

Submission  
No 28

## INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

**Organisation:** Dareton Aboriginal Community

---

Partially Confidential

NSW Legislative Council  
Standing Committee on Social Issues

INQUIRY INTO CLOSING  
THE GAP – OVERCOMING  
INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Submission from the

**Dareton  
Aboriginal  
Community**

20<sup>th</sup> January 2008

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

### Terms of Reference (a)

Policies and programs being implemented both within Australia (States/Territories/Federal) and internationally aimed at closing the gap between the lifetime expectancy between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people (currently estimated at 17 years), with the assessment of policies and programs including but not limited to: New Zealand, Canada, North America, South America, and also considering available reports and information from key NGOs and community organizations.

- **Housing:** The Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) is a seven year capital construction and infrastructure upgrade program that is aimed at raising the health and living standards of, priority Aboriginal communities which have an identified, major environmental health need. The ACDP has four main components that includes;
  - Priority Communities.
  - Water and Sewerage Program.
  - Housing for Health Program and;
  - Sustainability.
- **Education:** The schools have programs addressed at improving and closing the gap between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal students. There is also additional Aboriginal staff employed as tutors and to assist with the existing Aboriginal staff.
- **Employment:** There are no employment and training programs in the Dareton area. Clients are required to attend Job Network centre in Mildura.
- **Family Support Programs:** There is a mainstream Non Government Organisation that delivers a family support program for Aboriginal people, the service isn't accessed a great deal by the Aboriginal community as they don't feel they are getting a service and the programs are inflexible and are not culturally appropriate.
- **Child Protection:** The local CSC office has been understaffed for a few years, there is a Manager of Casework position based locally but this position hasn't been permanently filled for a few years. Management support is provided from Broken Hill by visiting the office of by telephone. There is three caseworkers based in the Dareton office they maintain a very low profile rarely leaving the office, they are not known to the community nor do they attend any interagency meetings. There are also 4 or 5 unfilled caseworker positions available at Dareton.
- The new method of recruitment of caseworkers for DoCS has made it harder to fill these positions locally as applicants are required to attend an assessment in a regional centre at their own cost, these assessments are not culturally appropriate and applicants are also expected to display knowledge of the caseworker role, although they have no experience in this field to successfully obtain a position. This new recruitment method is making more difficult for Aboriginal workers to gain these positions. Experienced caseworkers who have left DoCS and have reapplied for positions are required to undergo the same process.
- The number of reports of abuse of Aboriginal children is lower than non Aboriginal children, many cases of abuse and neglect go unreported by school and health workers Families and community. Cases that are reported are often closed without assessment by child protection workers.

- **Indigenous Family Violence:** There is an Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Legal Service based on the NSW side, this program is asupiced by an Aboriginal organisation from Victoria.
- Many more programs are needed to reduce the gap of Aboriginal people in the Wentworth Shire, programs that were making a difference in the 80's and 90's are no longer being delivered. Organisations have closed down this has had a negative impact on the health and wellbeing and self esteem of the Aboriginal community.

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE (b)

The impact of the following factors on the current lifetime expectancy gap:

- (i) environmental health (water, sewerage, waste, other)
- (ii) health and wellbeing
- (iii) education
- (iv) employment
- (v) housing
- (vi) incarceration and the criminal justice system
- (vii) other infrastructure

#### ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH (WATER, SEWERAGE, WASTE, OTHER)

The Dareton community has been one of the most disadvantaged Aboriginal communities in NSW, the Aboriginal people living at Dareton belong to the Barkindji language group. This group was removed from their country by the Aborigines Protection Board and returned to live in makeshift accommodation around Dareton in the 1950's and 60's. The issues associated with the accommodation and environmental issues were poor accommodation, overcrowding, lack of public health infrastructure such as filtered drinking water, sewerage and drainage, and dust. There are still issues contributing to ill-health, such as unemployment and lifestyle-related illnesses.

- ATSIIC allocated Health & Infrastructure Priority Program (HIPP) funding for projects to alleviate these issues and address the poor living conditions these projects consisted of:
  - housing and infrastructure to re-house 20 families in tin huts
  - water supply
  - sewerage
  - road works
  - power and street lighting
  - landscaping, site restoration, fencing and service upgrading
  - community facilities
  - training and employment
  - The program is now coordinated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and is called the Aboriginal Community Development Program (ACDP).
- **Dust:** Dust is a major problem for residents of the Aboriginal settlement Namatjira which is situated 5 kilometres out of the township of Dareton. Asthma is a health issue for the residents of Namatjira exacerbated by the dust.
- **Air-conditioning:** There are no air conditioners fitted to the houses at Namatjira this also includes the houses recently constructed under the Aboriginal Community Development Program which is administered by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Wentworth Dareton Community Working Party.

- **A Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA):** An SRA for the “Installation of Air Cooling Units” was signed in 2005 by the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to improve the living conditions of residents in the Murdi Paaki region. The Commonwealth Government provided funds for \$2,000,000 for the purchase and installation of the air conditioners for community housing in the region.
- Despite the signing of the SRA and the allocation of 12 air conditioners for houses in the Dareton area there has not been one unit fitted to the houses in the Wentworth Shire, residents of Namatjira had to endure the heat over Christmas where temperatures reached 40 plus in houses without air conditioning making the conditions intolerable as well as being a health hazard for the elderly, infirmed and babies.
- Repeated requests were made by various residents of Namatjira to the Dareton Wentworth CWP to follow up on the progress of the program, the CWP failed to intervene or follow up this issue, this issue was identified in the Wentworth Dareton CWP Community Action Plan.
- *“Airconditioning of homes is a top priority and should be actively pursued”. “Wentworth Dareton Community Action Plan Paragraph 7.20”*
- Although the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Aboriginal Communities Development Program has improved living conditions for the residents of Namatjira, the social issues have not improved and many residents have chosen to move off the settlement to live in surrounding towns and over the border in Mildura to access services and facilities to improve future prospects for their families.
- **Transport:** There is no public transport on the weekends in the Wentworth Shire. Bus fares for non concession travellers is unaffordable, a fare from Wentworth to Mildura is \$12.50 one way.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Dareton is located in the Murdi Paaki Region which is part of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial site, information obtained from the Two Ways Together Report states that the health profile of Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki region is worse than other areas of the State. The Murdi Paaki region has a higher rate of low birth weight babies which appears to be linked to the high rate of smoking amongst Aboriginal mothers and lower rates of antenatal visits by pregnant mothers.

- **Health Issues:** The community experiences the same health problems as other Aboriginal communities in Australia with a high rate of Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, smoking and drug and alcohol related diseases.
- **Domestic Violence:** Domestic Violence issues in the Wentworth Shire ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the state of New South Wales in 2006, there is an Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Legal Service that provides free legal advice, representation and casework for indigenous families affected by domestic violence or sexual assault in the Sunraysia area. The nearest refuge is in Mildura NSW clients are taken to Mildura Police station where clients are transported by DV workers to a refuge. If a client has breached the policies of the service they are banned from accessing this service leaving them without access to a safe place as this is the only refuge in the area.
- **Drug and Alcohol Abuse:** Drug and Alcohol is an ongoing issue in the Wentworth Shire, this issue is linked with health issues, DV offences and other crime. There is one D & A worker in Dareton and the closest Rehabilitation Centre in NSW is Orana Haven in Brewarrina. This centre is approximately

900 kilometres from Dareton. A high number Aboriginal youth in the area are using marijuana as well as alcohol, the nearest youth drug and alcohol facility is in Ballarat in Victoria.

