

# Talking back to policy: Aboriginal participation in policy making

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# **Talking back to policy: Aboriginal participation in policy making**

**Inara Walden**

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy



Social Policy Research Centre  
University of New South Wales

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## **Acknowledgements**

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In conducting analysis of the everyday negotiations between government officers and Aboriginal community members in a small remote community, I have been acutely aware of the particular need and challenges to protect the identities of research participants. I have adopted a number of strategies, including pseudonyms and obfuscating who has spoken. I explain further how I have handled anonymity on page 123.

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## **Publication arising from this thesis**

The following article has been published arising from subject matter contained in this thesis:

Walden, I., B. Dennis and Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (2014) 'Aboriginal people 'talking back' to policy in rural Australia', *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, 3 (2): 1-16



## **ORIGINALITY STATEMENT**

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.'

Signed .....

Date .....

## **Abstract**

Past Australian government policies have controlled, disenfranchised and infantilised Indigenous people, strongly contributing to their ongoing disadvantage and poverty. During Australia's formal policy phase of self-determination, 1972 to 2004, Aboriginal people emphasised their fundamental desire to define and control their own priorities and destinies. This desire continues today, however the policy landscape is now more ambiguous than ever about the role of Aboriginal people in policy making.

This thesis makes a case study of processes taking place when a remote NSW Aboriginal community asserted its right to participate in policy planning and decision-making. The research focused on negotiations between the Aboriginal community and government as a particular policy was implemented. The study aimed to investigate the extent to which Aboriginal people desire and pursue participation in policy making, and whether this is valued and enabled by governments.

The methodology is informed by grounded theory and Indigenous research methodologies. Data was collected primarily via semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal community representatives and government officers over a three year period, along with policy analysis and observational data. Reciprocity and relationship building were vital to sustaining the researcher's collaboration with the community over time.

Now enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, participation is an emerging concept and site of debate within the scholarship and practice of Indigenous policy making. This thesis makes a timely contribution to that scholarship by applying concepts of participation developed through four decades of practice, critique and theorising in the sphere of international development.

Debates about what constitutes participation are salient to analysis of everyday negotiations between Aboriginal people and governments. The research reveals a strong drive and commitment from Aboriginal community representatives to participate as local decision-makers, and a range of imperatives that urge governments to strive to enable this. However structural and resource challenges undermined the level of Aboriginal involvement and quality of participation achieved.

The study indicates that Aboriginal participation in policy decision-making may be essential to re-empower those affected by colonisation, and enable Aboriginal agency in setting goals and aspirations to improve their own lives and livelihoods.



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## Abbreviations

AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CGRIS	Coordinator General of Remote Indigenous Services
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CTG	Closing the Gap
DEG	Dharriwaa Elders Group
IEO	Indigenous Engagement Officer
IRSD	Indigenous Remote Service Delivery
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LDM	Local Decision Making
LIP	Local Implementation Plan
MPRA	Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
MPREC	Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NPA	National Partnership Agreement
NSW	New South Wales
OCHRE	Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment, NSW Government plan for Aboriginal affairs, since April 2013
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
ROC	Regional Office of Coordination
RSD	Remote Service Delivery
RSDC	Remote Service Delivery Coordinator (community-embedded role)
ROC	Regional Office of Coordination
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission
SMC	State Management Committee

TWT	Two Ways Together (Community Partnership Program)
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WAMS	Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service
WGACWP	Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party
WOG	Whole of Government

## Glossary of terms

Aboriginal or Indigenous - both terms are used capitalised as proper nouns in this thesis to refer to the first peoples of Australia. Indigenous is a more inclusive term than Aboriginal, as it includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and hence is often preferred by governments. However within NSW, the term Aboriginal is strongly preferred by Aboriginal people. This thesis therefore makes preferential use of the term Aboriginal, especially when referring to the particular peoples of this state, and uses the term Indigenous when referring to government policies and initiatives that apply to all native peoples of Australia. In international rights contexts 'indigenous' is written with a small 'i' to denote its use as an adjective referring to various native peoples around the world. When citing documents about the rights of all indigenous peoples, I do the same.

accountability - processes by which people, typically those in leadership or representative roles, are expected to be answerable to others. In Indigenous contexts this includes 'downward accountability' from leaders to keep community members informed; while in non-Indigenous contexts it refers to regulatory processes used to ensure resources are expended as intended and that processes of equity and fairness are maintained, excluding corruption or bias. Aboriginal organisations and representatives typically need to take account of 'two-way accountability' - upward to government funding bodies and downward to the community and family members they are also accountable to keep informed. This is discussed further in the thesis (at pp 73-75, 94-96).

efficacy - 'self efficacy' describes a person's belief in his or her own ability and capacity to accomplish tasks or deal with life's challenges, while 'collective efficacy' refers to the sense that one 'belongs to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes' (Krieg 2009: 31). A sense of efficacy can be lost in communities overwhelmed by disasters or extreme violence such as civil wars, genocide, colonisation. Participation may renew efficacy, by engendering hope and belief in collective or individual capability to act strategically and achieve goals considered to be important.

empowerment - this refers to increases in 'personal, group and social aspects of power and capacity ranging from leadership, resources and strengthened networks to critical thinking, trusting relationships and increased group participation' (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005: 152; Labonte 1999). People who are marginalised or impoverished are typically described as having been 'disempowered' by processes such as colonisation, dispossession,



discrimination or poverty. Participation is one type of process that may, this thesis argues, lead to the empowerment or re-empowerment of people whose rights and power have been taken from them in various ways. The thesis discusses empowerment at length, including principally at pp43-44. Processes of participation may deliver greater confidence, capability and capacity to make decisions that affect one's own life and wellbeing or that of one's community, ergo empowerment.

governance - the processes, relationships, institutions and structures by which a group of people organise to represent themselves, negotiate their rights and interests with others, and decide how their affairs are managed.

healing - this is a process or an ongoing series of processes Aboriginal people identify as such as to enable their recovery from past trauma or from contemporary harms such as lateral or family violence, which may in turn be expressions of past traumas. Like other colonised indigenous peoples, Australia's Aboriginal people are identified as in need of healing, due to the suffering and injuries caused them by colonisation and its aftermath. In Australia the term 'intergenerational trauma' (Atkinson 2002) is used to refer to cycles of passing down of trauma through generations, unless processes of healing can be affected to intervene and release people from its ravages. Healing is one potential outcome of processes of participation, as discussed further in the thesis (at pp322-326).

participation - the UNRISD definition describes it as 'organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control' (Stiefel and Wolfe 1994: 5). As the central concept of this thesis participation is discussed and theorised throughout.

policy making - used as an inclusive, collective term throughout the thesis to refer to the broad range of processes, practices and negotiations that take place during various temporal, political and geographic stages of policy-forming and implementing activity - from high level policy framing and national agenda setting through to the planning and implementation phases that see policies realised at regional or local levels. It is well argued in the literature that implementation should not be divorced as a separate process from policy making but considered a continuing vital element of the process of shaping and putting policy into action (Hill 2009: 197-199). Other types of local decision-making are also important and necessary in the design of programs and services to target particular social problems in local settings. I

attempt to clarify which type when describing 'policy making' and Indigenous involvement in decision-making.

self-determination - this was both an Australian policy phase from the 1970s to the mid 2000s, and describes an indigenous and human right principle recognised in international law. Self-determination is considered a fundamental Indigenous collective right, towards which participation contributes. Self-determination is discussed in relation to both contexts throughout the thesis and in particular in Chapter 4 (pp129-130, 139-140).

social capital - positive interaction that has been described as the social 'glue' that enables people to build communities, commit themselves to each other and knit the social fabric. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks; relationships of trust and tolerance are involved. It is argued that social capital can bring great benefits to people's wellbeing and lives (Putnam 1993; 2000).



## Introduction

Up near the hospital across the road, it was obviously spray painted, and the words were: 'Put all the blacks back on the mission.' That was all that was written there. It was written somewhere else too near one of the clubs, across the road. But that's now been filled in with tar and whatever else. The Council just put stuff over and covered it up.

(Geraldine, community participant<sup>1</sup>)

Aboriginal residents of country towns can no longer legally be forced onto segregated reserves. They cannot be banned from certain streets of a town, nor excluded from local schools, hospital wards, public and private establishments as they once were. Nevertheless, other powerful forces often remain in play. More covert, yet deeply institutionalised racism may be associated with intergenerational unemployment and poverty. Together with educational disadvantage and low literacy these factors continue to drive inequality and prevent Aboriginal people in small town Australia from accessing desired social, educational and employment opportunities.

Racial discrimination may be less visible today than 50 years ago, when Aboriginal rights activists rolled through country New South Wales on the Freedom Ride bus, but that does not diminish its impacts on those affected. The covering over by council workers of racist taunts daubed on the main street of Walgett, a remote town in north west New South Wales, described by Geraldine above, seems emblematic of the way racial tensions are sometimes denied or hushed up in small communities. The ripple effects of incidents and insults may be experienced more keenly and immediately in such communities, where certain conflicts can escalate because of the social or racial identities of those involved. Whilst it may be entirely appropriate for Council to move to quickly erase symbolic violence inscribed on local roads, the absence of an accompanying acknowledgement or attempt by the Shire to address specifically the underlying racism and discrimination it expresses appears to cast Council's action as more of a 'hush up' than an act of decency. At any rate, the profoundly injurious impacts that hate speech such as this can have when writ large on the streets of town for all to see must not be underestimated (Butler 1997).

Half a century ago Walgett was a town deemed so riven by racism and discriminatory practices that it would be a flashpoint on the journey of Charles Perkins' Freedom Riders, students from

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation to maintain the anonymity of participants.

Sydney University. This was not the first time Walgett had seen Aboriginal political activism, but the town earned its place on the Freedom Ride tour itinerary because of a shocking local incident featured in the Sydney press. Two 9-year old Aboriginal boys were locked in police cells for two nights after stealing toys and crayons from a church hall. A front page story in Sydney's *Sun* newspaper also highlighted the poor living conditions of Aboriginal people in the district (Curthoys 2002: 89). When the Freedom Riders visited Walgett six months later, picketing and demonstrating to highlight particularly glaring examples of racism and discrimination against the Aboriginal residents of the town, tensions ran high, occasionally boiling into physical and verbal confrontations in the main street. Their actions drew national and international media attention to the racial injustices they exposed, putting small town Walgett on the map. Exposure of the town's racial divisions attracted a level of notoriety that would be long lasting.

Since 1965, Walgett and the nearby town of Moree have been visited and revisited over the years by journalists who have used the towns as a kind of 'measuring stick to gauge the level of racism in rural NSW' (Peters-Little 2000: 8). Indeed, I was originally intrigued and drawn to the place because of the town's colourful past: wondering what I would find there today; how might things have changed for Aboriginal people living there since the era of the Freedom Ride; what issues and concerns are yet to be addressed.

This thesis provides a case study of Indigenous participation in policy planning and decision-making, sited in this remote town of Walgett NSW. The brief vignettes just given, indicate it is a place that has a fascinating yet disturbing history; it is also a place where elders strive to maintain and pass on language and important cultural knowledge that endures, embedded within the landscape in spite of the many transformations colonisation has brought. The Aboriginal people of Walgett are proud, resilient, often shy, funny, footy-oriented and almost always deeply enmeshed in family and other local networks. The so-called 'white flight' affecting many remote and rural parts of Australia today is taking place in Walgett too, as non-Indigenous residents retreat from the bush toward regional cities and larger towns in search of better education and job opportunities. As they go, many services are retreating too: bank branches close, transport services and other utilities progressively shut down or withdraw from small town life. Meanwhile Walgett has a large and growing Aboriginal population that is affected by many complex social problems: high rates of unemployment and welfare dependency, family violence, problematic substance abuse and social gambling, poor

educational outcomes and shrinking opportunities for local workforce participation by the Aboriginal community.

If the problems facing remote Aboriginal communities like Walgett today are complex, arguably the greatest challenge in Indigenous policy making comes from the complicated intersection of the Australia's three-tiered system of government, giving rise to uncoordinated cross-jurisdictional service systems, often exacerbated by siloed bureaucratic operations. Governments at different levels (local, state and federal) acknowledge their own lack of information and visibility over service systems delivered into particular communities, and this inevitably leads to gaps, duplication and poor accountability to Aboriginal citizens for services delivered. Challenges arising from governmental complexity are at the core of various whole of government initiatives implemented by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in recent decades.<sup>2</sup>

In 2009 Walgett was chosen as one of 29 communities to receive priority attention under the Remote Service Delivery (RSD) National Partnership Agreement (NPA) signed by COAG, which committed state and federal governments to improve coordination, and theoretically, thereby improve the standard of service delivery to remote Indigenous communities. Importantly, RSD was one of a number of NPAs intended by COAG to contribute to meeting six high-level Closing the Gap targets<sup>3</sup>. There are around 1200 remote and very-remote Indigenous communities in Australia and the criteria for choosing the RSD priority communities are not entirely transparent or clear (ANAO 2012b: 65-67); however, the five year process of RSD implementation in Walgett has afforded an opportunity for this researcher to observe and analyse the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party's (WGACWP) participation with governments in the processes associated with planning and implementing RSD.

### **Policy context of RSD**

The RSD National Partnership Agreement committed \$291.2 million over six years from 1 July 2009 to mid-2014 to 'improve access to government services and facilities, raise the quality of these services, and better support Indigenous community governance and leadership' within

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<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, the COAG Trials (2002-2007) would be the first such whole of government initiative, followed by the series of National Partnership Agreements linked to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) from 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Closing the Gap (NIRA, 2008) established six targets to reduce or eliminate identified gaps in a range of critical health, educational and employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within set timeframes. Closing the Gap targets and building blocks are discussed and critiqued in detail in Chapter 5.

the 29 priority communities across five state and territory jurisdictions (Australian Government 2009b). RSD was described as representing a 'commitment by governments to work with Indigenous communities to improve the delivery of services' in the priority remote locations, which would necessarily involve a two-way commitment:

- From governments and their staff – to cooperate to put in place the resources and planning for better infrastructure and services and to develop the capacity of individuals, communities and local service providers; and
- From the community and community members – to work with government to improve the community and to take responsibility for their own wellbeing, in particular the health, safety and education of their children (Australian Government 2009b).

One of the core principles established to guide COAG's Closing the Gap initiatives including RSD was the 'Indigenous engagement principle', which specified that 'engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services'. It directed that attention be given to 'engaging and empowering' Indigenous people in this process 'as appropriate', and stipulated that governments must be 'transparent regarding the role and level of Indigenous engagement along a continuum from information sharing to decision-making' (COAG 2008: D-68).

The bureaucratic architecture designed for RSD promised participatory processes whereby community and service sector representatives from each of the priority communities would be invited to be involved in devising and signing off Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) aligned with Closing the Gap targets and building blocks. Regional Coordination Centres (also known as Indigenous Coordination Centres) would be the main point of government coordination for RSD initiatives in each state or territory. Additionally two RSD workers were to be embedded within each local community, tasked to work with communities to help establish LIP goals for improved service delivery and then to track achievement of those priorities while keeping the community informed. Existing governance structures in each community were to be relied on, following a process of being reconstituted and reinvigorated with the help of government officers, to provide a point of contact for governments to work with on the RSD. In Walgett the first task for the WGACWP was to work on reconstituting its own terms of reference, confirming representation and setting out agreed processes.

## Participation

Participation in Indigenous policymaking is the primary concern of this thesis.

Participation is a notion that has been theorised in depth in various contexts within international literature. Broadly, the term is used to describe involvement by impoverished or marginalised people in development initiatives designed to assist them or in governance processes that affect their rights.

Various dimensions, modalities, potential benefits and motivations associated with participatory decision-making processes have been widely debated, intensively critiqued and theorised within the context of international development over the past four decades. A variety of processes have been developed and implemented in this realm to enable participation by people who are economically disadvantaged in processes designed to assist their development. Analysis of experiments in participatory democracy, taking place in various countries over the past two and half decades, has further extended this participation literature.

Key debates about what constitutes participation are also salient to analysis of participation taking place in the context of Indigenous policymaking today, and will be engaged throughout this thesis.

In the sphere of international development, participation has long been advocated as a vital way to empower marginalised or disempowered peoples. Participation by impoverished people has been variously seen by development agencies as a way to elicit important information, encourage local buy-in to programs, or to increase efficiency and thereby maximise benefit from moneys invested in development aid to reduce poverty (Cornwall 2000; Cohen and Uphoff 1980). Cornwall points out that discourses of participation in international development have evolved and shifted since the 1970s, with the role of impoverished people in development programs being characterised at different times as beneficiaries, consumers, or citizens with rights to be upheld (Cornwall 2000).

Analysts identify the importance of considering various dimensions and framings of participation, inquiring as to: who participates, why, in what, how, and for what purpose (Cornwall 2000, 2011; Cohen and Uphoff 1980). Differentiation is made in the literature between invited participation and other spaces for participation that people claim or create for themselves, because the former is usually structured and owned by those who provide it



(Cornwall 2008; Gaventa 2006). Such analysis emphasises the influence of power and the potential for manipulation within processes ostensibly designed to enable participation. Typologies of participation (Arnstein 1969; White 1996) have identified different levels and purposes of staged participation: that it can be broad, deep, shallow or narrow, depending on who is involved, what participation is about, how often it takes place, at what stage of planning processes and to what ends it is applied (Cornwall 2008; Cohen and Uphoff 1980).

