

1. Introduction

The Papunya Regional Council discussed the Commonwealth Grants Commission Inquiry into Indigenous funding at meeting no 4/2 convened at Ross River in February and 4/3 held at Nyirripi Community in March. At these meetings, Council discussion centred on the terms of reference and in particular the Inquiry's focus on relative need. Council is concerned that this means different and lesser standards will continue to apply to remote Aboriginal communities.

Council understands that concerns over the terms of reference are not within the jurisdiction of the Grants Commission to resolve. We respect the role of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, Central Australian Indigenous representative bodies have lobbied for direct funding through the Grants Commission process to resolve problems that arise from inadequate & non-existent funding (CLC, One United Voice). So whilst we would like our disappointment with the terms of reference noted, we will focus this discussion on the methods Regional Council uses to allocate funding across our region and the lessons that can be drawn from this. This submission also details some of the needs in our region, particularly in relation to housing, infrastructure and employment – all of which have a significant impact on our health status.

2. Allocation of Funding

From March through to June each year, the Regional Council is required to decide on funding allocations of the Regional Council budget. These meetings are long and difficult, as the Regional Council budget allocation is small in comparison to the expressed need in the region. Each year the Regional Council receives approximately \$30 million in applications for Regional Council funds that amount to \$3million.

The Papunya Regional Council directs its funding to the priority areas identified in our Regional Plan Part A: Building Sustainable Communities.

The Objective of Part A is that the basic requirements for building sustainable communities are met.

For the most part, these requirements are what would be expected as a right by any non-Aboriginal communities in Australia, and it is a national disgrace that different standards apply to Aboriginal communities in remote areas.

The additional requirement that Aboriginal communities in the Region have is that their cultural values are protected. This is seen as the most fundamental requirement, as without a strong culture, people will lose their pride and this starts a cycle of stress, depression, sickness, substance abuse, crime, violence and other forms of social dysfunction.

The consequence of not meeting the requirements for building sustainable communities is that these communities will not survive. The living conditions will deteriorate to a point where local society will disintegrate and people will have to leave, if not in this generation then in the next.

Papunya Regional Council Plan

The Regional Council is unable to achieve this objective. For the 1999/2000 financial year the Regional Council allocation was **\$17,209,648**. The table below depicts the breakdown of the Regional Council budget into program areas. This shows that 54.24% of the Regional Council budget is for CDEP wages. CDEP wages are the equivalent of other forms of welfare transfer payments, so the inclusion of wages in the budget *distorts* the actual amount Council has to allocate. CDEP Operational (21.16%) is quarantined to CDEP programs further limiting the amount the Council actually has for its priorities.

Program	Amount	% of Budget
Public Affairs	40,000	0.23
CDEP Operational	3,640,948	21.16
CDEP Wages	9,333,997	54.24
CHIP Infrastructure	1,563,557	9.09
CHIP Municipal	1,901,760	11.05
Broadcasting	117,813	0.68
Heritage Protection	25,000	0.15
Women's Issues	60,000	0.35
Law & Justice	373,800	2.17
Sport & Recreation	152,773	0.89
TOTAL	\$17,209,648	100.00

The Regional Council decides its allocations on a combination of the following; whether activities meet the objectives of the Regional Plan; Project Officer assessments; ATSI Funding guidelines and knowledge of our communities.

The Regional Council considers that our knowledge is under-estimated. Many Government departments and agencies choose not to consult with the Regional Council, yet most admit to enormous difficulties in understanding Aboriginal population characteristics. Too often the result is ineffectual programs and/or ineffective service delivery.

In contrast, our intimate knowledge of our society, languages and culture enables us to target our funding. We understand which funding arrangements can create conflict, population movements for ceremony etc, and we have a pretty good understanding of where funding can have the greatest impact. We are also developing our own solutions to the problems we face arising from colonisation. Ultimately these are the only solutions that will produce positive outcomes because our problems stem from the fact that non-Aboriginal people have been making decisions about our lives for the last 200 years. How impoverished this has left us is documented in section 3.