- **Teenage Pregnancies & Youth Issues:** There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy in the Aboriginal community in the Wentworth Shire girls as young as 13 are having babies, this issue is not being reported or addressed by families and relevant organisations.
- **Mental Health Issues:** Mental health incidences are increasing due to the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, health services are seeing an increase in clients with dual diagnosis. There is a social and emotional wellbeing worker at the AMS and a mental health team at GWAHS. Clients that are required to be scheduled are taken into Mildura.
- **Health Checks:** Adult health checks were conducted by Maari Maa in 2006 at Dareton the health checks were conducted with support from Coomealla Health who provided 2 Aboriginal health workers, an RN and a doctor to assist. Although CHAC had all of the necessary equipment and venue that could have been utilised for the health checks, Maari Maa chose to conduct the health checks at the Uniting Church which did not have any health facilities or heating. We feel that the health checks are useful in identifying health issues, there needed to be more follow up on the health issues that were found in the checks.
  1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT A FOLLOW UP BE CARRIED OUT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE AIR CONDITIONER PROJECT.**
  2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT A WOMEN'S SAFE HOUSE BE ESTABLISHED IN DARETON TO SERVICE DV CLIENTS IN THE WENTWORTH SHIRE.**
  3. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT AN ABORIGINAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL REHABILITATION CENTRE BE ESTABLISHED IN THE AREA.**
- **Health Services:** Wentworth Shire is serviced by 2 Health Services one mainstream health service and one Aboriginal Community Controlled as well as 2 doctors at the AMS in Dareton.
- **Coomealla Health Aboriginal Corporation (CHAC):** CHAC is a local Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation that was established in 1992 to provide health services to the Aboriginal community of the Wentworth Shire, CHAC is incorporated under the Aboriginal Corporations and Associations Act
- Maari Maa Health Aboriginal Corporation has attempted to take over management of CHAC since its inception and have used their political power in cohesion with the local Community Working Party (CWP) to place pressure on the funding body OATSIH try to achieve this plan. As a result of this influence being placed CHAC and the funding body a forensic review was conducted on CHAC in 2006, however the review did not find any grounds to have the organisation auspiced by Maari Maa.
- **Funding for AMS's:** Future funding for all Aboriginal Medical Services is going to be administered by Greater Western Area Health Service. In the lower sector this service is currently managed by Maari Maa Health Aboriginal Corporation from Broken Hill. This will be a conflict of interest as Maari Maa is an AMS and will jeopardise the funding for standalone Aboriginal Medical Services who are currently competing with funds from this larger organisation.
- CHAC is the only remaining Aboriginal community controlled organisation in the Wentworth Shire, the CWP has never supported this organisation, correspondence concerning the construction of the

Aboriginal Medical Service from the Wentworth Dareton CWP to the Director General of DAA dated 16<sup>th</sup> May 2004 to address the impending Regional Co-ordination Unit visit to Dareton quoted the following:

- *"We have been made aware that a new Health Centre is to be built in Dareton. The town has an adequate mainstream Community Health service. Wentworth is serviced by the hospital and Namatjira will soon have a new Health Outpost. The fast growing area of Buronga and Gol Gol should receive the benefit of the proposed Health Centre upgrading by having a centre built in the communities in preference to Dareton. The CWP should have been approached for input into the decision-making process."*
- Buronga has a small number of Aboriginal residents and Gol Gol has even less, the majority of the Aboriginal population live at Dareton, the new health post at Namatjira was never eventuated.
- All correspondence querying the performance or policies of the CWP or Maari Maa are answered by Circulating a copy of the response to DAA, Ministers, Wentworth Shire, local members of parliament and senior executives in government organisations.
- The CPW Community Action Plan had recommended that CHAC be reviewed as a service provider with no mention of reviewing other service providers in the area. Although CHAC has experienced difficulties with management and the board over the past, it now has a new manager and a new board of directors who are committed to providing culturally appropriate health programs to meet the needs of the community.
- In the 1990's CHAC submitted a proposal to NSW Health to provide funding for the amount of \$400,000 for the construction of a Community Health Outpost to be built by the HIPP apprentices at Namatjira. Burns Aldis who were appointed as consultants for the HIPP program recommended that the outpost be administered by Far West Aboriginal Health Service (Maari Maa) and Far West Area Health Service (GWAHS). The initial proposal was for the building to house Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council and FWAHS, CHAC was to provide outreach services 1 day a week. The Health Outpost was never constructed and the funding went to Maari Maa in Broken Hill.
- CHAC's core business is to provide culturally appropriate health services to the Aboriginal community of the area. Programs aimed at closing the gap between the lifetime expectancy between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people that are delivered by the AMS these include:
  - Healthy For Life Program, Diabetes educator,
  - Nutrition Program, Exercise Program,
  - Sexual Health worker,
  - Social and Emotional Wellbeing worker,
  - Women's health worker, Hearing health worker,
  - Drug and Alcohol Worker,
  - 2 GP's,
  - Centrelink agent,
  - Transport officers.
- Visiting services include:
  - Probation and Parole,
  - Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Legal Service,
  - Mission Australia Early Intervention.

- Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council rent an office as well. The multipurpose room at CHAC is also used for interagency meetings and is used by the Aboriginal community for wakes after funerals, CHAC staff assist with the preparation of food and the printing of funeral pamphlets at no cost to the families for these functions.
- **Maari Maa Health Aboriginal Corporation – Broken Hill:** Maari Maa Aboriginal Health Corporation is an Aboriginal Medical Service based in Broken Hill that was established by the former Murdi Paaki Regional Council and formerly named the Far West Aboriginal Health Service, Maari Ma manages the lower sector Greater Western Area Health Services in the Murdi Paaki region, this area covers Menindee, Ivanhoe, Wilcannia, White Cliffs, Tibooburra, Balranald, and Dareton.
- ***Aboriginal Health Services:*** *GWAHS works in partnership with community controlled Aboriginal Health/Medical Services to provide programs targeting the health issues that are most prevalent in the Aboriginal communities such as the chronic disease strategy being run by Maari Ma in the Remote Cluster. Aboriginal Health/Medical Services are located at Walgett, Bourke, Broken Hill, Dareton, Orange, Dubbo, Peak Hill, and Wellington and planning has commenced to establish a service at Coonamble.*
- Maari Ma does not consult or have partnerships or protocols with any Aboriginal Health Services, their programs are conducted through their management of the mainstream service GWAHS and Mallee Family Care a mainstream organisation who they have a partnership with. Maari Ma funds the Youth Coordinator, youth worker position and men's program based at Mallee Family Care and has entered into an MOU with this organisation. GWAHS lower sector managed by Maari Maa doesn't have a partnership with Coomealla Health Aboriginal Corporation GWAHS has partnerships with AMS's in Bourke and Walgett
- The support given to Maari Ma Under the structure of the CWP and the Regional Assembly has enabled them to gain power and control by delivering Aboriginal health services in the greater western area and through their partnership with GWHAS, these services are mainstream services with an Aboriginal component. The Regional Director of Maari Ma regularly attends the Regional Assembly meetings this opportunity is not extended to CEO's of other Aboriginal organisation.
- Smaller standalone Aboriginal community controlled organisations are unable to compete with the Maari Ma due to the size of the organisation, the amount of funding it receives and the support it receives from the CWP's and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. OATSHI funds Maari Ma to deliver Aboriginal health services through their management arrangement with GWAHS, this arrangement has led to the closure or downsizing of some of the smaller stand alone AMS's who were unable to compete.
- Maari Ma is the secretariat for the Broken Hill and Wilcannia Aboriginal Community Working Parties and has considerable political influence with the commonwealth funding body and other government organisations, they have used this influence on numerous occasions to obstruct the expansion of smaller Aboriginal medical services.
- CHAC AMS in Dareton were negotiating with the Wentworth Shire Council to purchase the doctors clinic in Wentworth, a support letter was requested from management of GWAHS in Dareton who passed the request onto the Maari Maa Regional Director who declined to support the proposal without further information and the support from the local CWP. Support is unlikely to be given to this proposal from the CWP as the chairperson of the CWP was also the chairperson of Maari Maa. Maari Maa later submitted a proposal to the funding body for an amount of approximately \$3,000,000 to establish a multi purpose centre with plans to include a doctor's clinic.