Waves of interest in participation in the context of international development, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s and peaking in the 1990s when participation was 'mainstreamed' within development practice (Cornwall 2011: xii), have resulted in the processes, objectives and outcomes of participation being intensively critiqued and theorised. Since the late 1990s, work on participation in development contexts has converged with and been extended by new emphases on citizen participation in democratic governance arising within many nations (Gaventa 2008; Fung and Wright 2003a). Important research across these contexts has helped to illuminate some of the important features of participation and the potential benefits it can contribute to both development and democracy-building outcomes, including that it may improve governance and accountability by creating more aware citizens/participants and fostering more responsive and accountable governments/donor agencies (Gaventa and Barrett 2012). That participation also has potential to increase participants' skills and capacities for taking action, deepening their networks and solidarities, and contributing to increased social cohesion across groups (Gaventa and Barrett 2012), are significant and important findings of relevance to the situation of Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

### **Indigenous participation in policy making**

With the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, providing formal international recognition of participation as an indigenous right, it is timely for research to examine the meaning and application of participation in the indigenous policy context. Whilst participation has been well theorised in the realm of international development and more recently in participatory governance, a comparable body of analysis of participation within the context of Indigenous policymaking is only beginning to emerge (Hunt 2013b).

The UNDRIP recognises Indigenous peoples' 'right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves' (United Nations 2007: article 18). It includes the right to 'determine and develop priorities and

strategies for exercising their right to development' and the 'right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them' (United Nations 2007: article 23).

Indigenous participation may in fact be essential to the fulfilment of commitments made by Australian governments to reduce disadvantage and improve Indigenous lives. If most of the past 200 years have been characterised by control and management of Indigenous Australians by governments, non-Indigenous agencies and church missions with completely top-down approaches that involved no participation by Indigenous people<sup>4</sup>, critical analysis indicates that this infantilising and disenfranchising of Indigenous peoples has strongly contributed to their ongoing disadvantage and poverty (RCIADIC 1991; Cox 2014a; Cooper 2011).

Increasingly, there has been a recognition by policymakers and governments in Australia and other democracies, in particular the United Kingdom (Cameron 2010; Holmes 2011: 5-7), that participation by citizens or community members, via some form of deliberative process, could be a vital element required to start solving certain types of seemingly intractable social problems classified as 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber 1973; Australian Public Service Commission 2007). Such problems are considered to be unlikely solvable by technical solutions alone, nor by top-down decision-making by governments or policymakers. Arguably therefore, the input of key stakeholders, including directly affected or concerned community members, needs to be sought in order to advance solutions within highly complex policy areas (Head 2008; Holmes 2011).

In Australia, Indigenous disadvantage is frequently referred to by governments and policymakers as a wicked problem (a proposition challenged in this thesis) and this may necessitate the participation of community members and other stakeholders closest to the problem via deliberative solution-finding processes that can lend local knowledge and engender the buy-in needed to bring about behaviour change that is required. However Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Australia's first people, who continue to experience colonised lives, have different perspectives and motivations for desiring participation in policy decision-making, pressing a more fundamental need to define and control their own priorities and destinies (Hunt et al. 2008).

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<sup>4</sup> The ATSIC period 1990 -2004, known as the self-determination policy phase, has been one exception to the top-down policy approaches described here. This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

## Research questions

This thesis takes a case study approach to consider whether and, if so, how participation of Aboriginal people in policy planning and decision-making is being valued and enabled by Australian governments, and in what ways participation is being desired and pursued by Aboriginal people. The main research question this thesis investigates is:

What is the nature of Aboriginal participation in policy planning and decision-making with Australian governments?

Aboriginal participation in policymaking is theorised, using a case study to analyse the processes that take place when an Aboriginal community attempts to assert its right to participate in policy planning and decision-making, and to re-negotiate the terms of its engagement with government.

Five research questions guide the investigation:

1. In what ways is participation in policy planning and decision-making desired and pursued by Aboriginal people?
2. Are there signs that Aboriginal participation is being valued and enabled by Australian governments and if so what are they?
3. What sorts of action might an Aboriginal community take to assert a right of participation?
4. What issues and challenges impact the negotiation space between governments and Aboriginal communities when planning and implementing policy?
5. What are the outcomes of participation for community representatives and government officers, and what can we learn from this about participation in policymaking to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage?

## **Chapter summary**

This section provides an overview of chapter content in the thesis. Chapter 1 introduces participation as the major concern of this thesis, reviewing international participation literature of relevance. Chapter 2 extends this analysis with a review of literature related to Indigenous sector organisations as vehicles for participation.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter, which reviews pertinent Indigenous research methodology literature before outlining the design of the case study. Chapters 4 and 5 are contextual: Chapter 4 provides a review of the broad policy context of Australian Indigenous policymaking; before Chapter 5 considers the particular context of the Aboriginal community of Walgett and RSD. Chapter 5a helps to contextualise the level of social policy need and problems, as well as identifying a strengths-based approach to problem identification that casts policy in a different light.

Chapters 6 and 7 are the findings chapters: reporting and analysing the major findings from rounds of interviews with the WGACWP and with government officers. Chapter 8, the discussion and conclusion, draws the findings together with participation literature to consider what the case study has added to understandings of participation in Indigenous contexts.



## Chapter 1: Participation

Much of the failure of service delivery to Indigenous people and communities, and the lack of sustainable outcomes, is a direct result of the failure to effectively engage with Indigenous people and of the failure to invest in building the capacity of Indigenous communities to participate. (Gooda 2010)

In his address to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda emphasised both a pressing need for ground-up involvement by Aboriginal people in planning and design of services delivered in their communities, and the need to build and support the capacity of Indigenous people to undertake this participatory role. Making specific reference to the Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response implemented from mid-2007, Gooda stated that the 'single most valuable resource' the initiative had lacked from its inception was the 'positive, willing participation of the people it was intended to help' (Gooda 2010: para 23). Gooda's identification of participation as a vital, if frequently overlooked element, necessary to achieve positive outcomes in the area of Indigenous policymaking, is worthy of closer analysis.

This thesis examines whether and in what ways participation by Aboriginal people at all stages of the design, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect them may be essential to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. Local Aboriginal people may be uniquely placed to understand the nature of social problems affecting their communities, to identify particular needs and advise on the suitability of policy solutions. Local people are, after all, experts in their own lives, cultures and communities (Ife 2013: 281-287). Surveying evidence from participation literature, this chapter introduces the thesis that the very act of participation itself has potential to empower, or re-empower, people who have been long disempowered by the impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma. In this way it operates beyond practical or instrumental advantages that accrue to policy making processes when local people are involved in solving their own problems.

Participation is a notion that has been theorised in depth within international literature over the past four decades. Broadly, it is used to describe involvement by impoverished or marginalised people in development initiatives designed to assist them or in governance processes that affect their rights. A number of important insights from the participation

literature are helpful in interpreting what takes place in the Indigenous sphere. Importantly, participation is now acknowledged as an Indigenous right within the UNDRIP (United Nations 2007). The Declaration establishes that states must consult and cooperate with Indigenous people, enabling them to be involved in decision-making that affects their various rights, including measures to develop or improve their socio-economic circumstances.

In Australia governments and policymakers do not tend to talk about 'participation', but rather use the word 'engagement' to describe a spectrum of different types of interactions that may take place between governments and Indigenous communities, or other Australian citizens for that matter, in negotiating policy problems and solutions (Hunt 2013a; Hill et al. 2012; COAG 2008; Jarvie and Stewart 2011; Head 2007). This chapter begins to consider the different ways the terms participation and engagement are being used in various policy contexts, noting that whilst they are sometimes assumed to be interchangeable, each term may in fact be chosen to signify particular orientations or emphases.

The concept of participation has been particularly important in the sphere of international development, where processes to enable it have been developed and implemented, and the meanings, importance and effectiveness of participation have been critiqued and theorised in depth since the late 1960s. Since the end of the 1990s, responses to democratic deficits arising within many nations have also led to a burgeoning of experiments in participatory governance (Gaventa 2008). Cornwall identifies a convergence in key concerns across the development and democratic governance contexts, with participatory processes identified in both contexts as providing potential means to address problems of accountability and governance (Cornwall 2011).

**Part I** of this chapter reviews the literature of participation, paying particular attention to aspects of theory from the context of international development that can enlighten analysis of participation in the context of Indigenous policymaking. In addition, it considers what can be learned from analysis and theorising of participation in the context of citizen participation<sup>5</sup> in governance processes, whether these processes have been designed by states to involve marginalised citizens or claimed via citizens mobilising themselves. Various modes and motivations for participation are highlighted and the potential benefits to people, processes and outcomes are surveyed. **Part II** of the chapter considers participation in the particular

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'citizen engagement' is frequently used interchangeably with citizen participation in the governance literature (Gaventa and Tandon 2010: for example), however in this thesis I use the term participation to avoid confusion in light of my analysis of the differential ways that Australian governments have been using these two terms.

context of Indigenous policymaking. It introduces some of the key factors identified in the literature that need to be taken into account in relation to participation within Aboriginal communities: preferred styles, levels and modes of Indigenous decision-making, issues and challenges related to representation and accountability. Finally the chapter considers key imperatives for Australian governments to enable participation of Indigenous people. One element of this is the contemporary emphasis on citizen participation by governments in democratic countries like the United Kingdom and Australia, where particular framings identify participation as important to solving so-called 'wicked' policy problems, including Indigenous disadvantage. The significance of participation from the perspective of Indigenous Australians themselves is also explored.

### **Etymology of participation and engagement**

If internationally the term 'participation' is used to signify citizen involvement in decision-making, in Australia the term 'engagement' is more frequently used by policymakers. This section explores the etymology of the terms 'participation' and 'engagement', as well as the contemporary meanings of each, towards consideration of what a particular choice of language may signify in relation to the interactions and processes implemented within contemporary policymaking.

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, 'participate' comes from the Latin *participare* meaning 'to share, share in, to impart'; from *particeps* meaning 'partaking or sharing'; and from *parti* meaning 'to divide' (Harper 2001-2014). These origins highlight the fact that participating involves not only taking an active part and sharing in processes, but also sharing in receiving benefits that may accrue. Participation also implies at least some degree of shared power, reinforced by the term's shared origins with the word 'partnering'.

Meanwhile the term 'engage' has 15th century French origins, meaning 'to pledge, employ or promise to marry'; and the word 'engagement' has various historical meanings, from a 'formal promise' (c.1600); a 'battle or fight' (1660s); a 'promise of marriage' (1742); and an 'appointment' (1806) (Harper 2001-2014). Contemporary meanings of engage include 'to occupy the attention or efforts of a person', to 'choose to involve oneself or commit oneself to something', to 'enter a conflict or battle', to 'enmesh, bind, absorb or pledge oneself', to 'take part or participate (as in sports)' (Random House Inc. 2014). The term engagement therefore encompasses quite diverse notions: from combat between disparate teams, armies or peoples, to an individual commitment of a kind that sees a person absorbed, bound or ensconced in a new relationship, pursuit or way of life.



On the other hand, 'disengaging' involves detaching, freeing oneself from attachment, pledge or obligation, or breaking off action with an enemy (Random House Inc. 2014). In the sense of social disadvantage, to 'become disengaged' implies that a person is, or has become disinterested or withdrawn from social activities. A person may also be disengaged from education or employment, or other activities mainstream society considers important, healthy or beneficial. It seems pertinent that whilst 'being engaged' has a pejorative antonym, there is no equivalent antonym for the word participating. One may choose not to participate (or be unable to do so), however this does not carry the same negative connotation as being disengaged. Moreover, the use of the term engagement, rather than participation, in the Australian policy context may implicitly assign responsibility or culpability to those people considered by mainstream society to be disengaged, as if disadvantage and poverty are somehow chosen by people who elect to disengage or become so by virtue of personal fault or failure.

Where Indigenous people's disengagement is ascribed as the policy problem to be resolved, measures to (re)engage people with values and practices acceptable to and valued by mainstream society are readily identified as the solution. However, such a formulation of policy problems and solutions facilitates an ahistorical account of the causes of Indigenous disadvantage, ignoring the enduring and ongoing impacts of colonisation and leaving little space for alternate Indigenous interpretation of policy problems and solutions. It seems likely that meaningful participation of Indigenous people in policy making, well facilitated, such as via deliberative decision-making processes, would cast a very different light on the way policy problems are framed and solutions are designed and implemented compared with the current way that governments formulate and frame such problems: as primarily associated with Aboriginal people's *disengagement* from mainstream education, jobs, and the healthy social values and practices that would improve their lives and livelihoods if they could only become *engaged* in the behaviour change commitments that governments have in mind. This conceptualisation of Indigenous policy problems is expressed within government initiatives to 'normalise' Aboriginal communities and to 'mainstream' Aboriginal lives by treating them the same as every other Australian citizen, as will be further discussed in Chapter 4 (pp130-133). Further analysis of Australian governments' use of the term engagement in the context of policy language is included in Chapter 7 (pp272-275).

## **Part I: Theorising participation**

This section identifies key elements from participation literature that will be engaged in later analysis of the case study findings (Chapters 6, 7 and 8).

### **Beneficiaries, consumers, citizens: participants in international development**

Participation has been an influential theme in international development since the 1970s, and since then a number of waves of emphasis and influence are identifiable. Cornwall offers a very useful meta-analysis of this field, tracing the evolution of 'popular participation' over three decades, starting in the 1970s when a series of high level declarations from international development organisations 'carved out a part for the poor' in development processes, as a central pillar of the basic needs approach of the period, to allow impoverished people as 'beneficiaries' of development to be involved in projects intended to benefit them (Cornwall 2000: 11). In the 1980s, Cornwall identifies that under the influence of neo-liberalism, beneficiaries of aid dollars came to be seen as having a more active role as 'consumers' of development projects and policies, and participation was accepted as 'necessary and desirable to ensure... efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability' of development projects (Cornwall 2000: 11-12). In the third phase Cornwall identifies that the new methodology of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) was widely adopted to help operationalise participation in the 1990s. She describes this phase as a time when aid consumers came to be considered as 'citizens', whose rights to participate in decisions that affected their own lives and livelihoods became recognized as human rights, beyond merely operating as a mechanism to attain basic needs (Cornwall 2000).

This rights-based approach to development, coinciding with the end of the Cold War, helped to shift priority to the most deprived and excluded (Green 2012: 23). The approach rejected the depiction of people in poverty as passive recipients of charity, rather positioning them as 'active subjects of their own development, as they seek to realise their rights' (Green 2012: 24). Green has argued that the state and other development actors should seek to build citizens' capacity to realise their rights, striving to empower citizens to be able to make decisions and act on them 'by guaranteeing the essentials of a decent life: education, health care, water, sanitation, protection from violence, repression or sudden disaster', as well as access to information and technologies (Green 2012: 24).

For, according to Green, powerlessness goes hand in hand with poverty, denying people the ability to control critical aspects of their own lives:

Poverty is a symptom of deeply-rooted inequalities and unequal power relationships, institutionalised through policies and practices at the levels of state, society and household. People often lack money, land, or freedom because they are discriminated against on the grounds of one or more aspects of their personal identity (class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality) - constraining their ability to claim and control the resources that allow them choices in life. (Green 2012: 24)

Given the compelling argument that powerlessness and poverty are closely related, explored further later in this chapter (p43), the need to facilitate participation, to empower or re-empower people who are impoverished to be involved in decision-making about their own lives and livelihoods, may be considered a particularly important stage in the process of freeing people from the tyranny of inter-generational poverty and disadvantage. If settler states like Australia were to acknowledge an obligation to actively re-empower Indigenous peoples disempowered by colonisation, dispossession and institutionalised discrimination, then participation might also be recognised as a vital piece of the puzzle required to tackle long-standing Indigenous disadvantage and improve Indigenous lives.

### **Typologies of participation**

Various typologies have been developed to theorise participation, its purpose, extent and relationship to power. Arnstein's eight rung ladder of citizen participation (**Figure 1**), devised in 1969, has continued to be important in participation literature. Its beauty lies in reminding us to think about where power resides and how the powerful may manipulate processes, pretending to provide longed-for or demanded citizen participation, when the underlying purpose may be to placate people or engineer their support (Arnstein 1969). Arnstein's ladder was devised at a time of significant left-wing activism in the late 1960s, when students and other citizens strove to empower themselves to challenge and overcome the influence of what they saw as oppressive, hierarchical and all-powerful conservative institutions such as churches, governments and universities. The ladder attempts to define various outcomes that may ensue when 'nobodies' or 'have-nots', as Arnstein described them, attempt to make target institutions and power-holders responsive to their views, aspirations and needs, and those power-holders respond (Cornwall 2011: 3-18).

Of manipulation, positioned on her bottom rung, Arnstein says power-holders may, for example, employ individuals in order to co-opt or placate them as activists, citing instances of mayors privately boasting about hiring militant black leaders so as to muzzle them and destroy their credibility with the black community (Cornwall 2011: 6-7). Further up Arnstein's ladder

are levels of citizen power with increasing degrees of decision-making clout. Partnership, for example, requires power sharing: parties may agree to share planning and decision-making responsibilities through structures and processes like 'joint policy boards and planning committees' (Arnstein 1969 republished in Cornwall 2011: 13).

