needed further assistance to manage the growth potential.

Private Enterprise

Further to the “individual enterprise” approach preferred by the community, two Aboriginal Enterprise Development Workshops were organised by Council in conjunction with Illawarra ITEC where one-on-one assistance was provided to a number of participants keen on setting up their own businesses. Further development of these people’s business plans should continue with government assistance.

Discussions were initiated regarding the possibility of attracting a small scale Aboriginal industry to the village and negotiations were underway through the Local Lands Council. Council also organised short courses in Quality Customer Service and website development which were well attended by a number of community members to help improve their employability.

Other Aboriginal enterprises in Eurobodalla include:

- Swans Takeaway, an Aboriginal owned and operated business in Moruya linked to commercial fishing
- Cobowra Made is a catering business linked to Cobowra Local Aboriginal Lands Council (Catered NAIDOC Flag raising ceremony)
- Aboriginal owned property at Bingi are looking to develop a camping ground at the property; they are currently talking to council about a DA
- A number of Aboriginal artists operate or manage their own gallery, there are also a couple of dance groups and cultural educators in the Eurobodalla gaining increasing recognition
- Batemans Bay LALC has a timber business including firewood and possibly even logging
- Mogo LALC has an environmental rangers program
- Little Yuin Preschool at Wallaga Lake and Mogo preschool are not for profit but have successfully run fundraising projects such as the Little Yuin Book launched last year
- The Ngaardi Women’s Group at Wallaga Lake make flags, bunting, soaps and mosaics and recently ran a successful two day exhibition at the Umbarra Cultural Centre. The event raised funds for the Women’s Group but also very talented local artists



Cultural Tours

The Gulaga/Biamanga Board of management has acquired the site behind Central Tilba, Bellbrook Farm with a view to running cultural tours. The opportunity to integrate the Gulaga Tours into mainstream tourism, historic Tilba and its emerging developments, such as River Cottage Australia, may make for a successful enterprise.

A recent consultant's presentation highlighted that cultural tourism would be a big draw card for this area (for both international and domestic visitors) branching into areas of art, eco/adventure activities and heritage interest. Furthermore, the slow food movement rapidly developing in the region would suggest opportunities for native foods and bush tucker products to be developed.

Education and Training

Areas of importance mentioned by Community members included: Access to good education from early learning teaching such as Wallaga Lake's Little Yuin preschool, primary and secondary schools and beyond, including the history of the Yuin people. The ongoing survival of Little Yuin Pre-School is critical and requires government funding to ensure sustainability and capacity building within this community.

More local school based apprenticeships and traineeships with opportunities for further training and employment within the community. Mentors and parents should be involved in training. Training for adults would also be beneficial including Corporate Governance, Lateral Violence and computers training. Further training for children including driver training and training in the consequences of their actions was identified by the community members.

The Wallaga Lake Study Centre is a testimony of what the community can achieve when they care deeply about a cause. The Ngaardi Women's Group with the assistance of the Elm Grove Trust and corporate donations are helping up to 35 children with after school care and tuition whilst enjoying healthy snacks and a caring environment. The study centre operates twice a week in the Village. (Pictured below courtesy of Narooma News.)

On the transition to employment front, having linkages to government support for all but particularly for apprentices and trainees, would be impacting a number of communities and employers and is worth exploring. Success here may provide role models to work back into the school environment to encourage greater attendance – a study on school retention for Aboriginal students highlighted this as a significant issue.



CONCLUSION

Eurobodalla has a higher than average Aboriginal population than most communities in NSW coupled with high unemployment rates. ATSI people are over-represented in crime stats and health issues. The Aboriginal population profile in the shire is quite different to the non-Aboriginal in that the majority of the local ATSI population is young.

Given that we have a lot of agency focus on places like Wallaga Lake and locally situated government agencies, there is opportunity for a focus on more Economic Development support for local Aboriginal people to help resolve a number of the social, employment, self-determination and health issues that are faced.

Council previously had a funded position in Aboriginal Social and Economic Development and there is a strong case to fund this position on-going. Two year programs are better than nothing, but most of the progress ceases when the funding and the assistance ceases.

APPENDIX A

Wallaga Dreaming: A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OF WALLAGA LAKE KOORI VILLAGE: Economic Development – Excerpts from main document (June 2014)

This plan was developed by the Wallaga Lake Community in 2014 to create a dream of what we would like this place to be like for our grandchildren and work out how we can make that dream happen. We would like to thank Eurobodalla Shire Council for helping us get this plan together. The plan fits within the framework of the NSW 2021 State Plan, the South East NSW Regional Plan and the Eurobodalla Community Strategic Plan.

“We dream of a future where we are self-sufficient and our culture and heritage is preserved and passed on. Where we have community fruit and vegetable gardens and other businesses: arts & crafts, manufacturing, environmental work (incl. weeds, lawn mowing, firewood and gardening), recycling, tourism via Umbarra, building and construction, so that everyone who wants to be employed is employed”

In their own words, the community would like: Local employment through own businesses and more assistance from employment providers in getting jobs through a Jobs Drive were highlighted. Conduct a Skills Audit with less training and more actual jobs and better communication re opportunities such as scholarships.

