

Submission
No 28

**INQUIRY INTO PROCUREMENT PRACTICES OF
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES IN NEW SOUTH WALES AND
ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE
PEOPLE OF NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Yuwaya Ngarra-li

Date Received: 24 January 2024

Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW

24 January 2024

Dear Standing Committee on Social Issues,

**Yuwaya Ngarra-li submission:
Inquiry into procurement practices of government agencies in NSW and its impact on the
social development of the people of NSW**

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry, and thank your Committee Office for allowing us an extension.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li is the long-term community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) in Walgett and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) that grew from collaboration on a research study. Yuwaya Ngarra-li means 'vision' in Gamilaraay. Our long-term goals in Walgett are:

- Greater Aboriginal community control and capacity
- Increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training and employment
- Reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system
- Improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people
- Increased sustainable management of water and Country
- Redirection of government funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives

We have become increasingly aware of the importance of improving government procurement and contracting practices in order to make progress towards these goals. Building community led solutions is at the core of our partnership, and we have learnt that much greater accountability and transparency is needed around government data and expenditure to make informed local decisions about the issues affecting Aboriginal people living in Walgett.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li invited researchers from Nook Studio to work with us to produce the attached policy paper: *Creating better futures with contracts*, which explores barriers in accessing data about government spending and funding opportunities relevant to Walgett's Aboriginal community, which includes residents of Walgett town and the nearby villages of Gingie and Namoi.

Our research found that there is currently no way to identify what activities are funded by government or who is meant to be providing them. This impacts the ability of local service providers to collaborate on issues such as health and education, water and food security and respond to the needs of the community. Current procurement and grant processes do not allow for communities to be involved in the procurement approach design or candidate selection process.

DHARRIWAA ELDERS GROUP

wendy@yuwayangarrali.org.au
PO Box 174 Walgett NSW 2832
<https://www.dharriwaaidersgroup.org.au/>

UNSW

walgettpartnership@unsw.edu.au
UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia
<https://www.unsw.edu.au/walgett-partnership>

Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW

We found that there is currently no way for communities to track progress or delivery, access details of contracts, monitor whether expectations and outcomes are being met, or be part of the evaluation process or easily access final evaluations (even if they contributed to them).

Our *Creating better futures with contracts* policy paper identifies ways to improve access to information on government procurement, grants and contracts in ways that are meaningful for each Aboriginal community, based on what we have learnt through our work in Walgett.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li will also soon be releasing another policy paper about government budgets and spending decisions: *Making government finances make sense for communities*.

We have found through research for this policy paper that a useful aspect of the NSW Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report is that it makes clear the number of Aboriginal programs and services that exist and new programs announced in the 2022-2023 budget, "designed to assist the NSW Government in meeting its commitments under the National Agreement." (page 11).

However, a summary of the 129 programs and services and new 28 budget initiatives announced (including what type they are), where they are being delivered, and by whom, is not available in an open and useful format. Nor is it not clear whether they will be delivered via procurement or grants. According to that summary there are 157 programs that service Aboriginal communities in NSW, however, there is no easy way to access what they are and what is being spent. We were advised by government representatives that this exists in a spreadsheet format and though the DEG have asked for this information several times, have not received it. Access to this information is essential for accountability, and would be enormously helpful for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to be able to identify funding opportunities.

Our *Making government finances make sense for communities* policy paper concludes that there is a need for a complete rethink of the ways this kind of information is collected, managed, and published to better enable communities and governments to work collaboratively on local, tailored solutions. We will share this policy paper when it is finalised in the coming weeks.

The findings of this research are consistent with the five priority areas agreed by all Governments as part of the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap for NSW:

- Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making
- Building the Community-Controlled Sector
- Transforming Government Organisations
- Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level
- Economic Prosperity, Business Growth and Employment

Unfortunately, Closing the Gap Reports consistently show a lack of progress in many areas.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW

Beyond providing access to meaningful data, an immediate and practical step that governments could take is providing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations with the resources and systems to analyse data, design and communicate their priorities, and to meaningfully contribute to and lead policy, program, and service design, decision making and delivery.

We look forward to opportunities to discuss the findings of our policy papers, and to explore ways to work together to improve access to data that enables Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to take the lead on social development and deliver better outcomes in Walgett and other communities across NSW.

Yours sincerely,

Secretary, Dharriwaa Elders Group

Associate Professor Ruth McCausland

UNSW Director of Yuwaya Ngarra-li