**Figure 1: Arnstein's ladder of participation, 1969 (Cornwall 2008: 270)**

Citizen Control	Citizen Power
Delegated Power	
Partnership	
Consultation	Tokenism
Informing	
Placation	
Therapy	Non Participation
Manipulation	

Since Arnstein's time, others have developed more complex typologies to describe different scenarios in the negotiation of citizen participation. White's typology of interests (Figure 2; White 1996) is an example that focuses attention on how and why participation is implemented, to what ends, and its impacts on various parties with different interests at stake. The typology ranges from nominal or instrumental forms of participation through to representative and transformative processes. Where power lies, and how much influence 'those on the receiving end' have is again a crucial variable defining each form of participation.

**Figure 2: White's participation typology of interests (adapted by Cornwall 2008)**

Form	What 'participation' means to the implementing agency	What 'participation' means for those on the receiving end	What 'participation' is for
Nominal	Legitimation – to show they are doing something	Inclusion – to retain some access to potential benefits	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency – to limit funders' input, draw on community contributions and make projects more cost-effective	Cost – of time spent on project-related labour and other activities	As a means to achieving cost-effectiveness and local facilities
Representative	Sustainability – to avoid creating dependency	Leverage – to influence the shape the project takes and its management	To give people a voice in determining their own development
Transformative	Empowerment – to enable people to make their own decisions, work out what to do and take action	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Both as a means and an end, a continuing dynamic

Source: Cornwall 2008, adapted from White 1996.

### **Policymaking and community outcomes derived at different levels of participation**

Many analysts identify that as the level and quality of participation achieved by 'the poor' within development projects designed to assist them increases, improvements in effectiveness and related positive outcomes can accumulate rapidly: from efficiency gains to sustainability, and even empowerment of individuals or whole communities (White 1996; Cornwall 2011). Likewise, as the level and quality of Indigenous participation in policy decision-making increases, benefits may accrue to both policy implementation outcomes as well as to Aboriginal governance, empowerment and wellbeing (Hunt 2013b, 2013a).

According to White's participation typology of interests (**Figure 2**), 'nominal' participation for 'display' (sometimes referred to in the Australian context as 'lip service consultation') has little benefit to either policy outcomes or community empowerment, however benefits accrue to policymaking processes quite quickly when slightly higher levels of participation are offered. For example, 'instrumental participation', a type of participation governments or aid funders may offer communities in order to maximize the 'efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability' of their financial investments (Cornwall 2000), may facilitate the commitment of free local labour, goodwill, contacts, resources and facilities. Locals may feel compelled to donate these inputs in order to achieve the desired outcome, such as a new facility or service for their community. However instrumental participation tends to come at a cost to communities, time for example might be taken away from paid employment, housework and leisure ((White 1996: 8) without significantly empowering individuals or communities. In fact, efforts contributed without a sense of being able to have any real control or influence over final decisions made may be *disempowering* for individuals, who may feel their only power to assert an influence is to withdraw their participation from processes altogether (or threaten to do so, as occurred in the case study, and will be discussed in Chapter 7). At the next level of 'representative' participation, potential benefits to both policymaking and community empowerment outcomes increase; the sustainability of benefits becomes more likely as local communities are given 'a voice in determining their own development' and therefore are able to 'influence and shape the project and its management' (White 1996; Cornwall 2008).

Beyond this, participation at the very highest level described by White is seen as potentially 'transformative' (White 1996), for the very process of community members participating in decision-making about policy problems, working out and implementing solutions to overturn social injustice and improve lives, has potential to empower people who have long been disempowered by colonisation, dispossession, discrimination or poverty, and who are now

able to take control over decision-making that will affect their (collective) futures. This type of empowerment also has potential to contribute toward longed-for healing processes within Aboriginal communities, as will be discussed later in this chapter. In addition it may bring about positive social enhancements described in the literature as increasing 'social capital', whereby the social glue that enables more inclusive and supportive, dynamic social relationships within a community is strengthened (Labonte 1999).

In White's analysis, participation at the transformative level is described as both 'a means and an end, a continuing dynamic' (White 1996; Cornwall 2008). White explains how transformative participation works:

The idea of participation as empowerment is that the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions, and taking collective action to fight injustice is itself transformative. It leads on to greater consciousness of what makes and keeps people poor and greater confidence in their ability to make a difference (White 1996: 8-9).

The potential for participation to deliver 'greater confidence', referred to by White in this quote, is similar to the idea of increasing collective efficacy, a concept I will return to later in this chapter.

According to White, empowerment is also 'usually an agenda controlled from below' (1996: 9). She identifies that while supportive outsiders may facilitate empowerment, or even aim to bring it about, such as by positioning themselves to 'work in solidarity with the poor', these others cannot bring it about, for 'empowerment must involve action from below' (White 1996: 9). Ife too emphasises that empowerment must be claimed and achieved 'from below' (Ife 2010). For the particular dynamics of power that inevitably exist in governance contexts mean that those who hold power are unlikely to be inclined to devolve or divest it to others, who may instead find they have to wrest power or claim it for themselves. There is a significant difference between being consulted or informed on an issue and holding actual power within decision-making processes. The latter involves having the 'clout' or say to drive or influence important decisions, such as how activities will be carried out or investments made within a policy or program context. This aspect of the literature supports arguments for the importance of Australia maintaining a strong Indigenous sector, able to advocate for Indigenous rights and Indigenous-driven agendas, goals and aspirations, as will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

## Unpacking participation

In her 2008 attempt to unpack meanings, models and practices of participation as they have developed over time, Cornwall reminds us that participation can be broad, deep, shallow or narrow, depending on who is involved, what participation is about, how often, at what stage of planning processes it takes place, and to what ends it is applied (Cornwall 2008). She points out a contrast between spaces for participation that are invited, and spaces people create for themselves, by their own initiative, such as networks of neighbours or workers, women's groups or social movements. Cornwall clarifies that invited participation is usually structured and owned by those who provide it. So, in each case, it is important to consider who is initiating participation, for what purpose and how that participation is being framed.

Cornwall also reminds us that it is unrealistic to expect that every person will participate, so 'optimum participation' is a more appropriate goal (Cornwall 2000). This brings into question the issue of representation, for *uneven* participation may in fact deepen the exclusion of those already marginalized within a group or community. Consideration needs to be given to who has access to power and voice within communities. Special provision may need to be made, with advocates able to speak on behalf of certain groups, like young children, older people, or certain families with less power and influence.

Most importantly Cornwall emphasises that being involved in a process is not equivalent to having a voice, for:

Voice needs to be nurtured. People need to feel able to express themselves without fear of reprisals or the expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously (Cornwall 2008: 278).

Cornwall continues:

Translating voice into influence requires more than simply effective ways of capturing what people want to say; rather it involves efforts 'from above' and 'from below', with authorities that are responsive, institutional changes to allow responsiveness, and political will to convert 'professed commitment to participation into tangible action'. From below, there is also a need for strategies to build and support collectivities who can continue to exert pressure for change (Cornwall 2008, p278).

Cornwall's analysis of participation draws out many interesting threads that enhance our understanding of the various aspects of participation, in ways that will be usefully applied to interpreting this thesis' case study findings.

## **What is participation for? What difference does it make?**

This section considers the potential benefits and outcomes of participation and what difference it might make for those involved in its processes.

### **Participation for empowerment**

In her 2013 report, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights emphasises that from a human rights perspective 'participation must be premised on empowerment as the ultimate goal' (Carmona 2013: 16). Human rights cannot be achieved while people are burdened by the multiple, crippling and disempowering effects of poverty. On the relationship between poverty and power, she explains that:

Lack of power is a universal and basic characteristic of poverty. Poverty is not solely a lack of income, but rather is characterised by a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatization, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which all mutually reinforce each other. Powerlessness manifests itself in many ways, but at its core is an inability to participate in or influence decisions that profoundly affect one's life, while decisions are made by more powerful actors who neither understand the situation of people living in poverty, nor necessarily have their interests at heart (Carmona 2013: 4-5).

To overcome the abject powerlessness that often attends poverty, Carmona emphasises the importance of participation, identifying it as both a fundamental human right and one that underscores the achievement of all other human rights. She clearly expounds, in the following excerpt from her report, the transformative potential of participation for people who have been disempowered by poverty and the multiple exclusions that accompany it, allowing them to 'exercise their voice to influence relevant decision-making processes':

Conceived as a right, participation is a means of challenging forms of domination that restrict people's agency and self-determination. It gives people living in poverty power over decisions that affect their lives, transforming power structures in society and creating a greater and more widely shared enjoyment of human rights.

Rights-based participation is particularly necessary in order to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised people can make their voices heard, because of its principled foundations of dignity, non-discrimination and equality... (In) contrast to some supposedly 'participatory' processes that are pro forma,



tokenistic or undertaken to give predetermined policies a veneer of legitimacy, rights-based participation aims to be transformative... (Carmona 2013: 4-5)

The World Health Organisation's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health recognized participation as a vital expression of 'inclusion, agency and control', critical for social development, health and well-being (WHO 2008: 18). Indeed, participatory processes underlie community development approaches that are increasingly advocated in the health sphere for their potential to 'empower' or 're-empower' people who have been disempowered and contributing to 'improved individual and collective health status as people gain greater control over their lives' (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005: 152). This empowerment process may be particularly important for people suffering ongoing effects of colonisation and dispossession, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.

According to a report from the World Health Organisation, empowerment ought be seen as an action-oriented concept that focuses on removing formal and informal barriers and transforming power relations between communities, institutions and governments (Wallerstein 2006: 18):

It is based on an assumption of community cultural assets that can be strengthened through dialogue and action. It is exercised in various domains, from personal through political and collective action. Empowerment has sometimes been used interchangeably with community capacity, or social capital, though, unlike social capital, empowerment focuses on power relations and intervention strategies (Wallerstein 2006: 18).

Empowerment is described as including both processes and outcomes, and the empowerment of marginalized people is considered to be an important outcome in its own right as well as an intermediate outcome on the pathway to reducing health disparities and social exclusion (Wallerstein 2006).

### **Power within participatory processes**

Cohen and Uphoff draw our attention to significant differences in the way power can be shared, transferred, or withheld within participatory processes. For the level of power transferred affects whether a particular participatory process will be experienced by participants as 'simply a formal action with little meaning' or rather, might become 'an activity which allows the individual to gain greater control over situations that would alter his or her

life' (Cohen and Uphoff 1980: 224-225). This section considers the various dimensions in which power operates, including those that are frequently concealed from view.

In analysing power within participatory governance processes, Gaventa identifies various dimensions (spaces, levels and forms). He advocates that attention ought to be paid to how the spaces for participation are created and under what circumstances these are denied. This analysis helps us to consider how and where power is operating within policy interactions. In addition to the invited, claimed or created spaces for participation identified by Cornwall, noted earlier in this chapter, it is useful to consider that the majority of decision-making spaces remain 'closed', whereby important decisions which affect the lives of marginalised people continue to be made by the powerful (governments, aid agencies and funding institutions) behind closed doors, 'without any pretence of broadening the boundaries for inclusion' (Gaventa 2006: 26). Critics have identified recent high-level bilateral government decision-making on Indigenous policy in Australia to be taking place 'behind closed doors' for example; meanwhile contemporary Australian governments rarely involve Indigenous participation in decision-making about how or where service funding for Aboriginal people should be allocated to Indigenous organisations and communities; vital decisions that frequently affect their very ability to survive (Kagi 2014; Altman 2014). Some notable recent exceptions, however, are participatory policy innovations being introduced in NSW via the Local Decision Making initiative, and in South Australia via the Aboriginal Regional Authorities initiative.<sup>6</sup>

Veneklasen and Miller identify that there are often unseen mechanisms of power at work that shape the effectiveness and potential outcomes of citizen participation. The authors distinguish between forms of power that are visible, hidden or invisible (Veneklasen and Miller 2002). *Visible power* refers to observable decision making, such as via visible and formal rules, structures, institutions and procedures; *hidden power*, on the other hand, relates to the way that powerful people and institutions maintain their power by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda; while *invisible power* is described as the most insidious of the three dimensions, for problems and issues are not only kept from the decision-making table but also from the minds and consciousness of different players involved

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<sup>6</sup> NSW Government's Local Decision Making initiative is designed to enable increasing levels of Aboriginal control of decision-making over time, and is part of a larger suite of OCHRE policies developed via Aboriginal community consultations by a Taskforce over a 2 year period; South Australia's Aboriginal Regional Authority initiative, developed via participation and co-design, aims to 'enable Aboriginal self-determination, local decision making and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal people based on local priorities' (Price Waterhouse Indigenous Consulting 2014: 1). It remains to be seen whether these initiatives will be genuinely participatory. In the past, during the Self Determination policy phase, ATSIC had also been moving towards a greater role in policy making.

(Veneklasen and Miller 2002). This third level of invisible power has also been described as 'internalisation', for the way it 'shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation':

By influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people's beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the status quo - even their own superiority and inferiority. Processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe (Gaventa 2006: 29).

In order to enable participation to be more inclusive and for people to be enabled to exercise their rights - to optimise participation in other words - particular strategies may be necessary to counter the forces of invisible power that can hold people back. Examples may include skill training to build confidence and political awareness, education about citizenship and rights, or action research processes that may raise consciousness and help to 'transform the way people perceive themselves and those around them, and how they envisage future possibilities and alternatives' (Gaventa 2006: 29; Veneklasen and Miller 2002). Improving the skills and capacities people need to participate has been described as vital to enable and promote their 'ability to analyse and confront the structures of oppression and power relations... to identify the root causes of their marginalization and to take action (individually or collectively) to make claims and realise their rights' (Carmona 2013: 17).

Particular methodologies and mechanisms of participation have been developed and applied in international contexts to enable impoverished and marginalised people/citizens to be better equipped and capable of taking part and benefitting from their participation, as will be outlined in the next section.

## **Major methodologies of participation**

### **Participatory Action Research and social learning**

Advocates of participatory approaches in the fields of health and education frequently turn to the ideas of Paulo Freire, whose 3-stage methodology for 'empowerment education' would importantly inform development of later models: Robert Chambers' Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and the research-oriented application known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). Freire's 3-stage methodology was repeated in cycles as the basis of empowering education processes: 'The first step is listening to understand the felt issues or themes of the community. Step two is participatory dialogue about the investigated issues using a problem-

posing methodology. Step three is action on the positive changes that people envision during their dialogue' (Wallerstein and Bernstein 1988: 382). Within the cyclical processes of PAR, dialogue, action and analysis can strengthen community assets and enable social learning over time. This concept of social learning is one that expresses the type of collective learning that may take place when investigative processes are carried out by an oppressed group about their situation, especially when this involves repeated processes of dialogue, listening, acting, analysing, and learning more (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001). Such dynamic, ongoing participatory processes have potential to allow new forms of local knowledge to be brought to the policymaking table, expanding awareness of the nature and causes of local problems, and enabling more innovative solutions to arise. Australian governments and their agencies frequently use processes of one-off or cursory, extractive consultation that have been identified as unlikely to be sufficient for this type of social learning to take place (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001: 76).

### **Empowered participation**

Fung and Wright's concept of 'empowered participatory governance' has identified particular success factors and elements that were present within four studied experiments in participatory governance in the United States, Brazil and India. The two Chicago examples are particularly relevant to the current research, for their focus was trying to address complex social problems associated with poverty and crime, carried out via devolved local decision-making power over policing and public schools within two marginalised black neighbourhoods. Processes are described as 'empowered' because, unlike many advisory panels, public hearings or consultation groups, decisions generated by these empowered processes directly determined the actions of officials and their agencies. Deliberative processes involved formation of committees made up of local residents and officials. The most important feature of the decision-making model was that all participants had 'rough equality of power, for the purpose of deliberative decision' (Fung and Wright 2001: 25). A number of other key design features of the empowered participation model included that the experiments involved:

- addressing a specific area of public problems;
- deliberation relied on empowered involvement of ordinary citizens and officials in the field;
- each experiment attempted to solve problems through processes of reasoned deliberation;
- decision-making power was devolved to local units; and

- these local units, though authorised to be locally powerful in terms of implementation of decisions, were not autonomous, but rather remained formally linked via resources and structured relationships to supervening levels of state institutions (Fung and Wright 1999; Fung and Wright 2001).

The notion of 'co-production' within service delivery contexts involves similar power-sharing ideals to Fung and Wright's empowered participation model (Holmes 2011; McKenzie et al. 2008) as the goal is delivering public services via an 'equal and reciprocal' relationship between professionals (Harris and Boyle 2009: 11), service users and other involved community members, a notion that has also been tested within policy making contexts (McKenzie et al. 2008).

### **Participatory Rural Appraisal**

In the field of international development Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and related Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), are terms used to describe suites of distinctive visualisation methods applied in development settings to draw out and draw upon local knowledge in poor rural settings where development projects are being planned. PRA incorporates tools that enable visual and diagrammatic analysis, such as maps, rankings, scorings, calendars and metrics done by groups of people and accompanied by discussion. The methods are designed to enable villagers with low literacy to participate in and contribute to the processes of knowledge production. PRA has been widely critiqued and debated in the development literature (Cornwall and Pratt 2010). One key purpose identified by many practitioners of PRA is that it ought to lead to empowerment of some kind for the individuals and collectives involved, as people gain confidence in expressing their views and knowledge in public and as they identify the resources and potential in their community, gaining 'courage to make approaches to authorities with plans or demands' (Cornwall Pratt 2009: 12). Criticisms of PRA practice have included that it is too hasty in its analyses, not giving local people enough time to reflect and learn and become 'empowered' by the process, or on the other hand, that it is too slow and demanding on the valuable time of hard-working people, disrupting their lives and livelihoods with usually no recompense (Cornwall and Pratt 2009: 11). The diverse criticisms of PRA highlight the great variety of modes of and different settings for its application, however the continued use of such practices in development contexts reinforces the ongoing appreciation of the value of local knowledge and involvement in planning for local projects.