1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT GWAHS ASSESS THEIR MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN MAARI MAA AND THE LOWER SECTOR.**
2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT GWAHS/MAARI MAA DO NOT ADMINISTER THE FUNDS FOR ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICES IN THE MURDI PAAKI REGION.**

## EDUCATION

There are 4 government primary schools and 1 high school located in the Wentworth Shire, there are Aboriginal staff employed at all of the schools except for Gol Gol public school which has never had a significant enrolment of Aboriginal students or Aboriginal staff.

- **School Retention Rates:** There are many programs in place at the schools in the area aimed at improving the retention rate of Aboriginal students, although there is an improvement on these rates the retention rate of Aboriginal students is still lower than non Aboriginal students. School attendance is lower for Aboriginal students compared to non Aboriginal students and participation of parents at school events is still a challenge as many parents are still reluctant to visit schools especially high schools.
- **Transition to high school:** Many Aboriginal students thrive in primary school for a variety of reasons one being that primary school is a more nurturing environment, the transition to high school has always been problematic. High school is the place where youth are finding their identity it is this place that the socio-economic gap between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal becomes obvious.
- **Year 10 Attainment:** The percentage of Aboriginal students who attained a Year 10 certificate in the Wentworth Shire has improved but is still considerably lower for Aboriginal students compared to non Aboriginal students. The exact statistics are not known by the writer.
- **Year 12 Attainment:** Very few Aboriginal students obtain their Year 12 certificate, on average less than 10 a year go onto finish Year 12.
- **Tertiary Education:** There is a small TAFE located near Coomealla High School this is the Riverina Institute Coomealla Campus which offers courses in general education, wine and food production, Aboriginal studies, information technology and community services. The campus also offers special courses that meet local industry and community needs.
- **RMIT University:** RMIT from Melbourne were approached by Careskills in 1990's to deliver training to 12 trainees employed at Coomealla Health Aboriginal Corporation. RMIT delivered an Aged Care training package to the trainees. Some of the benefits of this training included:
  - Funding for 13 Aged Care Packages
  - 1 trainee was awarded two awards the Victorian and National Aboriginal Student of the year.
  - A social function was organised by the trainees under the supervision of the former CEO of CHAC to acknowledge the contributions made by the Elders to the community.
  - After the training was completed RMIT recognised the need for further training and development in the Aboriginal community, extensive consultations took place between RMIT, Aboriginal organisations and the Aboriginal community, a request was made to RMIT by the Aboriginal community to establish a learning centre. An interim learning centre was established in Dareton with plans for a university campus incorporating a learning centre to be placed on Crown land near the Murray River in Dareton.

RMIT was told by the Community Working Party that they were not wanted as there was already training providers in the area, Sunraysia and MADEC were delivering training to the HIPP project at Namatjira.

## EMPLOYMENT

- The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in the Wentworth Shire is substantially higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people a high percentage of the Aboriginal community are CDEP participants or employed at Aboriginal organisations and a low number are in identified positions with government departments.
- The decline of the grape growing industry over the past decade has meant that many avenues of employment for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Wentworth Shire have declined. Tasks that once employed people is now increasingly carried out by machinery.
- **Community Development Employment Program (CDEP):** Whilst reforms for the CDEP were long overdue these new reforms and the placement of the program with mainstream and regional organisations has taken away the flexibility of the programs to meet the needs of the community. The local CDEP program was community driven and provided a sense of ownership of the program with local representation to identify the issues of the community. The introduction of Job Networks to CDEP is a crucial step to gaining meaningful employment many participants are not job ready and programs to address this issue need to be established by the CDEP providers.
- **Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation (CDEP) – Coonamble:** Created by the ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council the Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation Ltd (MPREC) was originally established as a regional body to takeover 6 CDEP's across the Murdi Paaki region. This was an initiative of the Regional Strategy Plan of Murdi Paaki Regional Council. MPREC commenced operations in August 2003 they currently manage approximately 11 CDEP's across the Murdi Paaki region as well as enterprises making it one of the states largest regional CDEP providers with over 500 participants. Under the structure of the CWP's and the Regional Assembly MPREC has a monopoly on CDEP services, MPREC administers the funds for 14 of the 16 CWP's in the Murdi Paaki Region.
- With the CDEP no longer community controlled, all projects and funds were administered from MPREC who are based in Coonamble, management support was provided by a visiting Regional Manager to the local office. The former Regional Manager of MPREC cancelled host agreements with employees, activities and sold off the one remaining Aboriginal enterprise to IBA. All of these were requirements of DEWR for funding and as a result of this the tender was awarded to MADEC a mainstream organisation from Mildura in Victoria in 2007.
- The CWP had prior knowledge and fully supported the proposal of the MADEC tender as the Community Facilitator tabled the submission from MADEC regarding the CDEP at a CWP meeting in February 07, when queried about the letter by an employee of the CDEP it was withdrawn and the facilitator stated that it was not a public document.
  1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT DEWR CONDUCT AN ACCURATE APPRAISAL OF THE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS OF THE CDEP PLACED AT MADEC IN MILDURA BY SPEAKING TO CURRENT AND FORMER PARTICIPANTS.**
  2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE CDEP BE MANAGED BY AN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ORGANISATION**

3. RECOMMENDATION THAT CDEP PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE APPROPRIATE TRAINING TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE ABLE TO ACCESS MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT.
4. RECOMMENDATION: THAT CDEP PARTICIPANTS BE CASE MANAGED TO ADDRESS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING ISSUES AS WELL AS EMPLOYMENT ISSUES.

