

Commonwealth Grants Commission

Indigenous Funding Inquiry

Submission

From: District Council of Ceduna

SUBMISSION NO.: IFI/SUB/0002

DATE RECEIVED: 30/03/2000

Commonwealth Grants Commission

Indigenous Funding Inquiry

Submission by the District Council of Ceduna

Author: Tony Irvine, Chief Executive Officer.

Introduction:

Ceduna has the highest proportion of Aboriginal people, officially approximately 16% of its population, of all local government areas in South Australia. The percentage is probably higher due to under enumeration of Aboriginals in the last Census. In addition there are Aboriginal communities in adjacent unincorporated areas that are essentially part of the Ceduna community.

In all, about 25% of the Ceduna community population is Aboriginal, one of the highest percentages in Australia, and perhaps the highest for a community that includes a substantial urban area.

Ceduna has a population of about 4,000 persons. It is about 800 km west of Adelaide, and is the last substantial community on the road to Perth before the Nullarbor Plain and the WA border. The town services a substantial grazing and farming region, and is the port for this produce as well as a major gypsum mine nearby. Other mineral prospects are being examined. There are significant flows of tourists passing to and from Western Australia.

The Ceduna community is a complex multicultural society. There are representatives of early European settlers, of Aboriginal communities with substantial previous contact with Europeans, of Aboriginals who continue to live traditional lifestyles, and increasing numbers of recent settlers in Australia.

The Maralinga community (Maralinga Tjarutja) has established its headquarters in Ceduna. The Maralinga Lands extend across the north of the Ceduna District.)

It is fair to say that in the past Ceduna had the reputation of being one of the most racist towns in Australia. This was until approximately ten years ago. At that time most leaders of the community realised that attitudes had to change if our town were to grow and be one of which we can all be proud to be a resident.

Since then Council has worked consistently to improve liaison and communication between the District Council and representative organisations of the Aboriginal people, including Wangka Willarurra Regional Council, Koonibba Community Council, Yalata Community Council, Ceduna Aboriginal Community Council and Tjutjunaku Worka Tjuta, (TWT) which provides CDEP program activities in Ceduna. Council, both directly and through its officers, have implemented an action program to maintain, implement or improve its commitment to the Aboriginal people in our district.

The following are some illustrations of these actions:

- recognise the Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council as our counterpart and develop links with the Regional Council as first point of reference on Aboriginal issues;
- develop greater knowledge and awareness of the issues that impact on Aboriginal people in relation to the role and function of local government;
- clarify the roles and responsibilities in situations where separate Aboriginal communities on Aboriginal Lands Trust Land are within the Council area;
- encourage Aboriginal people to have a say in Local Government by providing equitable access and involvement in Local Government (e.g. through voting, nominating etc);
- increase the knowledge of the Aboriginal people of the role, services and facilities provided by local government;
- always attempt to employ at least the same percentage of Aboriginals in the workforce of Council as to the percentage of Aboriginals in our community.
- increase employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and support programs such as the CDEP;
- maintain the database on each Aboriginal organisation in our area and services they provide;
- established advisory committees to Council to have Aboriginal representation when & where appropriate;
- continue workforce exchange programs to assist skills development;
- encourage local schools and libraries to teach and maintain appropriate information on the history and culture of the local Aboriginal people;
- Support local Aboriginal organisations in celebrations, promotion of NAIDOC Week, public awareness of culture etc by Council representatives attending such functions;
- invite Aboriginal leaders to Council functions;
- Research background information on Aboriginal culture and history of local area for Council.
- display posters and brochures to encourage Aboriginal involvement in Council, Community etc;
- share in economic development as partners for the benefit of all the community (e.g. Water Project \$5m, assist/ contract with the Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council for essential & municipal service delivery and other Infrastructure improvements);
- openly discuss and assist neighbouring Aboriginal Community Councils with typical council roles and functions (e.g. building approval and planning approvals, health inspections, administration sharing assistance, animal and pest plant control, immunisations, soil conservation and library services);
- Promote the positive aspects of Aboriginal / Council relationships and co-operation.
- Employment of an Aboriginal Liaison Officer to have better communication links with the Aboriginal communities. This Officer is critical in native title, youth, homelessness, law & order, health; council services to aboriginal people and education discussions involving aboriginal people.

- Council has also established a Regional Development Advisory Committee which has significant aboriginal representation. It also has aboriginal persons represented on other committees such as: Crime Prevention Advisory Committee, Ceduna Interpretative Centre Advisory Committee, Ceduna Koonibba Water Scheme Committee, Davenport Creek Management Committee, Youth Centre Management Committee, Town Camp Planning, Development & Management Committee, Great Australian Bight 1000 – West Coast Strategy Steering Committee as well as encouraging aboriginal persons to stand for council elections.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

Developing greater knowledge and awareness of issues that impact on Aboriginals and improving liaison arrangements

The District Council of Ceduna has used a consultative approach to develop greater knowledge and awareness of issues that impact on Aboriginals and to improve liaison arrangements.