## **Deliberative processes**

This section considers what deliberative processes may bring to participation in terms of alleviating a number of identified risks. Various analysts have cautioned practitioners of participatory processes about the dangers of 'reifying local knowledge and treating it as singular', for there is a danger of 'blotting out difference and with it the possibility of more pluralist and equitable solutions' (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001: 75). Others have queried whether small-group participatory processes are any more fair than other kinds of governance and decision-making, for the 'voices of minority, less educated, diffident, or culturally subordinate participants are often drowned out by those who are wealthy, confident, accustomed to management or otherwise privileged' (Fung 2004: 5). Certain liabilities that can affect participation have been identified, including that 'parochialism, lack of expertise and resource constraints may impair the problem-solving and administrative capabilities of local organisations relative to centralised forms' of governance (Fung 2004: 5).

Deliberative processes involving structured reasoning, in which people offer proposals and arguments to one another, may offer valuable solutions to the valid criticisms and concerns about participation raised above. For deliberation offers opportunities to guard against oversimplification in participatory processes, ideally enabling diverse views to be expressed and respectfully challenged by others, and achieving greater legitimacy in the outcomes of joint decision-making that may ensue. Processes of deliberation can involve speech-making and other forms of communal dialogue as an opportunity for free challenge, critical appraisal and analysis of perspectives and proposals put forward within a participatory process.

Deliberation is reflective of Habermas' model of 'ideal speech', in which listeners are at liberty to question validity claims of speakers in a process which can lead to shared agreement and the heightened legitimacy of decisions and actions which have been tested (Wenzel 1981). Habermas' model has been applied to conceptualisations of leadership as a facilitation rather than imposition (Fryer 2011), which in turn resonates with consensus-driven decision-making and facilitative leadership modes often recommended or preferred within Indigenous contexts (Hunt 2013b, p6). Fung and Wright also advocate 'decentralised' deliberative processes of decision making, which involve people close to the points of action, who hold intimate knowledge of relevant situations, offering useful information and jointly discussing alternative solutions. Such processes can drive learning for all parties involved, and can break down barriers between stakeholders who might otherwise be opposed, enabling solutions to be forged that parties are more readily able to accept and commit to (Fung and Wright 2001: 26).

## **Four key positive outcomes of participation identified in the literature**

A meta-analysis of 100 case studies of participation in 20 countries, including development projects and governance processes, was conducted by Gaventa and Barrett (2012). The study identified four key positive outcomes of participation, that:

- it helps form/create better citizens, people who are aware of their rights to participate in the first place, and are more confident in their ability to do so;
- it builds more effective participation practices, increasing capacities for collective action, deepening networks and solidarities;
- it contributes better development outcomes and creates more responsive and accountable states, enabling greater realisation of rights; and
- it can contribute to more inclusive and cohesive societies, bringing new voices and issues into the public arena and enhancing social cohesion across groups (Gaventa and Barrett 2012)

### **Importance of local associations**

Of various types of strategies to enable citizen participation identified in Gaventa and Barrett's study, local associations stood out as playing vital roles as vehicles to drive development and democratic outcomes in participation, being highly correlated with the positive participatory outcomes they identified (2012). Other participation strategies, like social movements (orchestrated campaigns seeking to claim rights or challenge policies through various forms of public action) or formal participatory governance mechanisms (such as participatory budgeting in Brazil and Argentina, innovations in public deliberation in Canada, or government-supported schemes for community participation in the United Kingdom) were associated with less positive participatory outcomes (Gaventa and Barrett 2012). This important finding about the particularly positive role and impact of local associations in participatory processes justifies a special focus on the role of Indigenous organisations within the Australian context, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Comparison of participation in 3 contexts: international development, participatory governance and Indigenous policy making**

As reviewed in this chapter so far, participation has been well theorised in the realm of international development over four decades, and more recently in participatory governance since the 1990s. A comparable body of analysis of participation occurring in the context of Indigenous policymaking is continuing to emerge.

Before moving on to consider literature relevant to the particular context of participation in the sphere of Indigenous policymaking, this section makes a comparison of key characteristics and factors affecting participation in the three key contexts addressed in this thesis: international development, participatory governance and Indigenous policymaking.

It has already been noted that a strong emphasis on applying processes of participation in international development and participatory governance contexts have converged in the past two and a half decades, to the extent that meta-analysis of participation experiments by Gaventa and Barrett examined examples drawn from each within the same study (2012). As this thesis sets out to draw on analysis from the two international contexts to extend analysis and understandings of participation in the Indigenous policymaking context, it is helpful to compare the features of the three different contexts at this stage.

**Table 1** on the following page compares some of the key characteristics and factors affecting participation in these three contexts, revealing many similarities. For example, Indigenous policymaking and international development both usually involve cultural difference and participation therefore takes place in cross-cultural environments. Participatory governance is typically affected by class or caste divides and frequently also occurs in countries where particular ethnic or cultural groups have been particularly marginalised. This means all three contexts involve certain challenges typical of intercultural environments, requiring cultural awareness and measures to assuage communication challenges. All three contexts attempt to address issues of poverty and disadvantage, with a goal in each context being to increase the likelihood that rights may be recognised and achieved via participation. Each context has a focus on development and solving social problems; international development programs may be more likely than the other two contexts to be taking place within violent or corrupt political environments.



**Table 1: Comparison of key characteristics of participation processes in three different contexts<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Indigenous policy making</b>	<b>International development</b>	<b>Participatory governance</b>
Cultural difference: participation takes place in cross-cultural environment	Cultural difference: participation takes place in cross-cultural environment	Class difference, may also be a cultural or caste difference, but not in all cases
Eg: residents of remote Aboriginal communities participate in local planning processes offered by federal/state governments, towards improving local service delivery	Eg: residents of communities in developing nations take part in community development projects offered by international NGOs and supported by global aid donors	Eg: residents of impoverished or troubled neighbourhoods take part in participatory governance processes with local authorities; requires some level of power in local decision-making being devolved to local committees
Poverty/disadvantage	Poverty/disadvantage	Poverty/disadvantage
Relevant to Indigenous collective rights	Relevant to human rights	Relevant to political participation rights
Development focus, and /or focus on solving social policy problems	Development focus, and may involve navigating environmental challenges, operating within violent or corrupt political environments	Development focus, and /or focus on solving social policy problems
Remote communities see government as distant and out of touch with local realities; perceive low level accountability by governments to Aboriginal people in terms of meeting their needs; little accountability for outcomes delivered in return for public investment	Participants see development agencies as distant and out of touch with local realities; may perceive state institutions / governments as corrupt; perceive low level accountability by development agencies for the outcomes delivered and aid dollars invested	Citizens see government/the state as distant, out of touch and sometimes corrupt; perceive low level accountability to meet the needs of disadvantaged / impoverished citizens
Strong local focus by Aboriginal communities, who demand a say in decision-making that affects their lives; culture match an essential success element for programs. Government focus on high level bilateral policy and strategy, while place-based policy trials target remote locations; responds to identified crises of Indigenous disadvantage and dysfunction	Ground-up, local focus and importance of culture emphasised within community development approaches; community participation considered vital to processes in this sphere; development projects part of national and global aid strategies	Local focus of participatory governance exercises. Programs tend to be described as experiments in 'citizen engagement'; responds to crises of democracy and demands from constituencies for more say in decision-making that affects their lives

<sup>7</sup> Compiled from Hunt 2013b; COAG 2009; Gaventa 2008; Fung and Wright 2003; Narayan et al 2000; Chambers 1999; World Bank 1996.

**Table 1** reveals that in all three contexts, participants may see organisations and state bodies that deal with them as unaccountable, distant, even corrupt. A strong ground-up, local focus of participation is common to all three contexts, and in each case participatory processes are established in response to particular identified crises: of Indigenous disadvantage or dysfunction, of large-scale poverty in developing nations, and of democratic process, whereby constituencies are demanding more say in decisions that affect their lives. The similarities reflected in the comparison table suggest that theories developed and lessons learned in the international contexts of development and participatory governance may also be salient to analysis of participation in the indigenous space.

Despite many similarities between Indigenous and international contexts identified in Table 1, it must be acknowledged that there are significant differences too, principally relating to the colonised space that Indigenous people inhabit. Additional factors affecting participation in Indigenous policymaking include: that displacement and disadvantage largely result from past oppressive policies implemented by the coloniser; and that participatory processes take place within an ongoing power dynamic of colonising and colonised people. These additional complicating factors are not usually present in situations of international development and participatory governance contexts.

## **Part II: Why participation may be valuable in Aboriginal policymaking**

An extensive body of participation literature from international development and participatory governance contexts has been surveyed in Part I of this chapter. Whilst this does not specifically highlight or distinguish outcomes of participation experiments relating to indigenous peoples, Table 1 has revealed many similarities to be drawn between the situations of Aboriginal people in Australia, who are seeking their rights of participation in policymaking, and those of both impoverished people in development processes and marginalised citizens taking part in democratic governance processes.

The second part of this chapter turns to a review of literature relevant to particular conditions and factors that may affect participation taking place in Indigenous policymaking contexts. It considers various imperatives to enable Indigenous participation in Australia, particular factors affecting participation in Indigenous community settings, and the potential benefits participation might contribute to both policymaking and to Aboriginal lives.

### **Participation as a human and Indigenous right**

The human rights-based approach to international development has been influential since the 1990s, focusing attention on poor people's rights as citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods (Cornwall 2000). Meanwhile, the UNDRIP has also now enshrined participation as an Indigenous right, along with other Indigenous-specific rights that accrue by virtue of first nations status (United Nations 2007). Participation is a particularly important right for Indigenous people worldwide, given that many native peoples continue to be colonised, dispossessed and disempowered within settler states.

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has recognised participation as a vital, if frequently overlooked, element necessary to achieve positive outcomes in the area of Indigenous policy making. He has identified a pressing need to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in decision-making that affects their rights, and for their ground-up involvement in the planning, design and implementation of services delivered to assist their communities (Gooda 2010).

The right to participate in decision-making that affects you is both a human right and an Indigenous collective right recognized in international law. Participation has also been identified as fundamental to the fulfilment of all other human and Indigenous rights, including the right to self-determination, as reflected in this statement from the Human Rights Council's

Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' 2010 progress report on the right of Indigenous people to participate in decision-making:

Indigenous participation in decision-making on the full spectrum of matters that affect their lives forms the fundamental basis for the enjoyment of the full range of human rights... at its core (this principle) enables indigenous peoples to be freely in control of their own destinies in conditions of equality. Without this foundational right, indigenous peoples' human rights, both collective and individual, cannot be fully enjoyed (Human Rights Council 2010: 3).

Participation is a right that has been acknowledged as especially important for people who experience extreme disadvantage or poverty, as it has the potential to be transformative and empowering, helping people to overcome the social, cultural and economic forces that replicate and maintain their disadvantage, poverty and powerlessness. However, as the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has emphasised, participatory processes may not be possible unless steps are taken to enhance the capacities of marginalized people to take part in participatory processes (Carmona 2013). This may involve promoting education and skills such as literacy, public speaking, and critical thinking that enable people to analyse and confront oppressive structures, to make claims and realise their rights; in addition it may be necessary to promote knowledge of human rights, and awareness of history, to enable people to understand power dynamics and the root causes of their marginalisation. Providing opportunities for these skills and knowledge to be acquired or developed may enable people to fully engage in participatory processes. For, according to the Special Rapporteur, participation ought not to be 'extractive or instrumental' but rather premised on the ultimate goal of empowerment: 'aimed at building the capacity, social capital, confidence, rights awareness and knowledge of people living in poverty' (Carmona 2013: 16).

The UNDRIP confers on Indigenous people the 'right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves' (United Nations 2007: article 18). It includes the right to 'determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development' and the 'right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them' (United Nations 2007: article 23).

The Expert Mechanism's 2010 progress report on participation points out that the UNDRIP is not the first time the right to participate has been acknowledged. Rather it is reflective of an

evolving expression of participation as both a *human* right, within a range of prior international human rights instruments (Universal Declaration Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child), and as an *indigenous* right via other conventions (ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989, which however is not ratified by Australia). However the UNDRIP importantly draws together, expresses and extends these rights in relation to Indigenous peoples, building on work that has contributed to understandings of the 'content of the right of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making' through international law, regional jurisprudence and interpretation of the Conventions over time (Human Rights Council 2010: 8). In particular, participation is recognised in the Declaration as a fundamental right that underscores a range of other related indigenous rights: to self-determination, including autonomy and self-governance; to free, prior and informed consent in negotiations with the state over matters that affect them; and to express not only individual but also, importantly, *collective* Indigenous rights (Human Rights Council 2010).

The Expert Mechanism's report on participation emphasises a distinction made within the UNDRIP, that indigenous people hold rights to participate that are both internal and external: the former refers to their right to autonomy or self-government over internal and local affairs (United Nations 2007: article 4), while the latter is their right to participate, *if they so choose*, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the state, and in all decisions affecting them and their rights (United Nations 2007: articles 5, 18, 19). This clearly describes a distinct political, social and cultural status for indigenous peoples and their right to maintain and participate in distinct, separate institutions, and that, as indigenous nations and peoples are also embedded within broader state environments, that indigenous peoples are also entitled to participate fully within those broader spheres, according to their choosing. It is important to note that the UNDRIP emphasises the Indigenous right to 'choose' participation in external or 'mainstream' social life, for this is different to the assimilatory force or coercion applied by Australian governments in the past and again today, which assumes Aboriginal people can and should be made to join in the mainstream market economy, even if this necessitates moving off country and thereby dislocating from community and culture<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> In March 2015 Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott attempted to justify the withdrawal of services from remote Western Australian Aboriginal communities, which may see them closed down, by saying that Australian governments should not be expected to 'foot the bill' for Aboriginal people's 'lifestyle choices' if they choose to live in such remote locations. These comments were slammed by Aboriginal leaders as disrespectful and ignorant of the deep spiritual and cultural connections Aboriginal people

### **Indigenous trauma and the role of participation in healing processes**

Participation and its potential to empower may also be critical to healing processes for people affected by various forms of trauma. The complex social problems that afflict many Indigenous communities in Australia are increasingly being understood as the impacts of trauma, experienced individually and collectively, by Aboriginal people as a direct result of the experience of historical and contemporary colonisation and its ongoing impacts (Krieg 2009; Day et al. 2012). 'Collective trauma' is a term used to describe community-wide impacts of traumatic events like disasters, genocide or colonisation that can profoundly affect the relationships of individuals, families and whole communities. Ratnavale describes collective trauma as 'a reaction to the shock of being separated from a stable community (when) the bonds that link people together, which give them a sense of safety and security, are broken' (Ratnavale 2007: 1). Analysts like Krieg (2009) have begun to compare the experience of Aboriginal peoples, frequently affected by overwhelming grief, loss and trauma<sup>9</sup>, with that of communities affected by severe natural or protracted man-made disasters.

Given the chilling similarity between some of the identified impacts of collective trauma on post-disaster communities and the profound social problems/effects experienced by many Aboriginal peoples in Australia, analysts have begun turning to post-disaster literature for ideas about how best to respond to what may be described as the ongoing collective trauma of Indigenous Australians. However, it is important to clarify a distinction between the trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples and people in disaster situations, because impacts from colonisation have been long lasting and are continuous, as Indigenous people are continuing to live colonised lives. While the impacts of collective trauma-inducing events such as long-running civil wars, genocides and extreme natural disasters may endure for decades, colonisation is a process that does not happen at one moment in time, but rather it continues as a recurring experience for Indigenous people. The continuous assaults of colonisation and its attendant impacts, such as racism, poverty, criminalisation and disadvantage (Cowlshaw 2004) seem likely to make for a more profoundly traumatic experience.

Ratnavale describes the particular type of trauma experienced by Aboriginal people in Australia as 'chronic collective trauma' because it involves groups of people suffering over

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have with land over which they are custodians, which should not be reduced flippantly as an optional lifestyle choice (Griffiths 2015).

<sup>9</sup> The concept within grief theory of 'inexpressible rage' is also described by Day, Nakata et al (2012) as affecting Aboriginal communities, whereby anger that is unable to find a 'just' or socially acceptable outlet, can lead to violence, destructive coping behaviours and dysfunction.

extended periods of time(Ratnavale 2007: 2). Furthermore, he identifies that while causes of 'shared catastrophes' – those events that bring about collective trauma when 'whole communities are affected, life is threatened and people suffer' - can be caused by either natural or human-caused disasters, the latter may have a more severe impact because the 'perpetrator-enemy is human agency'(Ratnavale 2007: 2). On the other hand, researchers investigating factors underlying and contributing to Indigenous family violence have identified 'inherited grief and trauma' as a key factor, along with dispossession from lands and traditional culture, breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal lore, racism and vilification, economic exclusion and entrenched poverty, the effects of institutionalism and child removal policies and loss of traditional gendered roles and status (Victorian Indigenous Family Violence Task Force 2003: 6).

