

**COMMONWEALTH GRANTS COMMISSION
INDIGENOUS FUNDING INQUIRY
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMISSION
CAIRNS & DISTRICT REGION SUBMISSION**

This paper will document particular issues in relation to three main issues: health; housing and infrastructure; and education, training and employment. It is important to acknowledge that these are not the only issues that require examination and discussion. Of particular importance to the many Indigenous people within the region are native title issues and land management issues in general. This paper should be read in conjunction with the ATISC State of Queensland submission.

ATISC is a supplementary funding body. ATISC views the State Government as the agency with the responsibility for the provision of the majority of services and programs to the States Indigenous people.

HEALTH

The responsibility for funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services was transferred from ATISC to the Department of Health and Aged Care in 1995. Since that time ATISC has not had any direct funding involvement in this area.

Issues:

Hospitals and medical services:

- Access to health services in most outlying/remote townships and areas is limited. This is particularly the case for specialised treatments, for example, dialysis patients are required to travel from remote townships to Cairns usually 3 times a week, which means either staying in Cairns for a week or more at a time or, if possible, travelling in the morning and returning to their homes at night depending on where they live.
- There are hospitals in the majority of towns within the region, however not in the most remote and isolated areas. For example, there are no hospitals in Chillagoe, Georgetown, Croydon, the latter two towns are located in the Gulf Savannah Country. Mossman Gorge community has a visit from a doctor on a weekly basis but there is no adequate examination room at the community.

Appropriateness of services:

- For several reasons, including a shortage of 'culturally-appropriate' medical centres, there is distinct need for more indigenous health workers in the remote/outlying areas.
- Cross-cultural training should be mandatory for all staff taking up employment in remote communities or communities that are identified as having a large Indigenous population.

Relocation factors:

- Relocation of people to Cairns presents many associated issues. These people have been identified as a group of people that are displaced temporarily in the Cairns area. A recent study undertaken by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development (DATSIPD) shows that there are approximately 98 people homeless in Cairns. There are numerous factors that attribute to this problem: there are several organisations with responsibility for administering temporary accommodation and caring for displaced people, however the sheer number of people to house, the diversity of backgrounds and circumstances, not enough financial resources for many of these organisations to operate effectively, and an un-coordinated approach by different government agencies attribute to the problem.
- Relocation of people to Cairns for medical reasons also presents immense difficulties with being separated from families. People from the remote townships face considerable hardships, as Cairns Base Hospital is the nearest adequately resourced hospital. This raises problems of patients being separated from families, often face problems of lack of public transport and temporary accommodation for patients and families whilst receiving treatment in Cairns.

Education and preventative measures:

- In order to improve the standard of health within many communities people need to have access to information, choice of care and services and able to understand the consequences of general lifestyle diseases. Emphasis should be placed on preventative health measures rather than curative measures. One way to start this process is to begin an education process in the early years of schooling. A more coordinated government approach may be required.

Barriers:

- Families and patients often don't have private transport
- Lack of public transport between outlying centres and major towns
- Language is often a problem
- Lack of confidence to consult with mainstream doctors and health workers
- Lack of knowledge of services available e.g. ambulance subscriptions

Services provided by ATSIC:

- Indigenous Womens Initiatives funds are used to promote Health, Nutrition and Lifeskills programs
- Visiting doctors utilise CDEP training centres on community visits
- Indigenous Health Workers' and Educators' wages are topped up from CDEP funds
- Use of transport for patients purchased through CDEP resources
- Community and organisations generally tend to use CDEP resources and other resources at their disposal to fill the gaps in the services

Links:

- The main link between ATSIC and State bodies such as Queensland Health are in relation to the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) funding for Environmental Health e.g. Projects at Mossman Gorge, Mona Mona and Yarrabah

HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE

ATSIC provides supplementary funding to Indigenous people for community housing and infrastructure. Principle responsibility for community housing and infrastructure lies with the State. Other funding agencies include the Queensland Department of Housing and the Department of Natural Resources.

A 1999 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) was conducted throughout Australia, it stated that 33% of housing managed by Indigenous housing organisations was reported to be in need of major repair or replacement.

