

**COMMONWEALTH GRANTS
COMMISSION**

**INDIGENOUS FUNDING
ENQUIRY**

SUBMISSION FROM:

**ALICE SPRINGS REGIONAL
COUNCIL**

Submission No.: **IFI/SUB/0046**
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Alice Springs Regional Council Vision Statement

Our vision is to bring Aboriginal equality into the 21st century and beyond, through a relationship with the Australian public that recognises the unique perspective of Aboriginal peoples. The relationship will be equal in status rather than sub-ordinate.

This includes bringing reconciliation to the Australian public, through recognition of the visible achievements of Aboriginal people. This will focus on: -

- equitable access to resources, including housing, health services, infrastructure provision, social programs, employment and economic development
- building the capacity of our people to do things for themselves
- moving towards a comprehensive regional agreement

We need to ensure that Aboriginal people have every opportunity for ownership and control in the decisions that affect us. This will be done by offering people the choice of how to overcome their own disadvantage in the development and planning for our future.



The Land

The Alice Springs Regional Council is responsible for an area of 172 kilometres, from East to West and 135 kilometres North to South, this area is surrounded by the Papunya ATSIC Region. Alice Springs is the major residential, commercial and administrative centre of Central Australia. The Arrernte land contains many sacred sites and significant places. In 1994 the Central Land Council lodged a native title claim over sections of Alice Springs on behalf of traditional owners.

The People

The Indigenous population of the Alice Springs Region in 1996 was 4,449 representing 17% of the total population of the Region. This represents a population increase of 12.5% (449) since 1991.

As Alice Springs is the regional hub of Central Australia there are many indigenous people from various language groups. In general, these groups include Central Arrernte, Eastern Arrernte, Western Arrernte, Warlpiri, Warrumungu, Kaytej, Alyawarra, Anmatjere, Pertame, Luritja, Pintubi, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra people. The majority of these people are residents of the 19 special purpose leases, known as town camps in and around the Alice Springs region. There is also the discrete indigenous community of Amoonguna to the south-east, and approximately 28 outstations throughout the region mainly to the north and west. Nearly 40% of the population is aged under 15 years, with the median age of 22 years being well below the overall Territory median age of 32 years. This is important demographic information for the Regional Council for development planning for the region, especially in terms of economic development for young people.

**PREAMBLE FROM CHAIRPERSON OF ALICE SPRINGS
REGIONAL COUNCIL:**

MS EILEEN HOOSAN

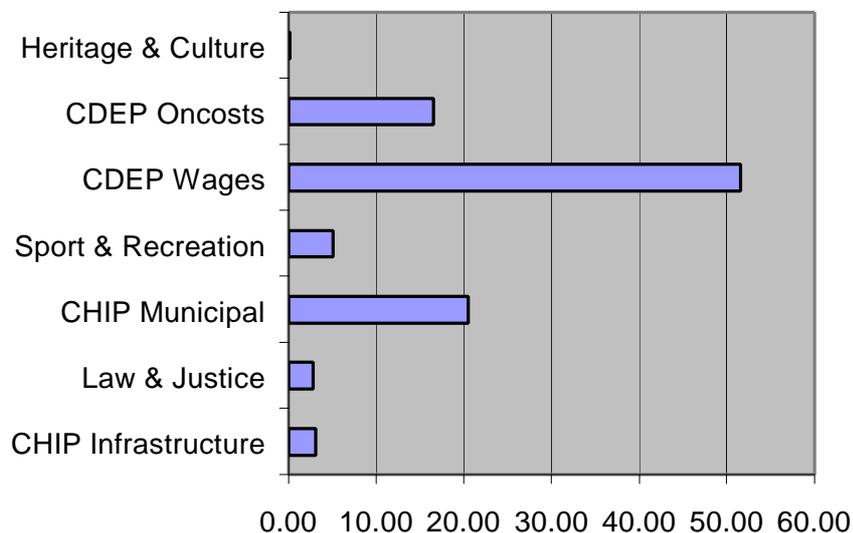
Alternate Deputy Chairperson Jungala Martin would like to welcome you in Arrernte and Warlpiri.