Aspects of grief theory have been found relevant to understanding the Indigenous experience, where 'inexpressible rage' is identified as particularly powerful for Indigenous men, who experience 'intergenerational grief and loss... as pervasive, generalised anger' passed on to each generation without a 'legitimate outlet' (Day et al. 2012: 108). Whilst anger is a normal reaction and part of adjusting to hurt or loss, inexpressible rage can occur when there is no culprit to be arrested and punished by authorities, but rather the 'state itself is the culprit', so that 'just rage' is forbidden from being expressed (Day et al. 2012: 108). Individuals may turn this rage upon themselves or family members, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational trauma within Indigenous communities (Atkinson 2002). In addition, Wanganeen's work on Indigenous experiences of grief finds that unrecognised losses can 'cause more damage and perpetuation of trauma for victims', such that 'uncovering them is an important aspect of healing' (Day, Jones, Nakata and McDermott 2012: 108). The inability or unwillingness of the state to acknowledge culpability in the damage and the suffering its actions have caused for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, may therefore itself perpetuate the depth of grief and trauma.

A range of common impacts from collective trauma has been observed in various contexts. For example, fundamental and lasting social consequences have been noted in Tamil communities as a result of protracted war in Northern Sri Lanka, where communities were assessed as being 'more passive, dependent, silent and mistrustful, and (displaying) less leadership' (Krieg 2009: 29). Common features seen in traumatized Australian Aboriginal communities have been identified too, including: deep mistrust of self, others, even family, self-directed violence, suicide, substance abuse and violence against women, unremitting grief, shame and humiliation, intergenerational conflict, role diffusion and leadership crisis (Ratnavale 2007: 3).

In post disaster communities there can also be a 'disruption of social norms and collective meanings', making it difficult for people to recover from the effects of individual trauma 'when the community on which they have depended has become fragmented and disconnected' (Krieg 2009: 29).

In the Australian context, Aboriginal academic Judy Atkinson has studied the enduring and trans-generational effects of trauma on Aboriginal people, identifying what she describes as 'intergenerational trauma', passed down from one generation to the next unless interventions are made to enable healing and steps toward recovery (Atkinson 2002). The traumas experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have come about as a result of 'multiple deaths and diseases, expulsions from home lands, loss of self-sufficiency and autonomy, the arbitrary removal of children and other assimilation strategies, unlawful incarcerations and cultural suppression' (Ratnavale 2007: 3). Canada's Aboriginal Healing Foundation describes a similar traumatic legacy for colonised Indigenous peoples in north America:

The experience of historic trauma and intra-generational grief can best be described as psychological baggage being passed from parents to children along with the trauma and grief experienced in each individual's lifetime. The hypothesis is that the residue of unresolved, historic, traumatic experiences and generational or unresolved grief is not only being passed from generation to generation, it is continuously being acted out and recreated in contemporary Aboriginal culture. Unresolved historic trauma will continue to impact individuals, families and communities until the trauma has been addressed mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2004: 3).

Meanwhile Aboriginal academic and social worker Sue Green has identified other types of injuries and traumas caused by the 'welfarisation of Aboriginal people' in Australia, since the time of the early colony and continuing today, advocating that decolonisation and 'de-welfarisation' may therefore be essential to healing processes (Green 2015).

According to Atkinson, healing interventions for intergenerational trauma may require creating safe places for people in a community to share the 'unspeakable' and to overcome trauma by reconnecting in relationship to others (Atkinson 2002). In this way healing can become a relationship and community-building exercise, indeed it is an important form of social participation. Culture is also identified in the literature as a powerful healing tool (Cooper 2011). The vital need for healing is frequently raised by Aboriginal people as something very



much needed for the improved wellbeing of Aboriginal communities/people, but which continues to be overlooked and insufficiently acknowledged by governments pursuing current policy agendas.

From a clinical psychiatric point of view, Krieg promotes the potential of exploring collective trauma literature to better understand and devise appropriate community-wide responses to trauma for Aboriginal people. In doing so he clearly signposts a differential context for Aboriginal Australians, stating that whilst disaster-related trauma may be extensive and long lasting, for colonised Indigenous peoples the 'time-span (is) over years and generations (and) there is no demarcated end to the trauma' (Krieg 2009: 31). Nevertheless, Krieg proposes that the depth of ongoing collective trauma in Aboriginal communities makes principles from the literature about communities that experience deep and long lasting collective trauma applicable (Krieg 2009: 31). Five essential elements have been identified in responding to collective trauma: 'promoting a sense of safety', 'promoting calming', 'promoting connectedness', 'promoting hope' and 'promoting a sense of self efficacy and collective efficacy' (Krieg 2009: 31). Although drawing on methods used to treat collective trauma in order to address impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal communities is a relatively new development, Krieg advocates that it may hold promise for those aiming to develop processes and programs for healing and improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples.

### **Efficacy and empowerment: participation as means and ends**

Efficacy and empowerment are related but distinct concepts; both efficacy and empowerment are identified as potential benefits arising from participation in decision-making. 'Self efficacy' describes a person's belief in his or her own ability and capacity to accomplish tasks or deal with life's challenges, while 'collective efficacy' refers to the sense that one 'belongs to a group that is likely to experience positive outcomes' (Krieg 2009: 31). This sense of efficacy is frequently lost when communities are overwhelmed by disasters, or in the case of Australia's Aboriginal peoples, living with the slow burning impacts of colonisation (Day et al. 2012). 'Empowerment', on the other hand, has been described as the increases in 'personal, group and social aspects of power and capacity ranging from leadership, resources and strengthened networks to critical thinking, trusting relationships and increased group participation' (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005: 152; Labonte 1999).

In the health sector, participatory processes underlie the community development approaches that are increasingly advocated for their potential to 'empower' or 're-empower' people who have been disempowered, contributing to 'improved individual and collective health status as people gain greater control over their lives' (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005: 152). This empowerment process may be particularly important for people suffering ongoing effects of colonisation and dispossession, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.

In addition to providing positive and satisfying experiences for community members to be part of setting policy agendas and improving local conditions, participation may provide both the means and ends to improve lives, as participation may contribute to the empowerment and healing of Indigenous communities affected by colonisation and dispossession. Self-efficacy and collective efficacy may grow within a community when participation processes are noticeably achieving desired /identified goals and aspirations.

However what seems clear is that participation takes time, and its processes can be messy and complex, stretching beyond the timeframes and expectations that governments typically apply in policy contexts (Ife 2010: 18). There is a risk in doing participation poorly, of promising or raising expectations that effective participation will take place, but then delivering nothing of the kind; only offering nominal participation for example, such as carrying out 'lip-service consultations' with Indigenous communities as a form of 'display' (White 1996), so that governments can appear to be doing the right thing, but which leads to no real impact on planning processes and outcomes (NSW Ombudsman 2011). Rather than empowering and healing, such processes may in fact inflame old wounds and foster within Aboriginal communities further mistrust and suspicion of governments and their motives.

Where the promise of participation is offered but not adequately delivered, communities and their representatives may feel more frustrated and despairing than ever. Those who have experienced trauma have a well-acknowledged heightened risk of re-traumatisation (Krieg 2009). This vulnerability to further injury is something governments and other agents and agencies need to be well aware of in their dealings with Aboriginal communities. The outcomes of disingenuous interactions or hollow attempts at participation may well include re-traumatisation of people who feel their trust is being yet again breached.

## **Participation in Australian policy contexts**

### **Imperatives for government to facilitate or enable participation**

There are a number of imperatives that drive Australian governments to consider enabling Indigenous participation. Firstly, there is an imperative to fulfil international obligations. Secondly, as Australian governments strive to improve outcomes in the area of Indigenous policymaking, some senior government decision-makers have looked to best practice in international development, with participation being long established as a vital element of community development approaches implemented in international development contexts. Thirdly, a number of Australian policy analysts who label Indigenous disadvantage a wicked problem, have argued participation is needed to progress solutions.

### **International obligations**

Being a declaration rather than a convention, the UNDRIP (2007) is not a binding instrument under international law, however there are political and moral obligations that come with Australia's support of the Declaration since 2009. The Declaration recognises:

Indigenous peoples have the right to *participate* in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves...

(emphasis added, 2007: article 18); and

Indigenous people have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions (2007: article 23).

Interpreted in the context of the entire declaration, participation is the right of Indigenous peoples to be involved in decision-making that affects them, along with other dimensions: it is related to and reliant upon informed consent; is related to and contributes to self-determination; and it involves representation by Indigenous people's chosen institutions and processes (United Nations 2007; Human Rights Council 2011). According to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 'meaningful and effective participation of indigenous peoples in decision-making is of fundamental importance to their enjoyment of a large number of human rights' (Human Rights Council 2011: 19). So participation is a right that may be said to underpin the fulfilment of Indigenous rights in particular, but it also underpins fulfilment of many human rights held by all people.

The Expert Mechanism also clarifies that while the right of indigenous peoples to participation has been 'well established in international law', more recently the indigenous rights discourse has 'seen increased focus on rights not only allowing indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making processes affecting them, but to actually control the outcome of such processes' (Human Rights Council 2011: 17). This means that being consulted or listened to is not necessarily enough to fulfil the right for Indigenous participation, in the absence of any sharing or transference of power to control the outcomes of decision-making processes.

Participatory rights for Indigenous people also have a collective dimension. In international law, participatory rights confer a human right for all individuals to participate in public affairs, such as, for example, via electoral participation; however in the context of indigenous peoples, the right to participation 'also takes on a collective aspect, implying the right of the group as a people to have decision-making authority' (Human Rights Council 2011: 18).

If Australian governments wish to project a strong human rights reputation internationally, they need to consider enabling Indigenous participation in terms of the various dimensions described here. In addition, there are practical reasons why governments are urged to value and facilitate Indigenous participation in decision-making, as emphasised by the Special Rapporteur on Indigenous rights, who observes that:

...without the buy-in of indigenous peoples, through consultation, at the earliest stages of the development of Government initiatives, the effectiveness of Government programmes, even those that are intended to specifically benefit indigenous peoples, can be crippled at the outset. Invariably, it appears that a lack of adequate consultation leads to conflictive situations, with indigenous expressions of anger and mistrust, which, in some cases, have spiralled into violence. (Anaya 2009: 12)

In particular, the Special Rapporteur recommends States should also endeavour to ensure that Indigenous peoples have 'adequate technical capacity and financial resources to effectively participate in consultations' (Anaya 2009: 22). A central issue in the case study for Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (WGACWP) members, which will be explored more fully in Chapter 6, was the resourcing of administrative support to enable their work. Members also identified their need to be able to access technical advice, including specialist economic or business development advisors, which would have provided WGACWP members with better capacity to play their desired role as local decision-makers.

### **Internationally, best practice in community development involves participation**

It may be especially pertinent to consider crossovers between international development and Indigenous affairs in relation to participation in policy and practice because, according to research participant Roland, high level decision-makers who were the architects of the Closing the Gap Indigenous policy framework, including then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, considered the challenge of tackling Indigenous disadvantage to be a development problem, and CTG was therefore designed accordingly as an 'anti-poverty measure'.

In the international development sphere, participation of 'the poor' in planning and implementation of processes to improve their lives and livelihoods via processes such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), has become widely accepted over the past four decades (Chambers 1999; Stiefel and Wolfe 1994; Cornwall 2011). Though critiques of participation in international contexts have pointed to complexity and potential barriers to getting it right or doing it well (Botes and Van Rensburg 2000; Cornwall and Pratt 2010), participation is still widely considered to deliver a range of vital benefits to development processes and outcomes, aiding beneficiaries as well as donors.

Fundamentally, good processes of community development begin with participation of the people that initiatives are designed to help, and importantly this means ground-up processes that involve 'starting where the people are' (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005; Cavaye 2004 ; Chambers 1999). Community development processes aim to empower those affected by poverty (or disadvantage) by providing them with the skills to be actively and integrally involved in effecting change within their own lives and communities, such that local people may come to feel they own, adopt and actively promote achievement of outcomes; and projects may therefore also achieve long term sustainability (Cavaye 2004 5). A strong finding of a report into overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage by the NSW Ombudsman was the need for 'initiatives that promote and equip Aboriginal people to take control of their own future' (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 7). The report found that beyond focusing on service delivery and meeting needs (although welfare support is vital for the most vulnerable), that governments have a key role to play in facilitating the skill development needed for people to 'get ahead', and working in partnership with Aboriginal leaders to build the 'social and economic capital within Aboriginal communities' (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 7). Emphasis in community development is not just on improving economic and/or social *conditions*, but involves the community itself becoming a more vital, strong and functioning community (Cavaye 2004 2), building social capital in other words (Putnam 2000; Putnam 1993). Cavaye

explains that community development is more than a planning process, rather it is an 'ongoing learning process where new attitudes and networks develop from action and reflection' (2004:16). The participatory processes and principles of community development, of 'putting the last first' and empowering different realities from below, are well described in the literature as essential components of development best practice (Ife 2013, 2010; Fung and Wright 2003a; Chambers 1999). However, despite evidence of the potential benefits they may bring, truly participatory community development processes are rarely implemented nor attempted in remote Australia (Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba 2005).

### **Citizen participation as a strategy for solving wicked problems**

Moran describes participation in its most general form as the 'expectation that citizens have a voice in public forums of decision-making, such as planning events, organisational activities, policy formation, development projects and government programs' (Moran 2006: 66). In the sphere of public policy, Bishop and Davis identify that participation 'always involves a sharing of power between the governed and the government, and an increase in citizen involvement in decisions that might otherwise be the sole prerogative of government' (2002, pp 14-16). In fact, participation by citizens in processes of deliberation around policy making has increasingly been advocated as essential to solving certain types of policy problems that are identified as wicked problems. Importantly, Indigenous disadvantage is frequently described by governments and policy analysts in Australia as one of the nation's most enduring wicked problems (Colebatch 2006; Johns 2008; Australian Public Service Commission 2007; Hunter 2007). This makes understanding so-called wicked problems, how and why participation is advocated as part of their solution, pertinent to the concerns of this thesis.

Wicked problems were first defined by Rittel and Webber in 1973 as complex social problems with certain peculiar qualities: they are hard to define; unlikely to respond to top-down, authoritative decision-making by experts or governments; having multiple interconnected causal factors at play it may be hard to define where the problem lies; and no 'trial and error' is possible, as every implemented solution is consequential (Rittel and Webber 1973). The Australian Public Service Commission (2007) has defined other key features of wicked problems in the modern context:

- Attempts to address wicked problems may invoke unforeseen consequences;

- Wicked problems are often unstable, with evidence or constraints for addressing the problem evolving at the same time that policymakers are trying to address the problem, so policymakers find they have to focus on a moving target;
- Such problems are socially complex in that measures to address them usually involve coordinated action by a range of stakeholders;
- They hardly ever sit within the responsibility of any one portfolio or organisation, with solutions requiring actions by governments at different jurisdictional levels, as well as by private sectors and individuals;
- Wicked problems often involve changing behaviour or gaining the commitment of individual citizens, however traditional levers like legislation, fines, taxes or other sanctions may be insufficient; and
- Chronic policy failure may feature, where longstanding problems seem intractable, persisting despite decades of policy action (APSC 2007: 5).

Head identifies three key features converging within wicked problems: high levels of uncertainty in relation to risks, consequences and changing patterns, high level complexity of elements and interdependencies, and divergence of viewpoints, values and strategic intentions among key players (Head 2008: 103). Traditional public administration approaches are therefore not 'conducive to grappling productively with wicked problems', for within traditional bureaucracies, with hierarchical forms of organisation and systems of control, each department is like a 'cultural fortress' fostering specialisation in areas of professional expertise (Head 2008: 9). When combined with interest-group politics, this may lead to a 'muddling through' incremental approach (Lindblom 1959) that is ultimately unable to address truly complex issues. A key challenge in addressing contemporary wicked problems, according to Head, is to unpack and discuss entrenched differences, something that is most commonly achieved via 'mediated dialogue, seeking to explore common ground about longer term goals and directions, and (also) interim steps for moving forward together' (Head 2008: 105). This resonates with deliberative processes discussed earlier in this chapter (pp32-33).

Analysts advocate that, because of the divergence of stakeholder views and worldviews typical of wicked problems, exploring and developing effective solutions to them demands the participation of key stakeholders, including in particular, affected citizens (Holmes 2011; Colebatch 2006; Head 2008; Head and Alford 2008; Head 2007; Fischer 1993). Participant

involvement necessarily involves deliberation around ways to frame or identify the nature of problems, as well as to pose and debate optional approaches to ameliorate or solve problems. Such processes potentially bring diverse parties to a convergence that may feed positively into planning and implementation processes, particularly where the participants will ultimately need to be involved in the implementation. Even where parties have opposing and divergent worldviews, perspectives and interests, there is still potential for convergence about overarching goals and for compromises to be brokered via deliberation.

Wicked problems may be said to require more expansive and creative types of thinking, with opportunities for parties to share and learn more about problem areas from the knowledge input by others, and via deliberation and debate. This requires thinking outside the square and outside the limitations of siloed government department or agency remits. Participation, including by citizens most affected by the wicked problem, is advocated so that stakeholders both inside and outside government can have a say and a hand in shaping, understanding, owning and promoting policy decisions. Participation has been described as one way of 'breaking the cognitive constraints created by bureaucratic institutions' (Colebatch 2006: 119).