Currently, funding constraints mean that many of our communities are at the mercy of the few non-Indigenous staff employed. This has resulted in a considerable number of rorts and rip-offs and Council can provide the Inquiry with confidential evidence about a number of incidences that we have had to deal with in the last two years. In most cases and despite the efforts of the Regional Manager, the police have not pressed charges. In

contrast, communities where there is strong Indigenous leadership, (such as Laramba Community), the outcomes achieved from limited funding is impressive.

Therefore the Papunya Regional Council requests the Inquiry to give serious consideration to:-

- a) Recommending funding levels to ensure that self-determining communities become a reality.
- b) Establishing the best available local estimates for calculations rather than rely solely on census counts, (we note that John Taylor of CAEPR suggested this in his submission to the Inquiry).

The Regional Council will be in a position to assist the Inquiry with a local estimate from the data set we are establishing as part of Regional Plan. The Council is developing a new set of community profiles that will be compiled by the Council undertaking a series of visits to each community and outstation to: -

- Check and enhance the CHINS data
- Gather information on the programs of other Government Departments and agencies
- Seek the views of residents on their funding priorities for the next three years
- Seek the views of residents on service delivery issues
- Seek the views of residents on governance issues.

Each ward will be visited by the Regional Council executive, the Central Zone Commissioner (when available), the Ward Councillor's and Regional Support Staff. With the language skills of the Regional Councillors, we are confident that when combined with current knowledge we will have the most accurate and useful information on the region.

We are hoping to have this task completed by February 2001, which could be too late for this Inquiry.

3. The needs in our region

3.1 Population

The Papunya Region is one of only a few ATSI Regions where the number of Indigenous people exceeds the numbers of non-Indigenous people – on this all data sets concur.

However there is considerable variation on what Indigenous population is. According to the 1996 census (ABS) the Indigenous population of the Papunya region was 7,518 comprising 62% of the total regional population. In 1998/99 the Office of Local Government estimated the Indigenous population of the region to be 8,758. Information collected by the ABS for the 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) recorded the regional population as 10,021 living in 181 communities – with 35 of these communities having a population of 50 or more people.

When considering population counts in remote regions we urge the Inquiry to consider the evidence given by State Agencies at your meeting with them, when the undercount in remote communities was estimated to be about 40%.

Population mobility is an important consideration in planning and delivering remote services. Factors affecting mobility are cultural business, marriage, income, family friction due to overcrowding. People are also required to travel to Alice Springs often to access services not available on communities. The lack of reliable transport means that people are often stranded. However, as Warchiveker discovered in his mobility study at one of our communities, most people actually move between remote communities.

In 'Learning Lessons' Bob Collins recommended that the difficulties posed by mobility should be dealt with by ensuring that schools develop a shared information system on students to ensure continuity in education. We believe that this has useful application across the range of services and recommend that the Inquiry consider such communication networks as essential infrastructure.

The median age of the Indigenous population in the Papunya Region is 21 years. There are a greater proportion of young people and a much smaller proportion of elderly. This reflects the higher birth rates and the lower life expectancy. Data from the Census suggests that the Indigenous population is growing at twice the rate of the non-Indigenous population. In the Papunya region the ABS recorded a population increase of 23% between 1991 and 1996.

The predominant languages in the region are Pintubi, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Warlpiri, Luritja, Western, Southern, Central and Eastern Arrernte, Kaytej, Alyawarra & Anmatjere. Language use in our communities is multilingual. The 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey (NATSIS), revealed that over 80% of Indigenous residents spoke their own language at home and 72% stated that they would use an interpreter service if it was available.

The Regional Council is pleased that an Indigenous interpreter service is finally being established in the Northern Territory. However, living with mandatory sentencing legislation, is the price the Aboriginal community is paying for the establishment of an Interpreter service.

In light of the special conditions under which the Interpreter Service has been funded, the Regional Council recommends that the Grants Commission give consideration to developing a weighting for language. Such a weighting, for the prevalence of language use, would recognise the significant cost that interpretation, translation and education add to effective service delivery on remote communities.