Issues:

- Housing continues to be one of the greatest issues for indigenous people in the Region. According to the 1996 census, only 21% of the indigenous people lived in a house they owned compared with 62% of the rest of the population. This situation is influenced by the similarly contrasting income levels. The majority of Indigenous people earn considerably less than non-Indigenous people. Of the income data available, 42% of indigenous households earned less than \$500 per week compared to 40% of other households. At the upper income levels, 4% of indigenous households had incomes over \$1500 per week compared to 10% of other households. Individual incomes were also significantly lower for indigenous people. Half had weekly incomes of \$195 or less, compared with \$333 per week for the non-indigenous population (CHINS Survey 1999). Owning a home helps to increase pride and responsibility in a community.
- Housing is a high priority for the Cairns region and for the Cairns and District Regional Council and the. An important issue is the intergenerational wealth transfer that exists for many non-Indigenous people but is not a factor for Indigenous people.
- There is a major need for more quality housing and appropriate housing design throughout the region.
- The problem of access to good quality housing is more pronounced in the outlying and remote areas.
- The City of Cairns is the centre for a large range of services not only for the people of the Cairns and District region, but also for the people from the Peninsula region.

Waiting lists for housing:

- Currently there is an approximate waiting period of 6 months for public housing e.g. Queensland Housing Commission
- An IHO servicing Cairns, Kozan Co-operative Society has 39 tenanted houses and a waiting list of over 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (waiting list prior to exclusion of inactive Kozan members was 100 families). Kozan provides secondary services such as referral of applicants to short-term housing agencies

and hostels and assistance for Indigenous people in working with Government agencies.

- Goobidi & Ngoonbi, located around the Mossman area, currently have a register/waiting list for people wanting housing accommodation, the numbers on the waiting lists are 120 & 20 respectively.
- At a recent Special General Meeting of Mooraridgi Co-operative Society, members were dismayed at the prospect of loss of housing stock and having to deal with commercial housing providers. They described the difficulties due to inherent racism within the town of Mareeba and the need to retain their own organisation that can be managed to provide a service that is sensitive to their needs.
- In relation to housing provided through indigenous organisations, there is a need for means testing to ensure that low-income families have access to this housing.

ATSIC Housing loans:

- The ATSIC Townsville office is responsible for administering housing loans within the following regions: Cairns, Peninsula, Townsville and Mount Isa. Within the 1999 / 2000 financial year there were 61 housing loans, totaling \$6.8 million within the above areas. The standard mainstream financial institutions do not adequately cater for Indigenous people and circumstances. Indigenous clients on average have lower incomes and therefore lower deposits. The ATSIC loans offer concessional interest rate loans and lower deposits requirement to assist people. This program operates under sec. 67 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission Act*. The National Housing fund relies on the payment of existing mortgages for funds, and therefore has a limited base of funds available, currently there is \$57 million nationally.
- A large proportion of people live in remote areas. Can't lend on DOGIT communities because of nature of title, communal title, cannot register loan over communal title loan.
- Currently the waiting list is on average 6 to 7 months. This is a very important program as many Indigenous people are unable to access other loans. Home ownership assists in increasing pride in individuals, families and communities.

Other factors:

- Overcrowding is also still an issue. For households with indigenous occupants the average household size in the 1996 census was 3.9 persons per dwelling compared to 2.6 for dwellings with no indigenous occupants.
- As Cairns is a major centre for services there is a lack of appropriate temporary accommodation for people visiting Cairns from outlying townships and the Peninsula region. Because the waiting lists are high for reasonable accommodation this often contributes to the high rates of homeless people in Cairns. There is also a great need for appropriate youth accommodation.
- The only hostel available in Cairns is the Kuiyam Hostel which targets students and is available for emergency and temporary accommodation only. Other types of accommodation include Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan (birthing centre – there are no birthing centres in the communities), Warringu (women's shelter), Red Cross House (mainstream owned), Singleton House (non-indigenous care workers) and

Quigley Street (emergency accommodation only). The mainstream hostels and services do not appear to adequately cater for Indigenous people.

Barriers:

- High cost of housing and maintenance in outlying and remote areas.
- Discrimination is an issue for low-income families trying to access housing throughout the region.
- Indigenous families with low incomes often have problems meeting requirements such as the payment of bonds for housing.
- Difficulties often experienced in obtaining references from previous landlords.
- Lack of education often results in people not being aware of their rights and their responsibilities.