## HOUSING

- The housing situation for Aboriginal people in the Wentworth Shire is characterised by the usual issues of overcrowding, high dependence on social housing, low levels of home ownership and high rates of environmental health-related illnesses. To relieve these conditions Dareton was identified as a priority community, construction of houses commenced in 1997?
- The Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) is a capital construction and upgrade program which is raising the health and living standards of 22 priority Aboriginal NSW communities with urgent environmental health needs.
- The ACDP was launched on 29 May 1998 as a seven year project. It now has a budget of \$240 million and will be completed in 2008. The program provides housing, water, sewerage, roads, and recreational and cultural facilities to communities with a high level of identified need.
- Despite the injection of millions of dollars from this program social issues have not changed at Namatjira, many residents are moving into town or over the border to Mildura in Victoria to secure a better future for their families.
- Home ownership in the Wentworth Shire is lower for Aboriginal people in the area less than 10% of Aboriginal households in the Wentworth Shire owned or are buying their own homes compared to the general population. Community housing in the Wentworth Shire is owned by Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation, Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Office of Housing.
- Coomealla Aboriginal Housing Company was a local Aboriginal community controlled housing provider that owned approximately 30 houses, 3 fruit blocks and a service station that employed Aboriginal people. As a result of a lengthy court case with the Wentworth Shire Council to achieve rate exemption status (the test case was originally funded by ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council) To protect the housing assets Coomealla Housing transferred the entire housing stock to Murray Darling Community Care an organisation that they had created to deliver family support programs. All of the houses are now owned by the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation that is based in Broken Hill.
- Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation – Broken Hill: Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation (MPRHC) was established in 1997 by the ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council, the housing provider started with 4 houses and currently owns or manages over 600 Aboriginal houses allocated from the Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO), the State Land Council and Aboriginal Housing organisations.
- In 1999 ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council approved the ambiguous deal of the purchase of 26 houses from Murray Darling Community Care in Dareton by Murdi Paaki Regional Housing of Broken Hill. MDCC owed rates arrears of approximately \$88,000 to Wentworth Shire Council for 22 houses in the Wentworth Shire area and \$32,000 to Lower Murray Water and Mildura Rural City council for 4 houses in the Mildura Shire.

- The rates arrears were paid by MPHC to the creditors and the titles of the houses were handed over to them by the CEO of MDCC. This deal was endorsed without the knowledge of the directors of MDCC except for one director who signed the contract who had limited literacy skills. The directors were told by the former CEO of Murray Darling that the houses were being managed by Murdi Paaki for a period of 5 years and were to be handed back at the end of the lease. The former CEO continued to deny that the sale had taken place until his dismissal in 2002. These houses have been permanently lost to the Aboriginal community of the Coomealla area although the local Aboriginal land council own housing stock there is no local Aboriginal Housing company in the area.
- **Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council:** (DLALC) own the remaining Aboriginal community housing in the Wentworth Shire the housing stock has been managed by the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing 2002. DLALC had intentions of resuming management of their houses at some stage. This organisation was closed down in 2004 after consultation between the Chairperson of MPHC (who is also the Chairperson of the Dareton Wentworth Aboriginal Community Working Party) and State Land Council staff, this person has made public threats that he will “close the land council forever and that they will never get their houses back”. It is in the best interests of Murdi Paaki housing if the land council is dissolved, the houses would be retained by Murdi Paaki Housing.
- DLALC is in the process of being re-established via meetings with the community with a signing an “Intensive Support” offer for assistance from the State Land Council. This process has never been supported by the CWP who rarely attend the land council meetings.

1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT AN INQUIRY BE CARRIED OUT ON THE MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL HOUSING CORPORATION PURCHASE OF HOUSES.**

#### INCARCERATION AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- In 2002, Aboriginal rates of imprisonment were highest in the Sydney and Murdi Paaki ATSI regions, where more than 1% of the Aboriginal population was in prison. In 2003, the rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki was 1%, compared to 0.2% for the total population of Murdi Paaki.
- Murdi Paaki had the second highest rate of Aboriginal adults on remand in New South Wales in 2002, With Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki four times more likely to be on remand than non-Aboriginal people. In 2002, 2% of the Aboriginal adult population in Murdi Paaki were on remand.
- The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)’s most recent figures indicate that Family and Domestic Violence and Break and Enter – Dwelling are the priority offences within the Wentworth LGA. Wentworth LGA ranked 9th in New South Wales for Assault (Family and Domestic Violence related) in 2006, which is a slight improvement from 5th in 2005. Wentworth LGA ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in New South Wales for Break and Enter (Dwelling) in 2006 compared to 16th in 2005, which reflects a strong upward trend in break and enter offences. These two offences have been nominated as the priority focus areas of the 2006-09 Wentworth Crime Prevention Plan.
- **Crime Prevention Plan – Wentworth Shire Council:** The WSC recently released its Crime Prevention Plan, this plan was developed in conjunction with local agencies and endorsed by the CWP. Consultation was held with Police, the CWP, Mallee Family Care, DoCS and GWAHS which was referred to as “Greater Western Aboriginal Health Service” in the plan even though it is a mainstream health service that has an Aboriginal component, it is also managed by an Maari Maa an Aboriginal Medical Service from Broken Hill.

- WSC did not consult with CHAC about the plan although it was advertised on their website CHAC did not have any knowledge of the plan until it was due to be released. CHAC is the only Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation left in the Coomealla district. The Indigenous Family Violence Intervention Program based in Buronga and the auspice body Mildura Aboriginal Corporation was not consulted nor was the Aboriginal community.
- There is a lack of alternative sentencing options available in the Wentworth Shire, there is a need for a Circle Sentencing program as most of the clients attending the local court are Aboriginal and are repeat offenders.
- **NSW Police:** NSW Police have recently released their updated Aboriginal Strategic Direction aimed at decreasing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. The plan The ASD guides police in its management of Aboriginal issues and seeks Aboriginal community involvement through a consultative and proactive approach by including grass root community members. A Local Area Command Aboriginal Advisory Committee (LACACC) is in the process of being set up to achieve this aim and to roll out the ASD.
- **Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLO):** Dareton Police station has 2 ACLO positions one position is currently vacant and will be filled in the near future. ACLO's don't receive funding to run programs for crime prevention initiatives, however they are have been involved in running programs and assisting organisations and groups with crime prevention initiatives. Some of these include:
  - Movie nights held at CHAC for youth.
  - Youth Disco Nights held at Dareton and Wentworth clubs.
  - Organising sports events in conjunction with other organisations.
  - Organising cultural camps with Police and Aboriginal youth – these will take place when funding is secured.
  - Assisting with the "Our Journey to Respect Program" run by Mallee Family Care making referrals, transporting clients and attending workshops.
  - Driving the Mildura United Soccer Club bus on a voluntary basis for Aboriginal youth 5 days a week to Mildura.
  - Assisting with the "Ride to Respect" program between Police and Aboriginal youth.
- **JUVENILE JUSTICE:** Juvenile Justice is based in broken hill a worker visits the area when their clients are involved in court cases, there is very little follow up and support for youth on community based orders, parole and remand.
  1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT A JUVENILE JUSTICE WORKER POSITION BE ESTABLISHED AT DARETON.**
- **Night Patrol:** The crime prevention program Aboriginal Night Patrol program was originally placed at Dareton Police Station and now placed at Mallee Family Care to manage. Itha-Mari an Aboriginal organisation administers the funds for the program. Although Itha Mari is an "Aboriginal Organisation" unlike other community controlled organisations it is registered under ASIC and membership to the organisation is by invitation from the board.

- The Aboriginal Night Patrol has a requirement that the youth have to register to be members of the Mallee Family Care Youth Action Program to access the service. Youth who are not registered with this program will not be able to utilise the services. Although the Night Patrol has Aboriginal staff it is coordinated by a mainstream organisation and a non Aboriginal co-ordinator, this structure is not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal youth.

1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE ABORIGINAL NIGHT PATROL BE MANAGED BY AN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ORGANISATION.**
2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE CIRCLE SENTENCING PROGRAM BE ESTABLISHED IN THE WENTWORTH SHIRE.**

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE (c)

Previous Social Issues Committee reports containing reference to Aboriginal people – and assess the progress of government in implementing adopted report.