Environmental Work (gardening, wood, weeds, surveys, park rangers); Tourism (guides, coxswain); Arts (artefacts, painting, music); Professional (teacher, police officer, chef, scientist, nursing, defence); Sports (football player/coach, motorbike rider), Hunting and gathering.

Management/administration and business management traineeships so that we have skills to manage our own affairs.

TYPES OF BUSINESSES

Tourism: tour guides, lake tours, walkway around the Lake with cabins

Manufacturing: artefacts (Umbarra), coffins plus undertaker / funeral director

Environment Team: land care contracts and services (lawn mowing, firewood), recycling

Farming: community garden, stock (beef, sheep, goats, kangaroos, emus)

Professional: fishing, timber milling

Recycling: cans, glass, paper, cars (wrecking yard)

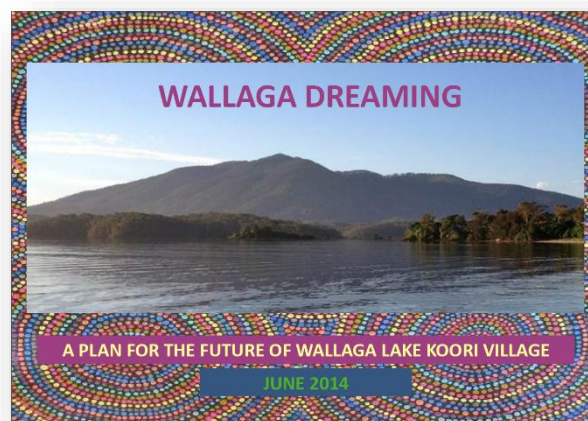
Culture café

CULTURE & HERITAGE

Cultural tours, Discovery Trail (youth), boardwalk around Wallaga Lake with interpretation, Culture Café at Umbarra, culture days.

Items: sites, dance, artefacts, painting, fabric design & printing plus clothing, basket making, jewellery, food, old photographs.

Stories on the Internet with limited access as appropriate.



ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES AS PER THE WALLAGA COMMUNITY PLAN (excerpts)

Strategic Area	Sub Area	Issue	Detail	Task / Responsibility	Priorit
Economic Development	Education & Training	Ensure Little Yuin Preschool remains viable	Long term commitment to maintaining funding, enrolments, attendance and strong governance	Little Yuin preschool board, staff and families	TOP
Economic Development	Education & Training	Lack of adequate training for young people	Access to good education including the REAL history of our people	AECG and parents/carers to advocate to local schools	TOP
Economic Development	Education & Training	Lack of employment opportunities	More local School Based Apprentice Traineeships including opportunities for further training and employment within the community	AECG and parents/carers to advocate through local high schools and MLALC to provide employment and training opportunities. Nyarmin Trust can provide scholarships for careers in education, sport and arts NOW.	HIGH
Economic Development	Education & Training	Lack of adequate training for older people	Including Corporate Governance, Lateral Violence and computers	TAFE and EAEC to arrange appropriate training	HIGH
Economic Development	Education & Training	Lack of adequate training for young people	Include driver training and training in the consequences of actions	NSW Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers to arrange	TOP
Economic Development	Employment	Lack of employment opportunities	Local employment through own businesses	Gudu Administrative Advisory Committee (GAAC), IBA and ITeC to provide consultancy and MLALC to explore and promote business opportunities within the Village	TOP
Economic Development	Employment	Lack of employment opportunities	More assistance needed from employment service providers in getting jobs through a Jobs Drive	GAAC, Department of Employment, Wesley Employment & Training, Campbell Page and Auswide Projects to arrange Jobs Drive	TOP
Economic Development	Employment	Existing qualifications of the community are not recognised and used	Conduct a Skills Audit with less training and more actual jobs provided	MLALC and GAAC to conduct Skills Audit and those skills to be used for any available work	TOP
Economic Development	Employment	Lack of knowledge of opportunities	Better communication of opportunities, scholarships etc. is required	MLALC to provide timely information to the community about employment and scholarship opportunities	TOP
Economic Development	Employment	Lack of employment opportunities	More opportunities in environmental work, tourism, arts, professions, sports and hunting/gathering	Job Services Australia Providers (JSAPs), Gulaga and Biamanga Boards, NPWS, DPI and Local Land Services to look at opportunities	MEDIUM
Economic Development	Employment	Lack of employment opportunities	Provide traineeships so that we have the skills to manage our own affairs	MLALC and JSAPs to provide traineeships in administration and management	HIGH
Economic Development	Business	Lack of employment opportunities	Establish businesses in tourism, manufacturing, environmental team, farming, fishing, timber milling, recycling and a Culture Café	Gudu Administrative Advisory Committee (GAAC), IBA and ITeC to provide consultancy and MLALC to explore and promote business opportunities	TOP
Economic Development	Culture & Heritage	Our culture is not shared widely enough	Find ways to share our culture through schools, tours, Discovery Trail (youth), boardwalk around the lake, Culture Café, culture days and stories on the internet.	Ngaardi Women's Group, Dooligahl Men's Group and Elders Group to explore opportunities in conjunction with Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Tourism	MEDIUM

NOTE: A full copy of the Wallaga Community Plan can be supplied upon request.

It is a challenge to convey in one submission, all there is to say on the opportunities and challenges of the economic development of Aboriginal communities. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further.