3.2 Housing and Infrastructure

The housing situation in the region is critical. According to the 1996 census 20% of families live in improvised dwellings. Improvised dwellings are structures that most

Australians would not consider suitable for long term occupation (this excludes dwellings unsuitable for occupation due to disrepair).

A further 28% of Aboriginal families in the region live in multi-family households. Multi-family households are defined as families who are second and third families who are forced to share dwellings with other families due to the scarcity of housing.

18% of families also live in overcrowded households. Overcrowding is calculated after excluding the second and third families from the dwellings as calculated above.

In addition 890 adults were also in need of housing as they live in either improvised or overcrowded dwellings.

It is estimated that between 1996 and the 2001 census 265 new houses were required to meet the growth in the number of families in the region and 704 houses for the homeless identified in the 1996 data. This is a total of 969 new houses.

Over this period IHANT activity has been as follows:-

Year	New constructions	Upgrades	Renovations & minor maintenance
1996 - 1997	50*		
1997 - 1998	44	38	43
1998 - 1999	36	9	39
1999 - 2000	31	17	26

The IHANT Program Manager supplied the information in this table.

** Means that the Program Manager estimated the number of houses constructed from the allocations made in the 96-97 year with 100,000 = 1 house. This clearly over-estimates the number of houses constructed as the average house costs approximately \$130,000.*

There have also been 31 new houses constructed under the National Aboriginal Health Strategy in the region to date.

This is a shortfall of 777 houses from the estimated rate of construction required in 1996. Obviously there needs to be significant investment in house construction just to meet the growth – let alone address the homeless.

In order to reduce this deficit the Papunya Regional Council requested that IHANT assist Council with the development of six concept housing designs that meet health hardware and environmental health standards. Council will own the copyright to the designs selected in the tender process. We also requested that IHANT put the Papunya region's new construction program up for tender as one job, in order to:-

- reduce the unit cost per house,

- ensure quality
- provide opportunities for Indigenous employment and apprenticeships.

Although this limits choice, Council envisages that this will ensure that all houses are built to the requisite standard and that there is greater standardisation in fixtures and fittings thereby decreasing the cost of repairs and maintenance.

The Repairs and Maintenance program introduced by IHANT should also assist in improving the housing situation. IHANT introduced a cyclical repairs and maintenance program, tied to rental collection in 1998/1999. This program is not operating as effectively as it should, because of the lack of a housing support funding to all major communities. Housing offices and staff are required for managing tenancies and to coordinate repairs and maintenance.

Appropriate levels of funding are required to address the chronic housing shortage and enable communities to manage these assets appropriately.

We note that the Papunya (Apatula) region has one of the highest housing need in Australia regardless of the method used.

3.3 Education

Most residents of the major communities within the Papunya region have access to primary schooling on their communities (69%), within 10 kilometres of a community (28%) or 25 – 49 kilometres of a community (3%). These figures exclude the residents of outstations or smaller communities whose access to primary schooling will be enumerated from CHINS data as it becomes available. The standard of the physical school environment in our communities has been heavily criticised in Collins Review into Aboriginal education.

There are no secondary schools located in the region except for an Indigenous private school that has been established at Yulara. This immediately disadvantages Indigenous students who are forced to either undertake studies through correspondence or relocate to one of the Alice Springs schools. This poses serious problems for many young remote people who have strong ties with family and communities and find the prospect of continuing their education away from home to be daunting. Families themselves are concerned that removal from home exposes their children to bad influences in town and removes the opportunities for their youth to learn about their culture.

Students from remote communities experience fewer educational opportunities as they have little or not access to public or school libraries.

The difficulties with access to education is reflected in the statistics. The Northern Territory records the lowest retention rates of any State or Territory in Australia at 42% compared to the National figure of 74%.

The issue of mobility discussed above, also impacts on school attendance and unless a system is established enabling the sharing of information then Indigenous students will continue to be disadvantaged as they are unable to meet the prescribed outcomes necessary.