While these reports are useful and necessary in identifying issues what is the outcome of these reports? These reports have been going on for years however the problems appear to be getting worse. Recommendations from these reports appear not carried out or followed up, as on the ground level communities are deteriorating.

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE (d)

The Federal Government intervention in the Northern Territory and advise on potential programs/initiatives that may or may not have relevance in terms of their application in New South Wales.

Although we do not support the Federal Governments intervention in the Northern Territory the issues in our community are similar to the issues in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and throughout Australia. We feel that the approach taken by the former Federal Government is racist, a land grab and is not aimed at the protection of children, all of the legislation that was rushed through parliament none of it addressed the protection of children.

We believe that the issues in the Northern Territory are a common theme throughout Aboriginal communities all over Australia. Communities are in crisis wherever there is a large Aboriginal population the gap between Aboriginal people and the wider community has widened not only with health but with poverty as well. Our chance to reduce the gap was severely jeopardised under the John Howard Federal Government policies by abolishing our only national body ATSIC and mainstreaming all of the programs and reducing Aboriginal funding and community control.

- **Child Abuse:** The issue of child abuse is another issue that is a common theme throughout Aboriginal communities many cases of child abuse go unreported and perpetrators go unpunished, while these perpetrators are not being detected using mainstream methods of police checks one advantage of having Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations is that they are known to these workers who will monitor them from a distance and advise mainstream organisations of their concerns.
- **Gambling:** Gambling is a huge problem in our community for Aboriginal people, family payments and other income is being poured into the poker machines. Like other communities around Australia this issue leads to other social problems for families, such as child neglect, poor nutrition and other issues. There is no gambling counsellor in the Wentworth Shire.

- **CDEP:** We believe that the closure of the CDEP in the NT will be detrimental to the Aboriginal community and will increase drinking and domestic violence issues, a reform for these programs is long overdue however they need to be retained to empower and develop the self esteem of the Aboriginal community. There is unlimited potential for communities in the Northern Territory for enterprises and for Aboriginal communities to tap into their art and craft skills there is untapped talent in the Dareton area which also could be used to create enterprises.
- **Permit System:** We believe that the permit is the best method of protection for the Aboriginal communities in the NT, this also ensures that unscrupulous developers do not have access to the land for development. Communities need to take more ownership of their community and make them dry areas and make a safe place for women and children, there needs to be a community stand against perpetrators using the communities to hide from the law as it happens in some Aboriginal communities.
- **Intervention Workers:** There should be an effort to recruit more Aboriginal Police, Teachers and Child Protection workers from the Aboriginal communities, Native Americans in the USA have tribal police to protect their communities as well as state police and Native American teachers and child protection workers
- **Quarantining of Welfare Payments:** We do not support the quarantining of welfare payments of Aboriginal people, this policy is racist if it is applied to one group of people in society. Quarantining of welfare payments should be linked to child protections reports and school attendance for all recipients of welfare regardless of race.

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE (e)

**Opportunities for strengthening cultural resilience within Aboriginal communities in New South Wales with a focus on language, cultural identity, economic development and self determination.**

The opportunity to strengthen cultural resilience within the Aboriginal community of the Wentworth Shire has been diminished with the introduction of the Community Working Party. The opportunity to strengthen the community with economic development has been lost since the closure of many of the local Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Self determination in this community is a thing of the past the morale of the Aboriginal community is at an all time low, lack of direction and leadership, drug and alcohol, gambling, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect are some of the issues that are prevalent in the community.

#### LANGUAGE:

- The local Aboriginal language is the Barkindji language it is spoken by few remaining Barkindji elders, the Barkindji language program was delivered at the Wentworth Public school until 2006. The language is in danger of being lost and is not spoken by the younger generation.
  1. **RECCOMENDATION: THAT THERE BE MORE RESOURCES ALLOCATED TO RETAINING THE BARKINDJI LANGUAGE.**
  2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE BARKINDJI LANGUAGE PROGRAM BE PART OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES AT COOMEALLA HIGH SCHOOL.**

## **CULTURAL IDENTITY:**

- Cultural identity is stronger in some of the older generation in the community who still speak some of their traditional language, the younger generation don't speak it and their identity isn't as strong. There aren't any specific cultural programs to reinforce the cultural identity for the youth their identity is being modelled on overseas African American rappers.
- On a recent visit from a group of Native Americans to the area a music and dance night was held at Namatjira, the Native Americans and the local Aboriginal people told traditional stories and performed their traditional dances, the visitors were then given a feast of traditional food. The alcohol free event was sponsored by CHAC with no support from the CWP the night was enjoyed by everyone that attended. This event bought back a sense of pride to the community who expressed a desire to make it an ongoing event.
- Cultural identity of the community has diminished under the mainstream policies of the CWP who support mainstream organisations delivering services to the Aboriginal community that are not culturally appropriate. These programs and policies designed by the mainstream organisations have no cultural content or sensitivity or understanding. See the Night Patrol example.

### **1. RECOMMENDATION: THAT A MUSEUM OR A KEEPING PLACE BE ESTABLISHED TO STRENGTHEN THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF THE COMMUNITY.**

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SELF DETERMINATION:**

Dareton has lost 5 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations since the CWP has been in place, there has been no support from the CWP to save these organisations. The CWP support mainstream organisations and believe that Aboriginal people need to go mainstream and lose some of their cultural identity. There aren't any Aboriginal art galleries or enterprises in the area, tourists interested in buying Aboriginal art often approach the Aboriginal Medical Service to enquire about where they can purchase it.

- **Coomealla Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation:** CYDAC was an Aboriginal community controlled organisation set up to run family support, foster care and youth programs. After the closure of CYDAC programs were transferred to Coomealla Housing and later Murray Darling Aged Care which later went into liquidation and was deregistered all of the programs were tendered out to Mallee Family Care.
- **Coomealla Aboriginal Housing Company:** Coomealla Aboriginal Housing Company was established in 1974, the local Aboriginal community controlled housing provided houses to the Aboriginal community. The organisation had assets of approximately 30 houses, 3 fruit blocks and a service station, these enterprises employed Aboriginal people as block hands as well as a service station manager and assistants. The company was deregistered in 2007.
- **Murray Darling Aged Care:** Murray Darling Aged Care, which was created by Coomealla Aboriginal Housing Company to provide aged care services to youth and elders programs that were formerly delivered by CYDAC.
- The company experienced problems with the funding body due to mismanagement by the former CEO, DoCS eventually withdrew all funding for the programs and these programs were transferred to Mallee Family Care.