### **Is it appropriate to label Indigenous disadvantage a wicked problem?**

In analysing the types of complex and multi-factorial problems typically affecting Aboriginal communities, former Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Fred Chaney, who has had many years of work with Aboriginal communities since his time as Minister, emphasises a need for participation via 'bottom up' community involvement in program design and decision making; for these types of problems 'do not admit to solutions that do not involve those for whom the program is established' (Chaney 2012: 58). Despite a strong emphasis from many quarters about the need to mobilise affected citizens as participants in helping to solve complex policy problems that affect their lives (Holmes 2011), there is little evidence that participation is being adequately or satisfyingly achieved within Indigenous policy making contexts today (Hunt 2013a).

Whilst there is a logical and perhaps useful progression between naming Indigenous disadvantage a wicked problem and therefore identifying participation by Aboriginal people as a required element to drive towards solutions, careful use of this terminology is important. For the use of the 'wicked problem' label itself is problematic for Indigenous people because it positions them as the problem to be solved, rather than sheeting home responsibility for the complex and enduring problems that colonising non-indigenous governments have created *for*



Aboriginal people. Historically governments have paternalistically agonised over the 'Aboriginal problem' (Markus 1990: 2; Dodson 2000), as if issues of Aboriginal survival and welfare were an unpleasant and enduring burden on white shoulders. This admits little concern for root causes of these problems nor any thought for compensation or reparation to Aboriginal people for the injuries and harms wrought upon them and their cultures by colonisation.

While problems facing Indigenous communities are indeed complex, a number of commentators identify the complexity of Australia's three-tiered government system as the root cause of failure to address service needs for remote Indigenous communities, for it is governmental complexity which creates cross-jurisdictional gaps and overlaps, especially when combined with siloed agency operations (Sullivan 2011; remoteFOCUS 2012). These issues are discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

Importantly, as we shall see in the next section, a strong desire for participation is framed rather differently by Aboriginal people themselves, as something more fundamental than the instrumental role participatory processes might play in solving wicked problems, as advocated by many non-Indigenous analysts.

## **Participation in Indigenous policy making**

It's absolutely vital that the people whom governments are hoping to help in any given policy context are active players in the design and delivery of the policies and programs that result. (Calma 2009)

In his former role as Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma lamented that major reform processes like Closing the Gap, which have significant impacts on Indigenous people, continue to be developed and announced by Australian governments with very limited involvement by Indigenous peoples themselves (Calma 2008). He explained that people often told him they felt overwhelmed by the level and constant nature of change occurring within communities, such as changes to educational assistance and employment schemes, or the regionalisation of representative structures; that rolling reforms were often introduced 'before we even know the impact of the previous reforms'; and that this was often compounded by the impact of 'red tape' many communities have to deal with (Calma 2008). Despite hope since the National Apology and bipartisan support for the new Closing the Gap approach, Calma identified it as still a process of 'policy being 'done to' Indigenous peoples rather than being done in partnership with us' (Calma 2008).

While Closing the Gap seems to have signalled a renewal of energy and commitment from federal and state governments toward tackling shameful levels of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, Indigenous leaders have expressed concern about the rapid development of new policy reforms, shaped and implemented by governments without 'significant engagement and participation by Indigenous peoples' (Calma 2008; Gooda 2010). Addressing the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Australia's current Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda identified a pressing need to 'ensure the intrinsic right to full participation of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in policymaking processes' as a 'critical step required to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of Indigenous peoples' and that states must recognise, endorse and treat Indigenous people as substantive players and major stakeholders in the development, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policy and legislation that impacts on their health and wellbeing' (Gooda 2010: para.14). Gooda identifies that Australian governments typically interpret their obligation to consult with Indigenous people as a duty to 'tell us what has been developed on our behalf, and what eventually will be imposed on us' (Gooda 2010: para.16).

Gooda points out that the capacity of communities to engage in consultative processes has also been hindered by inadequate resources to effectively participate in decision-making processes as equals; as well as unreasonably short timeframes for responding to discussion papers and draft legislation that directly relate to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. On the other hand, Hunt has established that both governments and Indigenous communities need to build capacity before high quality engagement can occur - that Indigenous governance needs to be strengthened to allow communities to 'take a leadership role in their relations with governments, to drive agendas and programs that will improve their lives', and that governments also urgently need to build the capacities of their own staff to be able to build and sustain relationships with Indigenous communities, engaging in ways that are culturally competent, responsive and flexible (2007: 169).

### **Particular factors affecting participation in Indigenous community settings**

The next sections introduce some key factors identified in the literature that are critical to analysis of the way that participatory decision-making processes take place in Aboriginal communities. These include Aboriginal cultural tendencies toward intense localism, preferences for consensus-style decision-making, and critical issues related to the ways that representation, legitimacy and accountability are defined, valued and assessed within

Aboriginal contexts. In the first instance however, it is important to consider what is meant by the term 'community' so often used in Aboriginal contexts.

### **Critique of 'community'**

The term 'community', commonly used in the context of Indigenous Australians, deserves further consideration here. The term is used to denote both a particular location where Indigenous people live, and the people who live there. However it can be vague and idealised and is frequently invoked politically. The term community may be taken for granted as referring to harmonious and unified relationships between groups of people, when in fact Aboriginal communities are often affected by significant internal rivalries and animosities as a result of historical dispossessions and other ongoing pressures, as discussed later in this chapter (Maddison 2009; Morgan 2006).

Common use of the term community came into being at the advent of Australia's self-determination policy phase, when the Whitlam government introduced it as an alternative to the old assimilationist language of reserves and missions. Peters-Little describes that Aboriginal people 'play the community game' expected of them by governments who allocate resources, and that this significantly disguises the complexity of dynamics and tensions that can exist between families and groups of Aboriginal people who reside in the same location resources (Peters-Little 2000, 2006).

Acknowledging these valid critiques of the commonly used term, and the complexities it masks, the word community is nevertheless used in this thesis to describe location-based populations of Aboriginal people, such as people who reside in Walgett and its satellite settlements and who identify as themselves as part of Walgett's Aboriginal community.

### **Consensus-driven local decision-making**

In Australia Indigenous participation has previously been analysed in a number of different contexts, tending to focus on participation at regional rather than local community levels, and in certain key sectors, including planning and geography (Howitt, Crough and Pritchard 1990; Howitt 1993; Moran 2004, 2006) environmental and natural resource management (Hill et al. 2012), early childhood services and health programs (Hunt 2013b).

However, Martin and Finlayson identify a tendency among Australia's diverse Aboriginal peoples towards 'intense localism' (1996: 7), whereby the appropriate locus of power and responsibility in decision-making about issues affecting a local community is strongly believed

to be the local community itself. This tendency means that notions of representative democracy are less likely to be acceptable to Aboriginal communities, with individual community members more likely to consider themselves to have a direct right to be involved in consensus-based local decision-making processes, especially when the matters of concern will directly affect them or their families. A fluidity is also identified in the political and organisational processes of Aboriginal communities, whereby rights to participate or represent others in decision-making processes around particular issues are highly 'contextual' and dependent upon 'who is seen as having legitimate interest' in the particular issue and 'how much support they can command over that issue' (Martin and Finlayson 1996: 5).

In his analysis Howitt has suggested that participation in Indigenous settings goes beyond Western democratic notions of representation and delegation to include participation at an individual and household level (Howitt 1993; Howitt, Crough and Pritchard 1990). He identifies an Aboriginal way of thinking about participation that is 'based on consensus and direct involvement' at an individual level, 'quite different to democratic decision-making where majority groups, perhaps more accurately powerful vested interests, claim to represent fortuitously silent majorities' (Howitt 1993: 131). The Expert Mechanism on Indigenous Rights' progress report on the right of participation has also emphasised the importance of recognising consensus-style decision-making processes which are germane to many traditional communal cultures and societies (Human Rights Council 2011: 11-13).

Previous research has identified a fundamental aspect of Australian Indigenous societies to be the tension between autonomy and relatedness, whereby small group (family, small group, local organisation) autonomy needs to be balanced within wider relatedness (to clan, organisational allegiance or regional network) (Hunt and Smith 2007: 15). To manage this tension, a principle of subsidiarity can be applied to decision-making, which means that 'decision making within networks is devolved to the lowest level competent to make particular decisions' and higher levels of alliance only make decisions about those that cannot be made at lower levels (Hunt 2013b, p10). This also means that decision-making authority lies closest to the group most directly affected (Reconciliation Australia 2014), which resonates with the desire for localism expressed by Aboriginal peoples.

### **Achieving inclusive participation: the challenge of representation**

The Expert Mechanism on Indigenous rights' progress report on the right of participation identifies that certain forms of representative structures and processes for decision-making,

imposed on indigenous people by settler states/governments can be antithetical and even destructive to indigenous modes of decision-making (Human Rights Council 2011: 11-13). The UNDRIP specifies that indigenous peoples have a right to participate in decision-making 'through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions' (United Nations 2007: article 18). Clearly, however, processes of colonisation have often damaged traditional practices and knowledge of processes used to make communal decisions.

Cornell points out that governance is a critical area for development by contemporary indigenous peoples, ideally approached by drawing on extant community strengths and ways of managing decisions, adapting these to create new forms of decision-making processes that can respond to external circumstances while retaining cultural legitimacy internally for the community (Cornell 2008). In the Australian context Hunt agrees, finding a key challenge for governments and Aboriginal people is the complexity of Indigenous governance, which has often been 'historically severely disrupted and modified by western influences' and may need to be 'renewed and made both effective and culturally legitimate for contemporary needs' (Hunt 2013b: 11). This involves taking account of the mix of people and networked relationships, cultural expectations and protocols needed to give it legitimacy in Aboriginal eyes as well as meeting external expectations of governments and others for contemporary decision-making.

Australia's Indigenous communities are typically conglomerates of often rival clans and families, who traditionally had responsibilities for different lands and whose interactions would have been structured by strict kinship codes. The actions of governments and church authorities in relocating and containing people on reserves and missions, have forced breaches in the traditional codes, resulting in people from different areas living in unusually close proximity to one another on land that may or may not be traditional country for them. Walgett is one such community (Peters-Little 2000, 2006). Development of representative structures within such communities must take careful account of the need for inclusion of representatives from various families, clans, organisations and population sectors to maintain accountability and legitimacy in the eyes of the community as well as in terms of external dealings with governments. In addition, optimal participation may be severely curtailed when calls from Aboriginal community members for dedicated healing processes to help resolve deep animosities developed out of forced removals and resettlements and the compounding effects of poverty in the community, are not heeded.

Clearly representation is a key issue of importance, given the cultural sensitivity and complexity associated with Aboriginal decision-making processes. Cornwall and Gaventa identify that the 'positionality' of those who participate is important, and that 'great care must be taken not to replace one set of dominant voices with another - all in the name of participation' (2001: 75). In any situation there is a risk that participatory processes may reinforce existing power dynamics, further excluding those most marginalised within communities (eg: certain families, women or young people). The challenge of creating conditions for inclusive participation that enables involvement by representatives of all families and population groups within Aboriginal communities, is one that ought not be underestimated. Beyond the selection of suitable representatives, Aboriginal concepts of legitimacy and accountability define particular responsibilities that community members expect their chosen representatives to achieve. These include, for example, consulting and communicating regularly with community members, being able to demonstrate tangible outcomes and account for what is being achieved on the community's behalf (Reconciliation Australia 2014). These are additional areas of challenge to be taken into account when analysing the nature and effectiveness of Indigenous participation in policy making.

### **Living between two worlds: pressures of two-way accountability**

In Australia Aboriginal people often speak of the challenges of living between two worlds, describing various forces, influences and sometimes conflicting pressures and expectations they are exposed to as both Indigenous community members and Australian citizens (McCoy 2009). These forces have significant impact on the operations of organisations that make up Australia's Indigenous sector, which emerged in the 1970s, as discussed further in Chapter 2.

Some commentators consider the imposition of heavy regulatory measures by the state on Aboriginal organisations to be at odds with self-determination, given the pressures these measures impose and the tensions they often drive between Aboriginal cultural values and practices and what is expected by government authorities. Notions of two-way accountability - upward to governments and the Australian public and downward to community members and constituents - have been developed to help Indigenous organisations navigate the complex demands of accountability in the intercultural spaces they inhabit (Reconciliation Australia 2014, 2002), see **Figure 3**. The notion of two-way accountability is also relevant to

community governance and the expectations placed on members of Aboriginal governance bodies.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 3: The two-way accountability of Indigenous organisations and governing bodies**

This is ‘two-way’ governance—for example, where the governance of an Indigenous organisation has to work both internally and externally. Sometimes it can be hard to balance Indigenous cultural expectations with the requirements set out by government or funding bodies. Finding that balance and meeting Indigenous and non-Indigenous requirements means building governance that works well ‘two-ways’.



Source: Reconciliation Australia (2014) Indigenous Governance Toolkit.  
[www.reconciliation.org.au/governance](http://www.reconciliation.org.au/governance)

The Expert Mechanism’s report identifies that Indigenous decision-making processes, while varied and responsive to the modern world, should involve ‘inclusive and participatory processes’, and that, depending on the nature of the concern, ‘all community members are free to participate in discussions directly or indirectly... (and that) as much as possible, problems are solved by consensus using procedures that engage all affected parties and exhaust dissent’ (Human Rights Council 2010: 12). In addition, the report identifies that changes to the ways that traditional leadership and representation are appointed can be problematic. An example provided is where mainstream authorities or governments appoint Indigenous leaders - typically to advise them or provide a point of contact with communities for government information to be delivered about policy intentions (Gooda 2010: para16) - without providing resources ‘to support these ‘new’ traditional leaders’, nor train and expose them to the required legal and administrative understandings needed to make ‘quality

<sup>10</sup> The system of Community Working Parties in the Murdi Paaki region of western NSW was formalised over the period since the 1990s. Further discussion of this system and its formation takes place in Chapter 4, pp147-151.

judgements and decisions'. This can have significant negative impacts on internal Aboriginal decision-making systems, to the point where indigenous people lose 'confidence in or mistrust their own decision-making institutions' (Human Rights Council 2010: 13).

From a human rights perspective, three vital elements of participatory processes include:

- a) access to information, disseminated in culturally appropriate ways and in a timely manner, necessary to ensure indigenous people *can* participate in decision-making in an informed way;
- b) representation of diverse sectors of the community, including young people and women often excluded; and that
- c) decision-making structures have 'legitimacy and credibility', requiring leadership capacity to be nurtured and developed.

The two latter elements are identified as essential to enable indigenous peoples to 'feel properly represented, and that their voices are not only heard but taken into account' (Human Rights Council 2010: 22). They also go to the question of power within participatory processes, as already discussed.

### **Closing the Gap and the Indigenous engagement principle**

Indigenous engagement was established as one of seven core service delivery principles at the heart of COAG's National Indigenous Reform Agreement, also known as Closing the Gap (COAG 2008). These principles, which also included priority, sustainability, access, integration and accountability, were designed to guide COAG in the design and delivery of both 'Indigenous specific and mainstream' programs and services delivered to Indigenous people, and in the negotiation of high level National Partnership Agreements, that bind Commonwealth, state and territory governments to commit resources toward agreed objectives.

The Indigenous engagement principle established that 'Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services', with particular attention given to:

- (a) recognising that strong *relationships/partnerships* between government, community and service providers increase the capacity to achieve identified outcomes and work towards building these relationships;
- (b) *engaging and empowering* Indigenous people who use Government services, and the broader Indigenous community in the design and delivery of programs and services as appropriate;

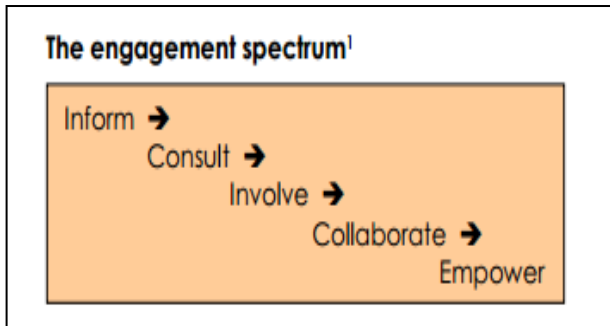


- (c) recognising local circumstances;
  - (d) ensuring Indigenous *representation is appropriate*, having regard to local representation as required;
  - (e) being transparent regarding the *role and level* of Indigenous engagement *along a continuum* from information sharing to decision-making; and
  - (f) recognising Indigenous culture, language and identity
- (emphases added, COAG 2008: D68).

The idea of a continuum of levels of Indigenous engagement -from information sharing to decision-making - which government officers are able to opt to implement 'as appropriate', was reinforced and explained within a suite of resources developed by FaHCSIA called *Engaging today, building tomorrow* (2011). Interestingly these resources borrowed directly from IAP2 (the International Association for Public Participation) however in doing so they substitute the word 'engagement' for 'participation' (compare **Figures 4 and 5** on the next page). That government was choosing to replace the term participation with engagement may be significant in light of the earlier discussion in this chapter (p35) about differential etymologies and contemporary meanings of these terms. Further detailed discussion about policy language and use of the terms engagement and participation by Australian governments will be made in Chapter 7 (pp272- 275).