Services:

- On average ATSIC provides an amount of \$3.5 million for housing each year and approximately \$360,000 for infrastructure
- Surveys suggest the need for housing in the regions is much higher than the allocations and the approach to meeting these needs is inappropriate as it is often approached in an ad hoc way.
- Resources are allocated on the basis of needs expressed by community organisations as a part of the ATSIC yearly submission process. Due to the limited funds available, compared with the needs, the allocation process has simply enabled the housing corporations located within the Region to have access to some resources to meet their urgent requirements.
- Some of the outlying townships lack basic infrastructure facilities e.g. sport & recreation facilities
- The Regional Council has tried to rationalise the process of meeting the needs with the limited resources through the establishment of a Regional Housing Authority.

Links:

- Queensland Housing Commission provides housing to low income families in Cairns and the major townships. However, the outlying and remote areas do not seem to benefit.
- Queensland State ATSI Housing provides housing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout the region.
- The main link between ATSIC and State bodies such as State Health are in relation to the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) funding for Environmental Health, including current projects at Mossman Gorge, Mona Mona and Yarrabah.

EDUCATION:

Over the past years ATSIC has only had a limited funding responsibility in respect of education.

Needs:

- According to the census data, Indigenous people have lower education levels, with 12% of indigenous people aged 15 years or over in 1996 indicating they had tertiary qualifications compared to 34% of the non-indigenous population of the region.
- There are not enough early childhood programs, particularly in relation to health issues and the value and importance of education.
- All major centres within the region have State Primary and Secondary Schools
- Most outlying areas have Primary Schools. Many outlying and remote areas do not have Secondary schools and many children often have to go to boarding schools. This leads to other problems that are associated with not being close to family and support groups.
- Need for culturally appropriate programs, particularly in DOGIT communities.

Cultural appropriateness:

- The curriculum may not be appropriate in many cases, eg what kind of history is being taught in schools?
- The language that is being used may be an issue. Many children may find it difficult to learn in English. For example, a teacher may use a person's name that has recently passed away and cause grief to many people. Perhaps more work can be done on bi-lingual teaching.
- The way that the programs are being taught and the relevance of programs to children may need to be examined.
- Schools need to be connected to the community
- The nature of the school environment and whether it is conducive to learning.
- Cross-cultural training of teachers should be a requirement for employment. Remote areas are usually not where people first want to live which means that in many cases inexperienced teachers are sent to these areas. A comprehensive induction of teachers needs to be included in education policy.
- Relationships between parents and teachers need to strengthen.
- There needs to be attitudinal change in the way that teachers approach teaching and also in the way that parents and children approach learning. This attitudinal change may take many years.

Barriers:

- Lack of good home environment often caused by inadequate housing, limited financial resources, alcohol and substance abuse. These and other factors often lead to children not being able to concentrate properly, are tired in classes and generally lead to being less interested in school.
- Lack of parental guidance in relation to informing students about the value of education.

Services:

- ATSIIC provides some funding to Primary Schools in the Cairns area for Language Maintenance Programs. Schools use available funds, including Education Queensland grants, but there is generally not enough to run these.
- CDEP wages is sometimes used to top-up Teacher Aide wages at Primary schools where there is a CDEP program in the township or community.
- The Regional Council took major steps during 1998 towards establishing an indigenous education and training facility in the region to address what it sees as serious deficiencies in the mainstream education systems as they relate to indigenous people. A working group has been established and a major feasibility study funded to determine whether such a school is warranted, whether there is sufficient demand from the indigenous community and whether it would receive the necessary active involvement of the community.

Links:

- More work needs to be done on coordinating the different organisations within communities.

TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT

Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) is ATSIIC's largest program and it is the major provider of employment and on the job training. ATSIIC no longer has a distinct training program but other programs may facilitate training as a part of grant funded activities.