- The former directors attempted to hold gain community support by holding community meetings to try to rescue the organisation and discuss the future of the programs, due to the lack of support from the community and the CWP the company was unable to be salvaged.
- **Carnma CDEP & Enterprises:** Carnma CDEP was funded by ATSIC to deliver employment programs and enterprises for Aboriginal people in the Wentworth Shire. This organisation created the award winning enterprise Harry Nanya Tours. The organisation went into administration after experiencing management and financial difficulties. The organisation was closed down and deregistered in 2004?. The CDEP was reopened under the auspice of MPREC in 2004.
  - 1) **Harry Nanya Tours:** Carnma owned award winning Aboriginal tourism enterprise was transferred to Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation who sold the business to IBA after extensive consultations between MPREC management and the MPREC Regional Manager. MPREC was in the process of renegotiating with Harry Nanya tours to act as a host employer to their CDEP participants before the organisation lost its tender to MADEC.
  - 2) **Oridgi Didge Enterprise & Harry Mitchell Gallery:** Carnma owned enterprise the Didgeridoo making business that supplied artefacts to the Harry Mitchell Gallery, this enterprise was closed down and the remaining stock was shipped to Broken Hill MPREC CDEP, and the shed sold to pay outstanding debts.
  - 3) **Women's Issues Group:** The sewing group was an initiative of Carnma CDEP providing sewing lessons to participants and providing artefacts for the Harry Mitchell gallery to sell to tourists. The Regional Manager for MPREC disbanded this sewing group and participants sent to Job Network when CDEP was taken over by MPREC.
  - 4) **Barkindji Aboriginal Dance Group:** There were a number of Aboriginal dance groups in the Coomealla area, one dance group the Barkindji Dance Group provided entertainment for tourists for Harry Nanya Tours, this group and the others have now disbanded.
- **Tulklana Kumbi:** Tulklana Kumbi was a local Aboriginal gallery that specialised in making Aboriginal Artefacts and running programs for schools. Managed by a non-Aboriginal person the gallery employed local Aboriginal artists who made artefacts and worked with students from the local schools. The Gallery was also a popular tourist attraction for buses and coaches from out of town, the business closed due to lack of funding it was also unable to secure funding from ATSIC.
- **Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council:** The Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council was closed in 2005 the housing stock is now managed by the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation. This organisation was closed down in 2004 after consultation between the CWP and NSW State Land Council managers. Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council is in the process of being re-established via meetings with the community and a signing of an "Intensive Support" offer for assistance from the NSW State Land Council.
- **Namatjira Regional Sporting Association (NRSA):** Incorporated on 1999 the NRSA obtained funding from the Government to run sporting activities and programs for Aboriginal youth. A grant was allocated to the group to establish and maintain a football oval at the Namatjira settlement, this oval was used by the residents to play sports and schools utilised it for visiting Aboriginal sports role models.
- Funding for \$30,000 was obtained by the NRSA from Premiers Department to purchase Go Karts for a crime prevention program, funding was also received for the purchase of sporting and camping

equipment to run programs for the youth of Wentworth Shire. After the NSRA went into liquidation all of the equipment was transferred to the Youth Action Project (YAP) based at Mallee Family Care. The NSRA was deregistered in 2005. The community is unaware of the whereabouts of the Go Karts and other equipment.

1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT AN INQUIRY BE CONDUCTED REGARDING THE ASSETS OF THE NSRA.**
2. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE GOVERNMENT LOOK AT ESTABLISHING ENTERPRISES FOR THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IN THE WENTWORTH SHIRE.**
3. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE GOVERNMENT LOOK AT ESTABLISHING AN ABORIGINAL TOURISM AND ART GALLERY VENTURE IN DARETON.**

### **Mainstream Services delivering Aboriginal Programs.**

- **MADEC:** This organisation was unprepared for the takeover of the CDEP there wasn't any structure in place to ensure the smooth transition of this program for participants who were confused and disillusioned by these new arrangements. There has not been any Aboriginal staff employed by MADEC to deliver the CDEP program and to liaise with participants, other job network organisations in Mildura have Aboriginal staff and programs to work with Aboriginal clients. The program is no longer culturally appropriate and the employment outcomes have not improved.
- The opportunity for participants of the CDEP to eventually gain meaningful employment from the new service provider is looking unpromising for the participants. A number of CDEP participants are not involved in host employment and are required to spend their 2 days activities in a shed at the MADEC site in Mildura, these activities consist of participants doing art, painting bird boxes, fixing bicycles, painting the MADEC trailer while some of the male participants out of boredom play football on the oval at the rear of the shed. Occupational Health and Safety regulations appear not be monitored by the supervisors in the shed as participants wear thongs and other inappropriate clothing and footwear while they are participating in their activities Another activity that participants partake in is to spend their 2 days looking for employment in Mildura by walking around to employment centres this activity is conducted by the participant without transport or support. .
- A number of CDEP participants are placed at a used furniture business run by a church member in Dareton activities include collecting and restoring furniture, due to the number of participants placed there (20) and the lack of work some of the participants turn up to sign their timesheet and leave their workplace at around 10.00 am to go and play basketball or kick a football around.
- The used furniture business no longer hosts the participants MADEC has now placed them in a unused shed near the river bank, the shed has no electricity connected, air conditioning or facilities a large shed with all amenities that would be appropriate for CDEP activities located at the Namatjira settlement near Dareton is leased by Itha Mari who don't allow community to access it. CDEP have tried in vain for many years to obtain access to the shed to hold activities.
- **Mallee Family Care (MFC):** Mallee Family Care is a mainstream agency from Mildura funded by DoCS to deliver family support programs and Out of Home Care in the Wentworth Shire. The organisation employs Aboriginal support workers to work with clients however none of the management positions are filled by Aboriginal staff. All policy and program development is done by non Aboriginal program managers at Dareton. The organisation is not culturally appropriate for the

Aboriginal community of this area as the programs delivered are not culturally appropriate or culturally sensitive.

- This organisation is supported by the CWP, in a recent review of the services by the Department of Community Services delegates from the CWP spoke to the consultants and gave the organisation a favourable appraisal despite the community dissatisfaction from the lack of services and the poor service delivery of the organisation.
- Maari Ma funds the Youth Coordinator position that is based at MFC, there is also a partnership arrangement between the 2 organisations. There are no structured youth programmes run by this organisation Aboriginal workers from the schools have recently organised school holiday activities from the premises. There are no venues in the Wentworth Shire to cater for youth activities.
- The Aboriginal Night Patrol program is placed at MFC Itha-Mari administers the funds for the program, this program is the only Night Patrol program that requires the youth to sign registration forms to be members of the Mallee Family Care Youth Action Project (YAP) program to be able to access the service, youth who are not members of YAP are not able to access the night patrol. Although the Night Patrol has Aboriginal staff it is coordinated by a mainstream organisation and a non Aboriginal co-ordinator, this structure is not culturally appropriate for Aboriginal youth.

1. **RECOMMENDATION: THAT ABORIGINAL PROGRAMS BE DELIVERED BY ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED ORGANISATIONS.**

- **Elders Group:** There is an incorporated Elders group in the area, however the elders are not active in local issues and the group is only open to Aboriginal women of Barkindji descent.
- **Youth Group:** There is no youth group, activities or venues for youth in the area. The youth program based at Mallee Family Care is auspiced by Maari Maa Health from Broken Hill.
- **Women's Group:** The last incorporated women's group was the Dareton Aboriginal Women's Network (DAWN) this group was disbanded in 2002 there hasn't been an active women's group since then. The aim of the group was to:
  - re-establish a sense of community among Aboriginal women and through that process to break down divisions among Aboriginal women
  - identify and prioritise service and support needs (including training) for Aboriginal women
  - act as a catalyst for the promotion of harmonious relationships within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities
  - identify and initiate a series of activities based on female strengths (including restoration of traditional knowledge)
  - organise events, especially fund-raising events, and retreats for Aboriginal women
- **Men's Group:** There is a men's group called the 2 rivers men's' group this is coordinated by the Aboriginal worker from Mallee Family Care, this group has not had a meeting since 2007. Funding to the group is provided by Maari Maa.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE (f)**

The experiences of the outcomes of the COAG Murdi Paaki trial but also take into account the other COAG trials occurring across Australia and their outcomes/lessons learned.