Thank you for meeting with the Alice Springs Regional Council Members and inviting us to discuss:

- the needs of Indigenous people in the areas of health, housing and infrastructure, education, training and employment
- what services are provided to meet those needs and by who; and
- how service providers are funded and how they allocate their funds.

Alice Springs Regional Council funding is directed to the major Aboriginal organisations based in Alice Springs. Funding for the 1999/2000 Financial Year was \$9,680,666 as reflected in the graph below.

% of Regional Council Budget by Program



ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

HEALTH

The state of Aboriginal health in this region, as elsewhere, is of concern to the Alice Springs regional Council. The cycle of cultural destruction, stress, depression, substance abuse, poverty and poor nutrition has led to a high incidence of chronic diseases and a life expectancy around 20 years less than that of non-Aboriginal Australians. Despite the investments made in delivery of primary health care and a significant reduction in infant mortality since the 1970's, little headway is being made regarding morbidity and life expectancy. Mechanisms to improve equity and access to health resources, including potential benefits of a decentralisation of resources to increase local capacity should be considered. An increased investment in preventative health measures must accompany improvements in access to primary health care services.

There is a common belief that so much money has been targeted to Aboriginal health that there should no longer be a problem. The sad reality is that the services are often inaccessible, and largely directed to expensive end-treatment of disease rather than prevention.

Specific chronic health issues such as kidney disease are expected to increase rapidly in the next few years. Alice Springs is the major health service centre for Central Australia, and as a result sick people are forced to come to Alice Springs to access the health services they rely on. However, they often live in areas of Alice Springs where lack of transport makes it still difficult to reach appropriate health services. There is also the problem of accommodation for relatives and the extended family when they visit Alice Springs. This leads to overcrowding in housing in the town camps and within the town in general exacerbating social problems.

Within the Alice Springs region there are a number of people with health training associated with town camps, communities and outstations that are not currently engaged in providing health services. This is a potential resource for more effective health service delivery.

There is a move by Territory Health Services to decentralise health services into the Papunya Region. This process should be paralleled by moves to extend health services to the Alice Springs town camps and outstation communities.

There is also a need for a culturally appropriate delivery of health services. For example males prefer male nurses within the public hospital system and with counselling services.

Although ATSIC does not fund Health Programs, many communities have CDEP Participants employed in health services as a work activity.

HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Despite massive investment in government funded housing programs over the past years, our people still often live in housing that would be considered as grossly inadequate by any other sections of the Australian community. The money that has been invested has often gone into poorly designed housing, and there has been no money allocated for maintaining it. This has resulted in a situation where some housing has a replacement life of only a few years, then placing considerable stress on the local housing stock. Unless things change markedly, the backlog in housing supply will never be met.

There is a significant need for additional housing in all parts of the region. These needs are in urban areas, town camps and outstation areas. There is a high demand for specific types of housing, including special purpose housing for people with chronic illnesses, larger houses for families and housing for older people with home care needs. There is a need for accommodation for people visiting Alice Springs to access services, and to visit family who have moved to Alice Springs for extended periods.

The demand for housing and accommodation is having a serious impact on the ability of housing associations and organisations to maintain their current housing stock. There are also serious social impacts coming from the pressure on existing houses, overcrowding and associated population increases. There is an impact on all social services associated with housing.

There are currently massive shortfalls in funding to meet repairs and maintenance requirements for Aboriginal housing. Capital funding for housing through IHANT will not be available unless organisations justify that there is an effective rent collection to contribute to maintenance costs. However, the amount of money collected through rentals will always be insufficient to meet repairs and maintenance requirements. There is no system currently within IHANT to provide for repairs and maintenance other than one off grants.