Council now meets regularly with the Chairperson and Regional Manager of the Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council and the CDEP program manager. Ceduna Aboriginal Community Council is consulted on social issues as the need arises.

The CDEP program is known as one of the best in Australia. Council engages this program to undertake contract work, such as clearing lanes, footpath maintenance and landscaping etc.

Council has from time to time introduced committees and Authorities to assist with aboriginal matters. Currently the Davenport Creek Authority is in place to manage a coastal creek area, which has significant importance to Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal people have representatives on this authority. Council supplies the administration for the Authority. The Ceduna Koonibba Water Authority has representatives from the Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council on it to assist in the operation and maintenance of a \$5m water scheme that serves their community and others to the west of Ceduna. These Authorities and committees have improved the liaison and knowledge and awareness of the role and function of local government in Aboriginal affairs.

Increased employment opportunities:

Council has undertaken many initiatives to increase employment opportunities for Aboriginals. Some examples are:

A. ATSI Middle Management Program:

Council in co-operation with the local ATSI Regional Office assisted with the middle management training of an ATSI staff member who actually transferred to the Council administration and was involved in management decisions, policy implementation, planning and human resource management for a period of three months. This was very successful and productive for her, Council and the ATSI Regional Office. It also acted as a bond and commitment to co-operate between the Regional Council and District

Council administrations. Council would have no hesitation in participating in such a training program again.

B. CDEP Program:

TWT Inc runs one of the best CDEP programs in Australia. We are extremely proud of their efforts and contributions to the community. Council contracts work out to this program which now runs various business enterprises.

C. New Work Opportunities:

Council undertook projects under the *New Work Opportunities* program of the Department of Education Employment and Training. A large contingent of Aboriginal workers was involved. This is another example of Council and Aboriginal co-operation for the benefit of the whole town.

D. Equal Employment Opportunities:

Council has a policy of attempting to maintain its own Aboriginal employment levels at equal to the proportion of Aboriginals in the district (i.e. 16%). Currently 30% of Council's entire workforce is Aboriginal.

E. Other Opportunities:

Council has been involved in programs such as *IN Work* and Training Aboriginals. Under these programs young unemployed Aboriginals were employed in traineeship positions for periods ranging from 12 week to 52 weeks.

We have had great success with these programs. Many of the Aboriginals trained have secured permanent employment as a result of these training programs and consequently are now role models for other young Aboriginals.

F. Ceduna Koonibba Water Authority

Council has established an authority to construct and manage a water scheme supplying areas to the west of Ceduna including Koonibba Aboriginal Community. This included aboriginal employment. At the peak employment period of the scheme construction, eighteen (18) of the twenty-one (21) employees were Aboriginal. Since the completion of construction four (4) of those employees have been employed permanently by Council.

G. Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council Essential & Municipal Works

Council has recently signed an agreement with Koonibba to undertake essential services (e.g. garbage collection and refuse management & STEDS management). Council is also involved in improving infrastructure at Koonibba. Additional employees required for this work have been recruited from the Koonibba community. Other Aboriginal communities are now approaching Council to assist in a similar way as Koonibba. All work will be done on a contractual basis with Council attempting to train the employed Aboriginal people, so in the future they can carry out the required services to the appropriate level without Council assistance.

H. Special Projects Team – Council Works

Establishing an all Aboriginal Special Projects work team of five employees to undertake special works assignments for council and surrounding Aboriginal homelands and communities.

I. Delivery of Environmental Health Services & other services to Homelands

Council has a contracts to deliver environmental health and municipal services to Aboriginal homelands and communities (again employing specialists staff & an aboriginal trainee) This includes grading roads, dust control, dog control, vermin & pest plant control, building inspections, garbage removal, infrastructure advice & assistance etc.

J. Employment of Community Artist

Council utilises the employment of an Aboriginal community artist to undertake community murals with involvement of aboriginal children and non-indigenous children to assist him.