**COAG TRIAL**

The Aboriginal community of Dareton and other towns within the Wentworth Shire has been severely disadvantaged by the Murdi Paaki COAG trials and the introduction of the new Aboriginal Community Working Party structure.

- The Federal Government passed the bill in 2004 to abolish ATSIC in 2005, in their haste to dismantle this peak Aboriginal body and their reluctance to replace it with a similar body has paved the way for a group of ex ATSIC councillors and the government to develop a governance model that has manipulated government departments into thinking they are promoting effective community governance that is inclusive of the views of the entire Aboriginal community.
- ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council in its dying days changed the structure of the CWP's across the Murdi Paaki Region. This group of ex Councillors and family and other self interest groups have through the CWP's and the Regional Assembly monopolised government funding to create and support regional empires and power bases at the expense of the community controlled Aboriginal organisations and communities.
- Individuals and communities that are excluded from the CWP's no longer have an effective voice as government agencies believe that the CWP's speak for all of the Aboriginal communities and are required to liaise with them on all Aboriginal issues and obtain their endorsement for various programs.
- The loss of ATSIC and the introduction of the CWP's and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has disempowered many Aboriginal communities across the Murdi Paaki Region, the delegates and the organisations that auspice the CWP's are the only groups that have gained power from this arrangement.
- **ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council:** ATSIC needed to be overhauled not abolished as the destruction of our only national representative body has left Aboriginal people and communities across the Australia without a voice, the new arrangements in Aboriginal affairs has been a dismal failure by the government and has only illustrated the need re-establish a national body that is legislated, mandated and incorporated like ATSIC to achieve transparency, consistency and accountability to the government and the communities they represent.
- Murdi Paaki Regional Council established 3 regional organisations to address the areas of health, housing and employment. These organisations now control the majority of the services delivered to the Aboriginal community across the Murdi Paaki Region, these comprise:

**Health Services – Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation  
Housing services – Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation;  
Employment & Training – Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation.**

- Murdi Paaki Regional Councillors abused their power by giving these organisations unprecedented support, additional ATSIC funding and access to consultants that ensured these organisations did not fail like their ailing counterparts. The Murdi Paaki Regional Council was aware of the mismanagement

and the misappropriation of funds of some of these Aboriginal organisations, despite the pleas of communities for assistance this fell on deaf ears and was used to benefit the 3 regional organisations ATSI created to expand and take over these services.

- **Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly:** The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly has always been promoted by the chairperson as a similar structure to the Torres Strait Regional Authority model and as being an autonomous body that would support regional participation in regional decision making to make it more relevant for communities and give them greater ownership.
- The Regional Assembly is chaired by the former chairperson of the ATSI Murdi Paaki Regional Council although the Regional Assembly is made up of the chairpersons of the 16 CWP's across the Murdi Paaki region, although the Regional Assembly has always promoted itself as an autonomous body that represents all Aboriginal organisations other Aboriginal organisations across the region do not get the same support from the Regional Assembly as the 3 regional organisations listed above do. The email address for the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is [mp.regionallassembly@mprec.org.au](mailto:mp.regionallassembly@mprec.org.au)
- At the conclusion of the COAG trial the government did not renew the Regional Partnership Agreement and ceased funding the Regional Assembly, funding was provided to the Assembly by the 3 regional organisations Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation, Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation and Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation to enable it keep functioning.
- **Namatjira Community Working Party:** In 1995 representatives of local Aboriginal organisations and community members of the Dareton community, in far south-western NSW, formed a Working Party, sponsored by the ATSI Murdi Paaki Regional Council. The purpose of the Working Party was initially to direct the provision of housing and infrastructure funded under ATSI Health Infrastructure Priority Projects (HIPP) programme to meet the needs of about twenty severely disadvantaged Aboriginal families living in unserviced, self-built tin huts at the former reserve called Namatjira, situated on the fringe of Dareton.
- The Namatjira Working Party was set up with representation from all Aboriginal organisations, community members and invited agencies including ATSI, DAA, NSW Health and DEWRSB, to oversee the project. The Namatjira Working Party had the agreed authority to direct the projects and was the peak point of contact with the Aboriginal Community. In 1996, the Working Party engaged Burns Aldis as its project manager, and work started on planning the housing and infrastructure project.
- **Wentworth Dareton Community Working Party:** NWP originally had delegates from local service providers and organisations on the committee as well as community members the working party was an active forum with input from members of the Aboriginal community. The Working Party was a well attended forum that was representative of the Aboriginal community, this changed when ATSI Murdi Paaki Regional Council refreshed the Community Working Party, changed the name to Wentworth Dareton Community Working Party, changed the structure and appointed members from the community as delegates and changed the status of service providers and organisations to onlookers. The CWP still administers the DAA Aboriginal Community Development Program, however the CWP's core business was changed to community governance in the dying days of the ATSI Murdi Paaki Regional Council to retain some of the power after ATSI was abolished.
- The CWP is recognised by the government as the peak local body, all communication by government departments is facilitated through the CWP, and government departments are under the impression that the CWP represents the entire Aboriginal community. Under the current structure of the CWP

there is no opportunity for the community to question decisions made by the CWP. All decisions of the CWP are made by the 2 main delegates the chairperson and the community facilitator.

- The Chairperson and the Community Facilitator have access to ministers and senior officials within the government that is unavailable to community members, this access has ensured the CWP's hold the power in communities and this has enabled them to build a power base that the community is unable to challenge. Representatives from DAA and other agencies who hold meetings with the Chairperson and Community Facilitator of the CWP are manipulated into thinking that the CWP is promoting effective community governance.
- Because the CWP's are not legislated or incorporated the roles of the CWP's across the Murdi Paaki region are not consistent, they change with each CWP they do not have a constitution or clear policies or guidelines. A delegate's manual to set out the rules, objectives and aims of the CWP's was in the draft form in 2004 this manual was never finalised. A clear guide for government services would also clarify the role of the CWP and what their purpose is.
- The CWP appears to be functioning and representing the community at all levels to government officials and service providers however the community primarily is not aware of its function and that is recognised as the local peak body that is supposed to represent the community. The CWP has developed a governance model that has manipulated the governments into thinking they are promoting community governance. There is in this case a need for the government agencies to work directly with the community however there is no knowledge of the community of how to contact the relevant officials to voice their concerns regarding this governance model.
- The Dareton Wentworth CWP attempted to gain total control over decision making and project allocation from government departments, this structure would have given the CWP greater control over the Aboriginal community and would disadvantage Aboriginal community organisations that the CWP does not support. Mainstream NGO's delivering services to the Aboriginal community, although not meeting their performance indicators, are supported by the CWP due to their partnerships and involvement with them.
- **Memorandum of Understanding:** The CWP has an agreement with the Wentworth Shire Council which gives total control of the CWP to the secretariat Itha Mari, unlike the agreement with Dubbo CWP and Dubbo Shire which gives control to the CWP and not the secretariat. The facilitators position is funded via the Wentworth Shire Council and outsourced to Itha Mari, both organisations have signed a MOU which in effect gives the secretariat Itha Mari total control of the CWP.
- **Refreshment of Delegates:** The CWP has not refreshed its delegates since 2004, delegates are appointed internally by the Community Facilitator the refreshment process for the CWP is a dubious process unlike the former ATSIC elections where representatives were elected through a democratically transparent elections. The Community Facilitator position is filled by a person from Northern Territory who is virtually unknown to the local Aboriginal Community, the person who holds this position has a dual role of Community Facilitator of the CWP and is the CEO of the organisation Itha Mari that is the secretariat for the CWP.
- **Community Facilitator:** Part of the role of the Community Facilitator is to facilitate, coordinate and maintain the community plan and CWP newsletter and web-site, there has not been a website since 2006 and has never been a newsletter distributed to the community. There has only been one community forum held in the past 5 years. The community facilitator is not recognised by the local community as Aboriginal, no does she interact with the Aboriginal community.