Comparing **Figures 4 and 5** it is clear that IAP2's participation spectrum has been simplified as the Australian Government's engagement spectrum within its resource for public servants working in the area of Indigenous policy. According to the resource, engagement 'is not a single process or set of activities' but rather 'an ongoing process or conversation that builds trust and relationships', with the 'type of engagement activity used (dependent) on the nature of the program, policy or activity being developed or implemented...' (Australian Government 2011a). The Government's 'engagement spectrum' thus offers public servants and agencies a suite of choices in terms of the level of engagement they attempt to make with Indigenous communities, from fairly shallow forms of engagement such as informing or consulting through to involving, collaborating and empowering, where 'final decision-making (is placed) in the hands of the community, who decide what will be implemented' (Australian Government 2011a).

Figure 4: The Engagement spectrum



Source: *Engaging today, building tomorrow*, FaHCSIA 2011

Figure 5: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

iap2 public participation spectrum  
developed by the international association for public participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
EXAMPLE TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberate polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen Advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus-building</li> <li>• Participatory decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

Source: [www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/84](http://www.iap2.org.au/documents/item/84)

The resource *Engaging today, building tomorrow* provides no specific advice to public servants about how to negotiate or choose an appropriate level of engagement. This begs the question as to how public servants and policy makers discern what level ought to be offered or attempted, and what role or ability to choose the style and level of engagement Indigenous communities might be afforded within a given policy negotiation space. Clearly circumstances vary in each case, depending on a community's perceived governance capacity, the level of demand coming from the community for decision-making power, and the political

environment that affects governments' willingness to apply the time and staff resources needed to effect a particular level of engagement. In reality, it appears that engagement at the higher end of the spectrum is rarely attempted or achieved in Australia (Hunt 2013b), despite the consistent desire and demands of Indigenous people for decision-making influence.

### **Enabling Indigenous capacity to participate**

In evaluating the extent to which processes enabled the voice of key community groups in a regional partnership process, MacDonald and Browne found that the level of influence of local people depended on three aspects: a) their level of understanding and experience of the issues, b) personal capabilities, and c) the quality of the engagement processes (MacDonald and Browne 2012: 74). Capacity of Indigenous people locally to participate was critically impacted by English language proficiency, and importantly, low levels of literacy were also found to limit effective participation for those who felt confident to contribute, leading to a smaller number of 'highly competent people' being involved and therefore overburdened.

According to international standards of participation, the burden should not be on Aboriginal people to be up to the mark when negotiating and dealing with governments, but there is an onus on governments to help facilitate processes of participation and make efforts to meet Aboriginal people on their own terms (United Nations 2007; Gooda and Kiss 2013; Human Rights Council 2011, 2010). That governments have an obligation to support and resource capacity building amongst disadvantaged people to enable them to acquire the skills and capacities they may need to achieve their right of participation, is strongly emphasised by the Expert Mechanism on extreme poverty and human rights (Carmona 2013: 16). In addition, human rights mechanisms make it clear that governments should provide any necessary supports to aid communication within negotiations such as ensuring translators are available when inter-cultural exchanges take place.

In their evaluation, MacDonald and Browne found that the level of 'skill and capacity of service and program administrators in consulting the community' was a major factor in how well the community voice was 'facilitated and heard', that training in consultation and engagement processes was highly important, as well as 'cross-cultural training to build a bridge across cultures' (MacDonald and Browne 2012: 74). In implementing a partnership, a local governance body needed to get the right level of consultation, avoiding over-consulting the community on multiple issues. The evaluation also recognised the need for 'building trust that concerns and needs are being addressed when much of the early work such as planning is

lengthy and invisible to people', identifying that part of this involved 'addressing anger at a legacy of poor previous engagement and inaction' (MacDonald and Browne 2012: 72). Layers of representation were important too: in the case study evaluated by MacDonald and Browne, all 14 clans were represented on the local governance body, board meetings were open to the whole community, and particular groups were consulted by the governance body and relevant government agency concerning any projects that specifically related to them (MacDonald and Browne 2012: 73).

Janet Hunt's comprehensive issues paper on Indigenous engagement for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse identifies some important things communities may need in order to be enabled to participate more satisfactorily with governments in initiatives to improve their lives and livelihoods (Hunt 2013b, 2013a). In particular, there is a need for sufficient time to be allowed and facilitative support provided to enable Indigenous-driven processes; good governance on both Aboriginal and government sides is vital and optimal participation relies on there being a genuine attempt to share or devolve power over decision-making; ongoing relationships of trust are needed and the identification of shared goals makes participation possible (Hunt 2013b).

Indigenous community leaders identify the need for administrative and facilitative support to enable them to play their part; access to independent technical advice and resources to understand information provided and assist them to identify innovative yet feasible solutions to local problems; and finally, perhaps most importantly, that continuing investment needs to be made to 'strengthen governance and develop capacity of both Indigenous and government partners' for effective engagement (Hunt 2013b: 3). Importantly Hunt identifies that governments and other agencies engaging with Indigenous communities need to: 'provide very high-level leadership, as well as secure, adequate resources, and culturally competent staff capable of building trusting relationships... demonstrat[ing] flexibility and a willingness to be honest about resource or other limitations, and set achievable goals' (Hunt 2013b: 3).

## **Conclusion**

The key conceptualisations of participation from international development and participatory governance literature, outlined in this chapter, have been described in some detail as they will inform analysis and interpretation of the case study to come. The next chapter provides a further literature review pertaining to Australia's Indigenous sector, which plays a vital role in representing and advocating for Aboriginal communities, enabling Indigenous rights of participation in negotiations with governments and with mainstream Australian society.



## Chapter 2: Indigenous organisations as vehicles for participation

The Indigenous sector functions well in the context of the challenging needs of its member/client base and its relative lack of material resources. Its development in the last three decades is testimony to the *resilience* and *capacity* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their communities. It has acquired a unique position as both a provider of governmental services and an *expression* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identity within Australian society. Both of these aspects require support. (Sullivan 2010: 11)

In this quote from his report on Australia's Aboriginal community sector organisations, Sullivan recommends that this oft maligned sector ought to be better recognised, supported and encouraged in its capacity to fulfil what is a unique role, especially in rural and remote regions where few services are delivered directly by government. However, Sullivan identifies that governments have an extremely ambivalent relationship with the sector. A major contributor to this ambivalence may be that Indigenous organisations<sup>11</sup> typically play multiple roles within communities, such that organisations providing services are 'not well delineated from' those involved in communal governance and advocacy (Sullivan 2011a: 60). Organisations that depend upon receipt of funding from government to deliver local services may, for example, be outspoken and critical of the policies and programs offered or driven by governments. This means that whilst governments clearly need the many attributes Aboriginal organisations have to offer in the service delivery environment, and the organisations rely on government funding, there is often a high level of mistrust on both sides, and this results in Aboriginal organisations being 'denigrated and regarded with suspicion at the political level of government' (Sullivan 2011a: 60).

At the time this thesis was being finalised the federal Government announced substantial cuts to Indigenous community-based organisations (Kagi 2014; Davidson 2015; Wild 2015; Griffiths 2015; Behrendt 2015). Given the important role that such organisations are playing in both attending to and representing Aboriginal needs, aspirations and rights, this development is a significant concern. This chapter provides a review of the academic and policy literature about the history, role and status of Indigenous organisations in Australia, including some

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<sup>11</sup> An Indigenous organisation is one that is Indigenous controlled, based-in, or primarily serving, Indigenous communities, initiated by and Indigenous community or group, and governed by an Indigenous body (ANAO 2012a: 11).

comparative references to indigenous peoples' experience in other settler states, particularly Canada.

It considers the importance of Indigenous organisations as vehicles for indigenous advocacy and representative participation in decision making on behalf of Aboriginal communities. It explores the survival challenges Indigenous organisations often face and their struggles to gain recognition as legitimate participants in policy decision-making and negotiations with governments over Indigenous rights, whether this be at national, regional or local level. Identifying the unique role of Indigenous organisations in remote Australia, the chapter considers the impact that shifts in government approaches to service delivery have had on their viability and important role in servicing as well as representing the needs of their Indigenous members and clientele in negotiations and consultations with governments. Finally, the chapter discusses relevant findings from the case study, which observed delegates from Indigenous organisations playing key roles as members of the WGACWP, representing both the interests of their organisations and those of Aboriginal community members, from which their service clients and membership are drawn.

In addition to being important front line service providers to Aboriginal people, Indigenous organisations can also be vital advocates and representatives of community needs and aspirations. However the continued existence of such organisations in remote Australia is often tenuous: their client groups typically have high needs, basic resources can be scarce, outgoing costs for utilities such as power and telecommunications are frequently significantly higher than in urban areas, and the recruitment of skilled staff can be a major hurdle, exacerbated by insecure funding (ANAO 2012a: 60). Where Indigenous-controlled organisations are undermined or insufficiently supported in their work, their ability to also fulfil essential community leadership and representative roles, participating in policy decision-making processes on behalf of local communities, might also be curtailed.

### **Origins, extent and status of the Indigenous sector**

Historically a number of state-based, regional or national organisations have formed in Australia to promote the civil rights and welfare of Aboriginal people since the early part of the 20th century. Examples include the Australian Aborigines Progressive Association in NSW, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), and the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. Rowse points out that according to the ideals of assimilation, embraced during the formal policy phase of the 1940s to the 1960s (discussed in

Chapter 4, p128), governments felt it was 'a progressive development if Indigenous Australians learned to participate in voluntary associations' such as clubs and societies that were 'part of the Australian way of life'; however they were wary of organisations that drove political agendas or became 'vehicles for the assertion of... rights and identity' as the 1930s organisations had during the oppressive protection era (Rowse 2005: 217-218).<sup>12</sup>

By the decade of the 1970s however, in response to increasingly vociferous Aboriginal political demands, the watershed policy phase of self-determination was introduced in Australia, enabling the rise of what Rowse first dubbed in 2002 'the Indigenous sector'. Today this sector consists of thousands of publicly funded Indigenous organisations, described by Rowse as 'agencies of collective choice' and a 'defining achievement of the era of self-determination' (Rowse 2002: 17). Indigenous organisations have come to play a number of diverse roles for their communities, including as service providers, but also in areas of governance, advocacy, economic development, cultural maintenance and land management.

The Indigenous sector in NSW had its foundations in grassroots Aboriginal medical and legal organisations established in inner-city Redfern in the early 1970s, to service significant support needs of people from around the state arriving in Sydney to seek work and other opportunities. Charles Perkins' Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was another social support organisation, set up to assist people find accommodation and work and to provide social opportunities. Aboriginal medical, legal and other support organisations would progressively be established in other locations around NSW, occasionally as offshoots of the city-based organisations.<sup>13</sup> Today peak bodies and alliances of Aboriginal-controlled organisations support and advocate for their NSW members, who typically rely on funding from federal and/or state governments. National enterprises like the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), and regional enterprises like Murdi Paaki Enterprise Corporation, are funded to provide employment and other services to Aboriginal people in particular regions of the state. Another important element of the Indigenous sector in NSW is the system of Local Aboriginal Land Councils, established to manage land assets for Aboriginal communities in accordance with the NSW

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<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that what is identified today as a re-emergence or re-embrace of assimilation-style indigenous policy making and debate in Australia (Behrendt 2002: 34) has coincided with the devaluing the need for, and undercutting the existence of, a distinct indigenous service sector since the 2000s.

<sup>13</sup> In Walgett a branch of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs would be established with financial support from the parent body in Sydney, while Aboriginal medical and legal services were independently founded to service Walgett's Aboriginal population; later, in the 1990s the Dharriwaa Elders Group would be incorporated as an independent organisation, having first been auspiced by the medical service (these key organisations are discussed further in Chapter 5).



Land Rights Act in 1983, and which manage a significant portion of Aboriginal housing assets with limited resources. State-wide organisations like the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, established in 1977, continue to provide advice to government on Aboriginal education matters, operating via local volunteer branches across the state; meanwhile the growing capacity of NSW Aboriginal out-of-home care sector is increasingly important, given high rates of Indigenous children entering the child protection system.

A 2010 report by the Desert Knowledge CRC identified the Indigenous sector as a unique category within Australia's 'third sector' of not-for-profits and cooperative enterprises<sup>14</sup>. Report author Patrick Sullivan estimated there to be at least 5000 Indigenous organisations within Indigenous sector nation-wide, across distinct service domains including:

- Community-controlled Aboriginal Health Services
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Multi-purpose 'resource agencies' and outreach services targeting dispossessed town fringe groups and homeland communities
- Arts and media centres, radio and television broadcasting stations
- Community-controlled schools and education advisory or lobby groups
- Communal councils, holding and administering Aboriginal land, providing municipal type services
- Land councils, as statutory bodies or voluntary advocacy organisations
- Language research and maintenance centres
- Sports associations
- Environmental 'caring for country' collectives, such as ranger programs, and
- Communally owned pastoral and farm industry organisations (Sullivan 2010).

The proliferation of community service, governance and other types of Indigenous organisations since the 1970s, enabled via Commonwealth funding, created a 'nationwide network of Aboriginal community-controlled service organisations' (Sullivan 2011a: 4) which continues today. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this is sometimes able to be translated via allegiances into sector-based participatory blocks with more power to advocate to governments over decision-making and policy that affects Indigenous peoples and their rights; however in other regions and states, these organisational networks remain a relatively untapped source of Indigenous participatory power. Altman and Hinkson have identified the

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<sup>14</sup> Following Lyons (2001), not-for-profits and cooperative enterprises are frequently referred to as the third sector.

self-determination phase as the 'first comprehensive shift to recognise difference in positive rather than negative terms, and to put in place mechanisms by which Aboriginal people could pursue aspirations that differed from the mainstream' (2010: 186-187).

### **The problem of misrecognition**

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have consistently maintained their distinct identities and asserted the desire to be treated as more than just another minority group for governments to accommodate (Bradfield 2004). It is clear that Aboriginal people wish to be accorded due recognition and rights as the nation's first people and prior inhabitants of the land. However Australian governments have been strongly resistant to calls for recognition of the distinct status or difference of Indigenous peoples, a fact which is sometimes ascribed as being due to fears it would threaten national unity (Bradfield 2006) or that it might open the door to claims for expensive reparation and compensation. This contrasts with the recognition of distinct political status accorded indigenous peoples in other settler states like New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Comparing Australia and these other countries, Bradfield correlates Australia's significantly worse indigenous to non-indigenous 'gap statistics' (based on key socio-economic indicators for health, employment and education) with the Australian Government's unique misrecognition of Aboriginal peoples' distinct political status and an attendant lack of formal political autonomy afforded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Bradfield 2006: 80). In addition, Cornell has specifically identified the importance of distinct governance and control by Indian nations over their own affairs as a vital factor contributing to success in narrowing, if not yet closing, 'gaps' in the United States (Cornell 2008).

If the distinct political status asserted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were to be properly and formally recognised by Australian governments, this would enable them to be contemplated (by themselves and others) as separate entities, able to participate in people-to-people or nation-to-nation negotiations with governments and others about their rights and development aspirations. In his report on addressing Aboriginal disadvantage, the NSW Ombudsman has identified that 'Aboriginal people need the power to take responsibility for reshaping and creating a new vision for their communities' (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 7). However, the ongoing (and increasing, since the 1990s) denial of separate Aboriginal political recognition creates a lack of solid ground and status from which Indigenous peoples might argue or negotiate with Australian governments over their rights and to assume power over policy decision-making that affects them. Moreover, this lack of recognition of a distinct or

separate status of Aboriginal peoples has enabled the re-emergence over the past two decades of assimilationist tendencies in Australian policy making, with concepts of mainstreaming and normalisation replacing the principle of Indigenous self-determination (as will be discussed in Chapter 4, p130), and justifying the transfer of responsibilities for Indigenous service delivery out of Indigenous hands, back to mainstream bureaucracies who increasingly contract out Indigenous services to large non-Indigenous NGOs perceived to be less risky.

Whilst cross-country comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this research, some mention of the differential situation in Canada will be touched on in the next section by way of contrast. For the recognition of distinct status of Aboriginal Canadians appears to explain the different trajectory and fortunes of indigenous service organisations there under the influence of relatively similar economic trends (toward neo-liberalism).

### **Contrasting the Canadian service delivery experience**

Abele has pointed to the different outcome of the neo-liberal turn in Canada, compared with Australia (Abele 2012). Along with the Canadian federal government's focus on 'downloading and contracting out' from the 1990s onward, came the transfer of numerous programs and responsibilities to non-government organisations. The same impetus to contract out service delivery also happened here in Australia, however in Canada this process created opportunities that Indigenous people were able to seize, forming service delivery organisations that would be able to 'design, staff and control' services for Indigenous people, and taking over services that had been administered previously by federal departments. This, according to Abele, effectively created a service sector largely outside government that was however still subject to federal control via reporting requirements and evaluation, however, some organisations also developed 'strong capacities for providing policy advice' (Abele 2012: 192-193).

A neo-liberal turn in Canada had negative consequences in terms of lower levels of social spending and increased fragmentation of the federation, however according to Abele, it arguably also had some positive effects in 'creating the room for the development of a new bureaucratic architecture of improved service provision, by indigenous people for indigenous people' (Abele 2012: 193). At the same time, this period saw a shift away from federal thinking on social policy, from universal programs towards place-based programming (following the international trend, but with quite distinct outcomes in Canada given the vast size of the

country and diversity of indigenous peoples), allowing 'greater local discretion and control' and more 'sensitivity to local circumstances' (Abele 2012: 193).