Health also impacts dramatically on educational outcomes of Indigenous people. Paul Seacombe, President of the NT Australian Audiological Society claims that between 80 - 90% of remote Indigenous community suffer from ear diseases that affect hearing. Work done by the SA Education Department supports this claim. Chronic middle ear infections perforate eardrums resulting in hearing loss. This loss has a significant impact on understanding and acquiring English language skills.

The lack of housing documented above also limits the effectiveness of schooling as there is limited space available for privacy to study.

In summary the Regional Council sees an urgent need for a significant increase in resources for education in remote communities. The continuing failures of the education system impact on every area of our lives.

3.6 Employment & Income

Unemployment in the region is high at 21%. The Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) is the main source of employment and disguises the rate of unemployment as CDEP participants are counted as being employed.

The large majority of Indigenous people in the region recorded as employed are CDEP participants from one of the 12 CDEP's operating in the region and most of the employment is part-time.

The allocation of CDEP to communities is based on a waiting list maintained by successive Regional Councils. There are currently 5 communities on the waiting list.

The following are the established CDEP's in the region and the average participant numbers: -

Organisation	Numbers
Aputula Housing Association	54
Arltarpilta CGC	38
Engawala Community Inc	39
Imanpa	44
Laramba	50*
Ltyentye Apurte CGC	146
Ntaria	44
Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre AC	283
Wallace Rockhole CGC	31
<i>Willowra Community Inc</i>	
Yuelamu Community Inc	50

Yuendumu CGC	58
Tapatjatjaka CGC	66

**Laramba Community started its CDEP in the final quarter of the year 2000.
Willowra Community Inc CDEP ceased in November 1999.*

The lack of full-time employment is reflected in the statistics dealing with income. The majority of income in the Papunya Region is derived from CDEP or welfare transfer payments (unemployment, pensions etc). The median weekly income for Indigenous people in the region is recorded as \$158 per week. However, this figure over-estimates actual income as many people in our communities continue to receive **no income**. Using estimates derived from CDEP sign-up processes and taxation information – it appears that in some communities up to 60% of adult resident receive income in the range of nil - \$2,000 per annum. Data from the Centrelink office on welfare recipients appears to confirm this.

Essentially, the extremely low level of income occurs because of the breach policies of Centrelink. Low language and literacy levels and mobility means that many people fail to lodge their forms – failure to lodge forms not only result in breaches but also incorrectly assumes that the payments were invalid thereby people accrue debts. At our last Regional Council meeting at Kings Canyon – Centrelink officials informed Council, that over 90% of the debts for remote community residents proved to be false on investigation.

The high cost of living in remote communities also compounds the problem of poverty. Territory Health Services in their 1998 study of Remote Community Stores found that for a family of six over a fortnight, a basket of goods costing \$335 in Alice Springs costs \$448 in remote communities.

Not surprisingly, the Papunya region has the greatest proportion and numbers of households in poverty in the Northern Territory (37.5%).

35% of households in the Papunya region are classified as being in before housing poverty. Before housing poverty is defined as when a households income is lower than that required for that sized household to meet its basic living requirements.

The poverty experienced in our communities impacts on every aspect of our lives. Aboriginal people cannot afford whitegoods, beds, tables or other general household items to make life livable. Not having access to a refrigerator to store food leads to wastage and a tendency to buy convenience foods. People barely have enough money to purchase personal items such as soap, washing powder and detergent all of which have an impact on the health of Indigenous people.

In households where family members are not receiving their correct social security payment or not receiving any payment at all face an impossible financial situation. In the Pitjantjatjara Lands there is a term ‘mai wiya day’ meaning no food day. Mai wiya day can last as long as three days.

Ultimately these problems will only be overcome by increasing Aboriginal employment. In Central Australia increasing employment levels will be dependent on establishing new enterprises. The Regional Council has endorsed a regional citrus development project proposal initiated by the Central Land Council. However, such proposals face enormous difficulty in attracting funding because they are often outside the expertise of the business agents ATSIC uses for assessing projects. Remote Areas are also hampered in accessing business funding because of the lack of infrastructure to support economic initiatives.

For these reasons the Regional Council urges the Grants Commission to include Business Funding and CDC funding within its Inquiry.