- **Community Action Plan:** The Community Action Plan that was praised by governments and government organisations across the Murdi Paaki region was devised by the CWP with no input from the local Aboriginal community this plan was to be implemented and monitored by the Community Facilitator. The Aboriginal community has very limited knowledge of this plan as it was not publicised at community forums to allow the community to have an input into it. The Dareton Wentworth plan was presented in a draft form at a CWP meeting held in February 2006 this plan was identical to the Wilcannia plan with the wording of the Wilcannia Plan scattered throughout the document.
- The development of the Community Action Plan has had no positive outcomes for the community, the community was not consulted or had no input into this plan and the community has very little knowledge or understanding of the purpose of this plan
- **Governance:** Living under the governance of the Dareton Wentworth Aboriginal Community Working Party and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly would be similar to having the John Howard Federal Government back in office. Their policies are similar with the focus on mainstreaming and on regionalising all of the services. During the 1980's local Aboriginal community controlled organisations were well funded and the community had hopes and prospects for a better future.
- Governance capacity has not improved in the Wentworth Shire the structure of the local CWP has silenced the voice of the community, there is limited engagement of the community with government agencies as all consultation must now take pace through the CWP. There have been no local partnerships forged through this process as promised. There has been a decrease in delegate participation in the CWP over last 12 months.
- **Secretariats:** Under the current structure of the Community Working Parties the Secretariat that provides services to the CWP's are the organisations that benefit the most from this arrangement, this structure gives the organisations access to government officials under the pretence of presenting community views. Employees of the secretariats usually are the chairperson or delegates of the CWP's.
- **Itha-Mari (Secretariat):** Delegates of the CWP along with a former MADEC employee set up Itha-Mari as a building company to coordinate housing services formerly delivered by MADEC who were under contract with DAA. Itha Mari started out with 15 Aboriginal apprentice carpenters to work on the project it now has 1 Aboriginal apprentice carpenter other staff and contractors are non Aboriginal.
- Itha-Mari is registered with ASIC as a Company Limited by Guarantee and under the terms of its constitution, Itha-Mari Ltd reserves the right to appoint its membership and board of directors, membership is by invitation from the board. Itha Mari is not an Aboriginal community controlled organisation. Itha-Mari was formally appointed as the Secretariat for the Dareton Wentworth Community Working Party in 2002 the secretariat role has not been refreshed since then.
- Itha Mari has a 99 year lease on a large work shed that was constructed for the HIPP program the shed was leased from the Dareton Local Aboriginal Land Council under a 99 year lease, most of the community has no knowledge of this agreement and the community are unable to access the shed to run programs there. Former directors of DLALC repeatedly requested a copy of the lease and to date one has not been presented.
- **Urbis Keys Young Evaluation of the COAG Trials and the CWP in the Murdi Paaki Region:** The consultants report noting the success of the Murdi Paaki COAG trial is not an accurate reflection of the outcomes of the CWP or of the views of the Aboriginal communities in the Murdi Paaki Region, there

were only 6 out of 16 CWP's that were consulted. The stakeholders that were consulted were delegates of the CWP's not community members who are affected by the policies of these CWP's.

- Community members in the Wentworth Shire were not interviewed by the consultants of this report regarding the Community Working Party. Consultation with community members in this area would have given a different evaluation of the trial from the stakeholders. The stakeholders do not have the knowledge of local politics and structures of the CWP that the community members' possess, neither do they have access to the views of the communities at a grass root level. The stakeholders obtained their information from the CWP chairpersons and delegates. Consultants who spoke with community members that are nominated by the CWP's were given favourable views of the CWP structure. Consultation should have taken place with a broader cross section of ALL of the communities involved in this trial this would have given clearer and more accurate views of the CWP structures and their policies.
- Stakeholders listed in the report are from government departments who are involved in the CWP process these stakeholders deal with the CWP's on a professional basis and are only privy to views of the delegates in their dealings. Community members do not have access to these professionals to express their views. The Director General of DAA attended a local CWP meeting the community had no knowledge of her impending visit or did not have the chance to consult privately with her away from the CWP delegates to express their concerns.
- As mentioned above, Urbis Keys Young undertook community consultations in the Murdi Paaki region in 2005 on behalf of DEST and DET. These were designed to provide objective information relating to community governance in the region, and to identify any areas for potential improvement. A report on these consultations, "*Community Governance in the Murdi Paaki Region*", was produced for the Murdi Paaki Steering Committee in mid-2005. While the involvement of the Murdi Paaki Action Team was crucial to the success of that project, there was relatively little input from government into the 2005 research.
- The stakeholders consulted and the limited number of communities consulted would not have provided objective information about the structure of the CWP's, the consultants are not aware of the local dynamics of the Aboriginal communities consulted therefore the feedback given would have been supportive of the CWP's. To obtain a comprehensive and accurate view of these structures community members who are not involved in the CWP's or had involvement in the past would have been able to describe the positive and negative aspects of this governance arrangements.
- The community of the Wentworth Shire would welcome the opportunity to speak with government agencies and consultants of this report to voice our concerns regarding the Wentworth Dareton Community Working Party. Whilst this arrangement may appear to be representative of the community it is very detrimental to the progress of this community. Since the demise of ATSIC the progress has stalled in the community, local Aboriginal community controlled organisations have closed down, there is no community optimism about the future morale is at a low point for the Aboriginal community.
- There is very little interest from the Aboriginal community in attending community meetings and participating in committees, in the ATSIC era community meetings were well attended now it is a struggle to get 10 people to attend meetings and get involved in community issues as there is no longer any community control or pride as services are being regionalised.



1. RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE NEW FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ESTABLISH A NATIONAL ABORIGINAL BODY TO REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE.
2. RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP WITH MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL ASSEMBLY NOT BE RENEWED.
3. RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENT ABOLISH THE COMMUNITY WORKING PARTIES ACROSS THE MURDI PAAKI REGION.
4. RECOMMENDATION: THAT A NEW REPORT BY AN IMPARTIAL CONSULTANCY FIRM BE CARRIED OUT TO DETERMINE THE FAILURE OF THE COAG TRIAL ACROSS THE MURDI PAAKI REGION.
5. RECOMMENDATION: THAT THE MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS OR A DELEGATE HOLD A MEETING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO ASSESS THE EFFECTS OF THE COAG TRIAL ON THE COMMUNITY.

REFERENCES:

1. *Wentworth Dareton Community Action Plan 2006*
2. *Correspondence from Wentworth Dareton CWP to DAA.*
3. *Greater Western Area Health Strategic Plan*
4. *Two Ways Together Report Murdi Paaki*
5. *Evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, Urbis Keys Young.*
6. *Home-grown solutions for healthier homes: The Healthy Housing Worker program in far west NSW Bill Balding, Far West Area Health Service, Bruce Graham, Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation, Hugh Burke, Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation.*
7. *Wentworth Shire Council website Crime figures for the Wentworth Shire area.*