Communities on Aboriginal Lands Trust Land:

There are two adjacent Aboriginal communities that form part of our community. Council has established co-operative arrangements for assisting Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council and Yalata Community Council. It should be noted that Koonibba is within the District Council area, but is rated on the same basis as a farm. Yalata is outside the District Council area, but its residents are part of the Ceduna community, and visit frequently for social and commercial purposes. Koonibba Community (30 kms to the west of Ceduna) and Ceduna District Council have established reasonably clear lines of responsibility in relation to the District Council providing services for the Aboriginal Land Trust Land on which Koonibba is situated. Council grades the school bus routes at its expense, whilst other roads in the Koonibba Community are graded at cost to the Community Council (through an ATSI Grant). Our Council assists with dog control at no cost to the Koonibba Community. Our animal and pest plants officer also works with and advises the Koonibba Community Council on relevant issues. Council also assists the Yalata Aboriginal Community Council in any way it sees fit and is keen to strengthen relationships with this neighbouring council. In the past the District Council and Yalata Community Council have had joint meetings to discuss relevant matters. Council assisted Yalata in securing State Government funding for their "Head of the Bight" whale lookout facilities. The D.C. of Ceduna has given expertise assistance to Yalata at no cost on issues such as the Head of the Bight tourist development due to it having "spin offs" for the Ceduna economy.

Aboriginal people having a say in local government:

Ceduna District Council had the first Aboriginal Councillor in South Australia and has had several Aboriginal councillors since. We actively encourage Aboriginal persons to nominate for Council. Local Government election materials are supplied to all the appropriate Aboriginal organisations promoting and encouraging Aboriginal people to nominate.

Increasing the knowledge of Aboriginal people of the services provided by local government:

Council has a "council page" in the local newspaper each month to communicate to all people what services are available, general points of interest to the public, new work being undertaken by Council, etc. This has been very successful and is a great way to generate interest in council matters as well as keeping the public well informed.

Council keeps the Aboriginal community well briefed on matters concerning them as well as seeking their advice on matters pertaining to them through its open communication channels with the various Aboriginal organisations.

Council also invites Aboriginal leaders to its civic functions and in particular the members of the Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council who are our counterparts as the elected representatives of the Aboriginal people of the community. Council representatives and staff have a great relationship with the local ATSIC Office and Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council.

Economic development:

Council actively encourages Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons, and companies to enter into joint ventures for the economic benefit of our community. The Denial Bay Clearwater Oyster lease is an example of these joint ventures or economic developments that are certainly adding value to the local economy and have heavy involvement from both Aboriginals and non- Aboriginals.

Education / History / Promotion of Aboriginal cultures.

Council encourages the education systems to cater for all people and in particular recognise the cultural differences and important Aboriginal history of our area.

Council is actively pursuing the development of an Heritage/ Interpretative Centre (tourist based) to promote the Aboriginal history of our areas.

Our school / community library undertakes promotional displays at times like NAIDOC Week etc. Council flies the Aboriginal flag in our main shopping district to recognise the large proportion of Aboriginal people in our district. The Council also was a major sponsor of the recent State CDEP Conference held in Ceduna.

Working together:

A number of other examples can be given where the Aboriginal Community and Non-Aboriginal community have / are / will work together for the betterment of our towns and district. Some examples are:

- The production of \$80,000 worth of TV commercials to promote pride in our multi cultural town. (very successful)
- Ceduna and Districts Development Board prepared an economic development plan for the district with heavy Aboriginal involvement and representation. A Federal grant was won (\$21,000) for this but is also supported by Council (\$20,000) and ATSIC (\$15,000)
- ATSIC and Council have combined forces to gain funding from the Federal Government to extend the Todd Trunk Water Main from Ceduna to areas west. ATSIC allocated \$2.75m and the State Government \$2m towards the project which will cost \$5m approximately. An Equal Employment Opportunity award was won for this project due to Council's commitment to employ and train aboriginal people (see attached submission)
- Council also fought strongly for Aboriginal representation on the Ceduna and Districts Aged Care and Health Services Board (Multi Purposes Service Hospital). Aboriginals are now represented on this Board which is responsible for co-ordinating the health needs of the district for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons.

A nursing home is being established as a result and upgrading of the Ceduna Hospital will also occur. The Board is also assisting Yalata with its aged care facilities and other health needs.

- Council and Aboriginal organisations were instrumental in implementing “dry areas” to the whole of Ceduna and Thevenard to assist in combating the “binge” drinking problems in highly visible areas.
- ATSIC sponsorship of the Ceduna Oysterfest to promote and increase the knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal culture within our community. This has been extremely successful.
- The revamped Ceduna Town Hall is used to display Aboriginal Art from local artists and Yalata when exhibitions are put together. The Aboriginal community has been encouraged to use this community facility and have been actively doing such for conferences and other celebratory occasions.
- Council and the Eyre Regional Development Board in conjunction with the Wangka Wilurrara Regional Council undertook a tourism strategy plan for Eyre Peninsula. This plan’s main focus was on Aboriginal tourism ventures etc.
- Council was also very vocal and instrumental in getting Aboriginal representation on the Eyre Regional Development Board.
- Council has been participating in meetings with the Far West Aboriginal Working Party to discuss the potential mining of the Gawler Craton to the north and west of Ceduna. Native Title issues, employment opportunities, infrastructure improvements etc. have been discussed.
- The Council’s citizen of the year for 1997 was an Aboriginal woman who had excelled in developing an aboriginal childcare centre. It is interesting to note both aboriginal and non-aboriginal children attend the childcare centre.
- The Council encouraged the Ceduna Business and Tourism Association to sign a working protocol with the Ceduna Aboriginal Community Council. The parties have agreed to establish and develop in an ongoing manner a working relationship which:
 - a. recognises and supports the aims of and objectives of the National Reconciliation process;
 - b. aims to address local issues of importance to the Ceduna community in a manner that is sensitive to both cultural diversity and community aspirations;
 - c. Seeks to improve the economic status of the Ceduna community by promoting the business and tourist advantages of Ceduna and surrounds.