Within the urban area, a substantial amount of housing need for Aboriginal people has been met by the public housing sector, funded through the Commonwealth-State housing agreement. The pool of housing available to Aboriginal tenants is currently shrinking, and the Northern Territory Government is selling three bedroom houses to replace these with more one and two bedroom units. Last year the Northern Territory Government set rents at the mainstream market level that has resulted in many Aboriginal families being evicted from public housing in Alice Springs. The income from pensions and/or unemployment benefits is not adequate to cover weekly rentals and as a result there has been an increased demand on Aboriginal organisations to provide housing for these people. Ensuring an adequate supply of housing for Indigenous people is of considerable concern to the Alice Springs Regional Council. Private home ownership remains limited in the region with 19% of Indigenous people owning or purchasing their homes compared to 50% of non-Indigenous people in 1996.

Arrernte Council, Ingkerreke Outstation Resource Centre and Tangentyere Council have Repair and Maintenance to housing in their CDEP Activity Program.

EDUCATION

Many Aboriginal and parents are active in the Government and private systems working to improve the access, participation and success rates of Aboriginal people and adults. Despite this there are not enough Aboriginal teachers in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal schools.

The overall school participation rate approaches 90%, with the dropout most significant at age 16.

Ten percent (approximately) 292 of Indigenous people 15 years or over indicated that they have tertiary qualifications compared to 40% of the non-Indigenous population of the region.

The education system is failing Aboriginal people, in that children are completing primary schooling without adequate standards of literacy and numeracy, and that they are dropping out of secondary education for these and other reasons. There is an urgent need for education authorities to develop models which are more effective in retaining Aboriginal children within the education system, and in giving them the skills they need to manage their lives.

The high incidence of Aboriginal children dropping out of high schools is often taken to be an indication that they and their parents are not interested in education. This is not the case. However, children who have to travel long distances and stay away from their home communities in order to attend high school often get homesick, and their parents worry about their welfare. In addition, the fact that primary schooling has often not been effective means that high school children find it difficult to cope with their studies, and they may be humiliated and taunted by teachers and other children.

Aboriginal people suffer a considerable disadvantage in gaining access to adult education courses because of their lack of secondary schooling. Many people are unable or unwilling to attend high school away from their home communities, and they therefore miss out. Those who do leave home to attend high school often find the experience distressing, and drop out of the school system. This situation will only be effectively addressed if there is appropriate secondary schooling delivered to where people are actually living.

ATSIC does not fund education but funds are allocated to educational organisations through the Language Access Program.

TRAINING

There is a strong feeling that there is too much emphasis placed on provision of training for Aboriginal people without any commitment to provide employment to people who have skills. There are already many skilled Aboriginal people in the region who have not been offered ongoing employment, and whose skills could be effectively put to use.

There tends to be a belief that the best way of addressing Aboriginal employment is to provide training. This will not be effective and may be counterproductive unless it can clearly be shown that training leads to real jobs. Training strategies need to be developed with this in mind. Training must be Accredited, from a Registered Training Organisation, thus achieving both

recognition and credibility. The objective is to encourage appropriate employment of those people with existing skills, and to ensure that Aboriginal people receiving training are able to put their new skills to good use. By developing accredited and culturally appropriate training programs based on identified employment opportunities, will assist people who have been trained in gaining access to employment.

Local communities are finding it increasingly difficult to get access to appropriate adult training, despite the widely recognised need to develop skills at the community level. The basic entry requirements for accredited courses often exclude Aboriginal people, because of the standards of literacy and numeracy required, even for courses where these skills do not appear critical. Many courses are standardised in a form that has limited relevance to community requirements. There is limited willingness of training providers to tailor their courses, and to deliver training in local areas. Lack of access to transport by potential trainees is another barrier.