Needs:

- Statistics generally show rates of unemployment amongst Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people as being considerably higher than the wider community. According to the 1996 census, 22% of Indigenous people were unemployed. This result includes the CDEP participants among those counted as employed. If they were still counted as unemployed, the rate of unemployment would be at about 34%. Either way, the figures contrast poorly with the non-Indigenous unemployment rate of 8%.
- This situation is more pronounced in the outlying townships and remote areas, as there are limited employment opportunities.
- There is a lack of access to mainstream employment, particularly in the outlying and remote areas.
- While Cairns and other major towns are reasonably well serviced for training needs through TAFE colleges, the outlying and remote townships are extremely disadvantaged in this regard. Distance education or learning through correspondence does not seem to be prevalent in many areas which may have something to do with access to computers, general information about the types of services that are available and encouragement or support from family and friends.

CDEP services and issues:

- CDEP provides part-time employment for up to 1,456 people in this region, and promotes transition into other unsubsidised employment (both part and full time) in the wider labour market. Transition into unsubsidised employment – 14

KMKM CDEP participants are currently doing accredited training at a tourist resort at Kuranda, assisted by DEWRSB subsidies. The intention is for at least 10 to be placed in full- and part-time jobs upon satisfactory completion of the course.

- CDEP development of enterprises – KMKM has 3 separately incorporated enterprises, developed and currently still assisted by CDEP (through CDEP Wages).
- There is a demand in the region for additional CDEP places, particularly in the outlying and remote towns and centres.
- CDEP also facilitates the development of community-based enterprises. For example: Strangled Mango – a café staffed solely by CDEP participants; Kuranda Hardware – providing the sole retail hardware outlet in Kuranda, Wangal Arts & Crafts – fosters the development and marketing of local indigenous arts and crafts, which are made by CDEP participants.
- CDEP Forums – funded by C&DRC, these forums have focussed participating CDEP organisations on plans to collectively market and purchase, to achieve economies of scale and to maximise the significant human and physical resources among the CDEP organisations.

Barriers:

- Lack of education is a major barrier to taking on more advanced training and gaining adequate employment
- Lack of confidence in dealing with employers
- Lack of skills in applying and interviewing for jobs
- Lack of uptake of Department of Education, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) subsidies
- There is a lack of management and administrative training which means that often people are brought into communities from other areas to fill various job vacancies. There is not an adequate skills development process for Indigenous people. For example there is a shortage of qualified Indigenous people in accountancy areas. This leads to a continuous cycle of reliance on external expertise. This is also an important issue in terms of self-reliance and determination and the desire of Indigenous people to run and manage their own affairs.

Services:

- ATSIIC funds six (6) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to provide employment opportunities, which contribute to community development and establishment of income generating activities.
- Four (4) of the CDEP's are based in townships at Mossman Gorge (70 kms north of Cairns), Mareeba (60 kms west south-west of Cairns) Gordonvale (20 kms South of Cairns) and Kuranda (26 kms north west of Cairns). Two (2) are located in Yarrabah (south of Cairns on the coast) including the largest CDEP in Australia which is funded to the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community Council.
- The CDEP scheme provides employment opportunities for 1456 participants. Some 920 of these participants are in Yarrabah with the remainder within the other townships.

- Funding for CDEP comprises a Wages component and an Oncosts allocation to carry out work activities such as: Maintenance of community houses, provision of ranger services, sport and recreation for youth, assisting in operations of womens centres, operations of arts & crafts centres, supplementing the provision of municipal services, and establishing income generating activities.
- For the year 2000/2001, the six CDEPs in the region will be funded a total of \$17,396,788. Some 70% of this amount are funds that are offset against unemployment benefits and paid to participants in the form of wages.
- CDEP provides on the job training for the majority of participants on a 2-day per week basis and provides top-up wages for some participants to receive accredited training and to undertake apprenticeships.
- Apart from CDEP, ATSIC provides funds for wages for the operations of various activities such as Broadcasting, Family Violence Prevention, Sport & Recreation, Heritage Protection and Indigenous Womens Initiatives

Links:

- CDEP program links with training providers such as Dept of Employment, Workplace Relations & Small Business (DEWRSB), State Dept of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR). Often CDEP wages top up programs funded by these departments for accredited training and apprenticeships.
- Similar links also exist for enterprise development through use of CDEP Operational funds and funding from DEWRSB
- TAFE also provides a valuable link for CDEP participants undertaking accredited training