The above three objectives will be developed in a working relationship, which is ongoing and reviewed regularly by the parties. Both parties will have reciprocal representation at Board meetings to discuss local issues and associated strategies. Neither party will undertake any action in the name of the protocol without a formal agreement from the other party.

There are many examples of our community embarking on the process of reconciliation and working together to improve the life situation for aboriginal persons in our region. It is hoped all our community continues to share in our future and make it one where we the residents of Ceduna and District can claim to be leaders in bringing even greater cohesion and co-operation between indigenous and other Australians.

Ceduna District Council wants its area to become one of the best multicultural communities in Australia. We believe in recognising each others cultures, by working together and physically demonstrating our reconciliation through projects and examples as provided above as much more concrete than anything placed on paper. I personally believe Ceduna and Districts are further down the reconciliation path than many outside our district realise. I believe through the above combined projects and co-operation openly demonstrated that the District Council of Ceduna and the community are showing a commitment to improving services to Aboriginal persons.

The situation now

In the words of the Chief Executive Officer:

It is fair to say that in the past Ceduna had the reputation of being one of the most racist towns in Australia. This was until nine or ten years ago. At that time most leaders of the community realised that attitudes had to change if our town were to grow and be one of which we can all be proud to be a resident.

Ceduna District Council wants its area to become one of the best multicultural communities in Australia. I believe we must recognise how far we have come, but most importantly we must continue to recognise how far we have got to go.

We have been through the very hard times, but now I believe our community is a leader in the reconciliation process and a community that will achieve its vision through adopting the 'family' approach to life in Ceduna.

Council is embarking on many exciting projects that will have a positive effect on the lives of many Aboriginals living in and near our district. These projects include:

- The development of a marina and heritage centre
- The development & operation of a "Town Camp"
- The development of a Youth Centre
- The development of mining within the region
- The continuation of contracting work by Council in Aboriginal communities
- The continuation of advisory committees to ensure consultation with the Aboriginal persons continues & we work together for the benefit of the entire community
- Involvement by Council in inter-agency committees addressing the needs of Aboriginal persons (housing, infrastructure, health & education) e.g. Dept. Human Services – Delivering of services to Aboriginal people in Ceduna, Local Government Association's – Delivery of Services to Aboriginals (a Local Govt. perspective) etc.

Council's strategic plan outlines this commitment.

There is high unemployment with Aboriginal persons; there is a need to extend CDEP's to more than two days per week.

How do we improve the situation (the future)?

There needs to be a better way of making the dollars go further and a better way of ensuring positive outcomes are received with the funds expended in this area. Some aboriginal communities are in deep trouble from a management and financial aspect. Their remoteness and isolation often does not allow good recruitment of staff to assist. For too long many people of all persuasions have been “dodging” the issues. The time is now appropriate for open and frank discussion to take place on how neighbouring communities, Local, State & Federal Governments can get better value from grant funding allocated to these communities. In saying this I can only comment on communities I know of. Some work very well whilst others struggle with maintaining their communities.

I believe this matter is better discussed in formal meetings (e.g. the Grants Commissions meeting with our Council set down for 11th May 2000) and on site visits to see and learn first hand the issues that confront these communities.

What the District Council of Ceduna is doing to service indigenous people. (Action on the ground)

From the previous examples give, you may gauge that the District Council of Ceduna at huge expense to it's ratepayers is “having a go” at assisting the aboriginal communities in and near our district. These can be elaborated on further at the May meeting.

Summary.

I firmly believe that functional reform has to be seriously looked at by Local, State & Commonwealth Governments to allow the best positioned to be able to service the aboriginal communities in their various needs. This is particularly appropriate for those situations where the communities are really struggling to survive.

Since learning of your visit to Ceduna in May, this submission is more for background information rather than addressing the particular terms of reference of the inquiry and we welcome further discussion “face to face” on the matter. The issue of funding to meet the needs of Aborigines has been a major issue for our Council for many years.

We look forward to meeting with you in the future.