At the same time, the training environment is becoming increasingly competitive. Agencies such as Batchelor College, Northern Territory University, the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD) and Centralian College are all keen to increase student numbers, as these will determine their funding levels. This situation presents some opportunities for encouraging institutions to respond to community training needs. However, there are also the dangers of market driven training strategies leading to priorities being placed on those areas where student numbers can be maximised (which may not be the highest priority for practical trade orientated skill development), and for these government funded training providers enthusiastically promising what they can't deliver.

NTETA (Northern Territory Employment and Training Authority) is the main source of funds for training for Aboriginals. Funds are allocated to Registered Training Organisations to deliver training "on the job".

EMPLOYMENT

Levels of employment among Aboriginal people in Alice Springs are well below those of the wider population. The most significant sources of full time employment are the CDEP organisations, Tangentyere Council and Arrernte Council. These are followed closely by the Aboriginal service provider organisations.

Much of the available information on Aboriginal employment is highly misleading, as CDEP participation is counted as "employment" for statistical purposes. This results in funding programs which are directed to assisting people into employment making inadequate provision for localities where there is CDEP operating. It also results in inequitable provision of training assistance, eg through the New Enterprise Incentives Scheme.

Participation in CDEP should not be considered as full time employment. However, there are opportunities to create full time jobs from CDEP enterprises, arising from new incentive funding through the Indigenous Business Incentives Program, and use of the work-for-the dole scheme to create a labour pool that can compete for contracts within the private and public sectors.

Despite commitments made by Commonwealth and NT Governments, their recruitment of Aboriginal people is well below what would be expected to achieve equity of representation.

There is a need to develop the capacity of Aboriginal organisations including CDEP organisations to manage pools of Aboriginal labour in contracting out and deploying workers with private sector businesses. This links back to training in vocational trades which is not being addressed adequately by the institutions.

In the area of tourism, the region is one of the prime areas for presentation of Aboriginal culture to tourists in Australia. A range of cultural tourism experiences is on offer, but there are additional opportunities. In the past, Aboriginal involvement in tourism has been hampered by lack of business support structures, and poor advice on business development. There are models from in other regions, which suggest that an Aboriginal business support agency would bring considerable benefits in building a sound support base for future ventures.

The production, promotion and sale of Aboriginal arts and crafts is especially strong in Alice Springs, and the benefits flowing to artists are increasing. There are still issues of copyright that need to be addressed. The ability of artists to directly market their work through the Internet presents some exciting new possibilities, provided that artists are well advised about how to manage the export market.

Rural industries have suffered a decline in all parts of Australia, with a shrinking of the labour force, and increasingly unreliable markets. There are still economic opportunities, but these need to be soundly based. It is important to develop land management strategies for land subject to native title and other lands acquired by Aboriginal people, so that cultural and social values are protected, and that sustainable economic benefits can be obtained where appropriate.

There are significant employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in the construction industry, and the development of building skills will have other benefits (providing local communities with the capacity to maintain their housing and infrastructure, for example). These opportunities need to be reinforced through the various Aboriginal housing programs.

SUMMARY

Applications from organisations in the Alice Springs Region for 2000/2001 in the general allocation totalled \$1,115,634. The total funds available was \$797,624. Total amount requested in the Chip allocation was \$3,068,809 with funds availability of \$2,332,183.

The Alice Springs Regional Council Plan is organised into the key goals of *Equitable Access to Resources; Building a Strong Indigenous Economy; Building the Capacity of People to do Things for Themselves; and Moving Towards a Regional Agreement.*

The council directs its funding to the priority areas identified in the Regional Plan.

However, the Regional Council budget allocation is small in comparison to the expressed need in the region which is evident in the figures above.

ATSIC in Alice Springs has an effective working relationship with Government Agencies in the area. This relationship is at Management and Field Officer levels.

Politics in the Northern Territory has a dramatic influence in Aboriginal Affairs with many parties pulling in different directions. These influences often have a detrimental effect on the function of the organisations.

The Alice Springs Regional Council recommends that the Commonwealth Grants Commission considers funding non-government organisations directly, especially indigenous organisations.