By contrast, the increasing emphasis on mainstreaming in Australia undermines local control and the ability of Aboriginal people to be decision-makers in planning services to meet local needs and devising suitable solutions to local problems. If the self-determination period of the 1970s had enabled the flowering of Australia's Indigenous service sector, the neo-liberal period has coincided with the increasing denial of Indigenous collective rights towards a focus on individual responsibility since 1996 (Chappell, Chesterman and Hill 2009: 119). Meanwhile there has been an increasing denial of the benefits that distinct community-controlled service delivery can offer in terms of cultural engagement and enabling self-determination for Indigenous peoples.

### **Accessing participation: the power of organisational allegiances**

The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has identified that non-political Indigenous associations may play an important role in advocating the interests of indigenous people, representing them in dealings with governments, and making collective decisions on their behalf; and that regional, national or international alliances between Indigenous groups and organisations can be valuable in assisting them to 'use their collaborative positions to discuss common challenges and speak out collectively on fundamental issues that affect them' (Human Rights Council 2010: 21). Nevertheless, the Expert Mechanism acknowledges that Indigenous organisations can frequently find themselves 'overlooked or excluded from formal decision making processes' (Human Rights Council 2010: 21).

In Australia, organisations like AMSANT and APO NT<sup>15</sup> are good examples of peak bodies using their alliance to pool resources and jointly advocate policy positions to governments on behalf of their member organisations and respective constituencies.<sup>16</sup> However, where such

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<sup>15</sup> Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) is the peak body for Aboriginal-controlled medical services in the Northern Territory and a strong advocate for community-control over primary health care provision to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) is an alliance comprising the Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT). The alliance was created to provide a more effective response to key issues of joint interest and concern affecting Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, including through advocating practical policy solutions to government. APO NT is committed to increasing Aboriginal involvement in policy development and implementation, and to expanding opportunities for Aboriginal community control.

<sup>16</sup> In the Northern Territory peak bodies have had some success in attaining formal roles in planning processes: APO NT is a key representative in the Territory Government/NGO Partnership Group,

organisations are fiercely critical of governments and their policies, as is often the case, governments may be unlikely to willingly countenance or enable their role as formal participants in policy and decision-making processes.<sup>17</sup>

Australia's Social Justice Commissioner identifies that whilst there is great potential within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to represent communities, participating in decision-making that affects their rights, the constraints of funding and regulations can shackle organisations *from* participation:

There are currently hundreds of organisations that have been established by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to represent our interests. However, in most cases the reliance on government funding and the legislative requirements concerning purpose and accountability severely restrict our effective participation in the decision-making processes of those organisations, and the extent to which they are self-determining and self-governing (Gooda and Kiss 2013: 14).

The refusal of successive Australian governments to recognise Indigenous peoples or nations as separate political entities is identified by some commentators as highly problematic for the assertion of Indigenous rights (Bradfield 2006). This includes various fundamental rights that underpin the UNDRIP: self-determination, free prior and informed consent, and participation in decision-making that affects Indigenous people's lives, livelihoods and their rights. One of the most significant barriers to effective participation in decision-making by Australia's Indigenous peoples, according to Gooda and Kiss, is the 'exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the broader societal structures of Australia, including our national Constitution'. Debate over the necessity for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and if so what form it should take, is ongoing in Australia. Whilst Indigeneity has at times been recognised in Australia in relation to positive initiatives, such as Native Title rights and Indigenous cultural heritage, Australian governments have been inconsistent in their recognition of distinct Indigenous status which has frequently been negatively or expediently applied (eg: utilised to deny Aboriginal people ordinary citizen rights, to apply discriminatory

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established 2015 to provide leadership and facilitate relationships in the government and NGO community services sector, specifically working on strategies to reduce red tape and secure sustainable funding for Indigenous community controlled organisations; AMSANT is part of the NT Aboriginal Health Forum (NTAHF), a planning structure established to make decisions and provide strategic guidance on key policy and planning in the Northern Territory with the Commonwealth and Territory Health Departments, Prime Minister and Cabinet and Primary Health Network NT.

<sup>17</sup> The Congress of Australia's First Peoples lost its federal funding in 2015, and the national peak body for Aboriginal legal services, NATSILS, also faced defunding by the middle of that year, though a late announcement by government restored funding for the time being.

policy processes during the Northern Territory Emergency Response, or when distinguishing population groups as Indigenous and non-Indigenous to identify statistical disadvantage). In addition, Gooda and Kiss identify a significant barrier to participation arising from 'the often unnecessary over-administration of (Indigenous) affairs' (Gooda and Kiss 2013: 13), an issue that will be discussed further later in this chapter.

### **Participation via national representative bodies: the dilemma of ATSIC**

The formation of the National Congress of Australia's First People in 2010 is the nation's fourth attempt at forging a national representative Indigenous body to provide a voice and advice to Australian governments on high level Indigenous policy issues. Morgan describes the fate of the previous national bodies as 'experiments in Aboriginal governance' that foundered because they involved the state creating 'forms of representation that are alien to Aboriginal people' (Morgan 2006: 24). The three previous bodies - the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) and its successor the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC), established by the Whitlam and Fraser federal Governments respectively in 1973 and 1977, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) established by the Hawke Government in 1989 - were each created by governments as consultation bodies to assuage Indigenous political aspirations (or perhaps rather to 'contain' such demands, according to Bradfield 2006, p84). Each of these bodies has been described as to some extent 'impotent' due to their dependence upon government for funding, the fact that their ongoing existence was subject to control by the federal government<sup>18</sup>, and as there was never a requirement that governments would listen or heed the advice proffered (Bradfield 2006: 83-84; Tatz 1979: 48). In addition, the legitimacy of the various national Aboriginal representative bodies has been strongly questioned by Aboriginal people themselves, with many people harbouring 'deep suspicions of the idea of an institutionalised national Aboriginality' (Morgan 2006: 26). Morgan identifies that for all the 'problems and conflicts that have afflicted Aboriginal organisations... most indigenous people still want the primary operation of self-determination to be *local* rather than through remote national bodies' (Morgan 2006: 26). Low voter turn-outs seem to confirm this lack of faith in national representation. People living in many thousands of diverse, small to medium-sized indigenous communities across Australia may feel justifiably wary about being asked to 'confer authority on an individual who comes from outside their own community and with whom at best their kinship and even cultural bonds may be

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<sup>18</sup> Despite Bradfield's view that ATSIC was under federal 'control', it is acknowledged that ATSIC Councils did hold decision-making power and discretion over the allocation of at least a proportion of regional funding to Aboriginal communities.

tenuous... or non-existent' (Morgan 2006: 24; cites Department of Aboriginal Affairs report into the failures of NACC, p229).

ATSIC was unique in that, in addition to playing a representative or advocacy role for Aboriginal peoples, it was also assigned significant responsibilities pertaining to the administration of service delivery to Indigenous people. Bradfield has described these dual roles as 'often conflicting tasks' that 'would prove difficult to combine' (Bradfield 2006: 87). Whilst the creation of ATSIC was portrayed by many as a swing toward self-determination or self-government, others have described ATSIC as simply providing another service delivery arm of government (Maddison 2009). Many Aboriginal people accused ATSIC of being 'remote, in the control of white bureaucrats and out of touch with local needs' (Morgan 2006: 23). There is little doubt that the service delivery aspect of ATSIC's role made the organisation vulnerable to blame for the failings of government programs and service delivery to make headway within the challenging areas of policy it had inherited, and which have since remained challenging. According to Bradfield:

ATSIC continued to hover in the uncertain space between autonomy and state bureaucracy, with Indigenous office-holders within the organisation experiencing conflict between the different demands of their constituents versus the government' (Bradfield 2006: 88).

The ease with which the Howard Government dismissed ATSIC from the policy landscape in 2005 highlighted its lack of real power, legitimacy and independence from government as a national representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Immediately following the demise of ATSIC, Rowse asserted a belief that the Indigenous sector would survive the elimination of the national representative body and most of its associated regional councils, if for no other reason than governments 'need to engage with (Indigenous organisations) to formulate land tenure, deliver services and - sometimes - to deliver policy' (Rowse 2005: 226). Indeed, the Indigenous sector continues today, comprising thousands of mostly small and tenacious local Indigenous organisations, clinging to survival across the nation. Nevertheless there has been an increasing dissipation of Indigenous political energy across and between these organisations, as Beckett predicted would occur in the post-ATSIC era (Beckett 2004).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> To counter this dissipation in the Murdi Paaki region a deliberate strategy was implemented at the time of ATSIC being disbanded, to maintain the regional grouping and voice of western NSW Aboriginal communities by transitioning from Murdi Paaki Regional Council (ATSIC) to a Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA).

The emerging role of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples as a national representative body providing advocacy for Indigenous Australians today is distinguished from some of the risks that plagued ATSIC: it has avoided service delivery functions, and plans eventually to become an entity that is funded independently of government (Calma and Dick 2011). The Congress' website distinguishes itself as a body that does not:

- provide service delivery or funding for public programs;
- have representatives or memberships who are handpicked by government;
- depend upon the good will of parliament or the government of the day

(National Congress 2015).

However, the ongoing viability and capacity of the National Congress to play an active advocacy role on Indigenous policy issues will be tested, as Government ceased funding Congress before the national body reached its intended goal of independence (Harrison 2013; Altman 2014).

### **Unique role of the Indigenous sector in remote Australia**

Indigenous sector organisations offer important attributes governments need for the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development objectives. They offer:

local wisdom, community credibility, expertise acquired through practice, and not least the willingness of staff to work for less material reward and under more difficult conditions than public sector staff (Sullivan 2010: 7).

In addition, the advocacy role of the Indigenous sector positions it as 'the principal form of *engagement* between mainstream Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' today (Sullivan, 2010 p5). Representatives from local organisations have capacity to advocate for the needs and aspirations of local people from an informed perspective, to help governments to understand and frame problems, devise and embed suitable local solutions. Whether governments value and sufficiently foster the input of this expertise offered is another matter, but in the case study it was quite clear that strong willingness, capacity and drive to participate in decision-making processes was evident on the Indigenous side of the table.

Sullivan asserts that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs policymaking should recognise the importance of the Indigenous sector for three reasons. It is the critical ingredient in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's material security, an expression of



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander political identity, and an appropriate *modernisation* strategy with the evolution of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil society. (Sullivan, 2010, p4)

This idea of a 'modernisation' strategy is one that has been identified by some commentators (Altman and Fogarty 2010) as troubling, if interpreted in the sense of a need to coerce Indigenous people to forego traditional practices and cultural ways of life in favour of market oriented activities before disadvantage can be overcome and equality gained. The term 'normalisation' has been used to describe the project of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), for example, where the goal appears to be instilling the adoption of Australian mainstream values and cultural practices that may also be considered 'modern'. However, Sullivan's use of 'modernisation' in this context seems likely to refer to the ability of organisations to represent Indigenous people within the broader context of expectations and demands of modern Australian society and systems of governance, whilst preserving space for the cultural uniqueness and diversity of Aboriginal people to remain.

The notion of 'living in two worlds' often spoken about by Indigenous leaders, and of two-way accountability (Reconciliation Australia 2014; Hunt and Smith 2007), as already discussed in Chapter 1 (pp73-75), are pertinent to this understanding. Local Indigenous organisations may act as go-betweens in an intercultural zone, interpreting or translating community needs for governments and other external parties, as well as navigating the demands and requirements of governments and mainstream society to draw on funding and other resources needed to provide services to Aboriginal constituents in culturally appropriate ways.

### **Remote challenges**

The capacity of Indigenous organisations has been described as 'continually threatened by the fragile nature of government grant-funding cycles, consequent employment insecurity and low levels of remuneration' (Sullivan 2010, p.10). Indigenous organisations in regional and remote Australia are faced by numerous challenges that make it difficult for them to achieve their goals and provide services to their communities. These challenges include the high-level needs of community-members, and significantly higher outgoings for power and other utilities than in urban areas. A lack of ready access to resources can compound challenges faced by Indigenous organisations, such as IT support and infrastructure, accounting and other essential services and resources needed to run an organisation compliant with Australian governance

regulations. At times these issues may threaten the ongoing viability of Indigenous organisations.<sup>20</sup>

Recruitment of suitably skilled and trained staff is another area of considerable difficulty that faces many Indigenous organisations. Meanwhile many Indigenous organisations rely on piecemeal, short term contract funding from governments, that divert precious service delivery resources to onerous cycles of administration to apply for funding or report on its use.

Various commentators have identified that while Indigenous sector organisations are frequently undervalued, under-resourced and overburdened by reporting and regulatory requirements, they continue to play a vital role for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Sullivan 2010; Dwyer et al. 2009). Limerick agrees that Indigenous sector organisations are undervalued, pointing out that they regularly come in for an unfair share of public criticism, and that 'the dominant narratives in public discourse about Indigenous community organisations' tend to damn them for 'nepotism, factionalism and financial mismanagement' (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 45). Others concur in their concern over what seems to be an unnecessarily negative focus within mainstream media coverage, as well as in public policy debate, on the failings of individual Aboriginal organisations, instead of highlighting or focusing on the success stories, which are perhaps less newsworthy (McCallum, Waller and Meadows 2012; Hunt 2008).

### **Promoting Aboriginal control and self-determination**

The report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody<sup>21</sup> (RCIADIC, 1991) affirmed a vital role for Indigenous organisations in empowering Aboriginal people, towards overcoming the 'extraordinary level of domination' of Aboriginal lives by non-Aboriginal

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<sup>20</sup> In the Northern Territory, where there were previously 68 local government councils, many of which represented tiny communities of just 300 people, sweeping reforms were implemented in 2007 to amalgamate the councils into 9 large Shires. This action was justified as necessary to address serious concerns about the long term sustainability and ability of local councils with less than 2000 people to achieve economies of scale and maintain adequate levels of administration and service delivery (Sanders 2008) however the Shire amalgamations raise serious questions about how the significant needs of remote Indigenous communities will be represented and addressed going forward.

<sup>21</sup> Taking place in the late 1980s and reporting in 1991, the RCIADIC had a broad ambit to investigate the underlying social, cultural and legal issues associated with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders dying after arrest or conviction. Findings included over 300 recommendations, however there has been significant disappointment over the non-implementation of a large number of these, and that Aboriginal people continue to be significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Mosse 2004; Reconciliation Australia 2014). Many RCIADIC recommendations were specific to justice and incarceration issues; others identified actions to alleviate social injustices experienced by Indigenous Australians in a range of areas, given the Commissioners' view that these underscored the disproportionately high levels of criminal justice system engagement by Aboriginal people.

society, existing in Australia for more than 200 years. Removing this domination is imperative, according to the RCIADIC report, for the ongoing disadvantage of Indigenous people 'is the product of that domination' (1991: 1.7.6). It is important to note that the RDIADIC was a broad-ranging and in depth inquiry, whose findings were well respected and received by Aboriginal people, though not fully implemented by governments.

Praising the commitment and diversity of Aboriginal organisations, the RCIADIC emphasised the important role for the Indigenous sector in delivering appropriate services, representing needs and negotiating with governments to ensure the 'self-determination principle is applied in the design and implementation of any policy or program... which will particularly affect Aboriginal people' (RCIADIC 1991: recommendation 188). The RCIADIC report praised the vitality, diversity and tenacity of Indigenous organisations in the face of many challenges:

The variety is endless, the energy is enormous. Some of course, fail. What is surprising is not that some fail but that so many keep going and even those that run down often come up again. All of these are dedicated in their own way to the empowerment of Aboriginal people, to raising self-esteem, demonstrating the ability to exercise control of their own affairs, attacking the legacy of the past. Associated with this is a renaissance in many ways of Aboriginal culture. (RCIADIC 1991: 1.7.11-12)

Since the time of the Royal Commission however, Australian governments have swung further away from supporting or promoting ideals of self-determination and Aboriginal-control of service delivery toward neoliberal approaches that involve competitive tendering and 'mainstreaming'. Service delivery is typically outsourced into Indigenous communities by governments via contractual arrangements that frequently favour large external NGOs over small local Indigenous organisations. This approach threatens to undermine the already tenuous viability of thousands of Indigenous organisations across Australia.

### **Undermining the Indigenous sector since the 2000s**

Commentators describe a 'continued decline' in the Indigenous sector over the past decade as governments have 'adopted policies that prefer competitive tendering over self-management and self-determination' and large NGOs with greater resources increasingly have beaten Indigenous community organisations on competitive tenders for provision of government services (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 45-46). Olga Havnen, former coordinator-general of remote services in the Northern Territory, sheets the blame for this situation to government cultures of 'risk intolerance' whereby massive expansion of NGO involvement in service delivery by non-Indigenous or multinational NGOs takes place in communities regardless of

these organisations' *effectiveness* to engage and deliver services to communities. Havnen described Aboriginal control of service delivery in many areas as having 'withered on the vine' as a result of successive governments choosing large NGOs for service delivery ahead of smaller indigenous-led organisations, despite evidence to show that community control over service delivery in Australia and overseas may achieve better results (Martin 2013; Havnen 2013).

As noted in Chapter 1, the World Health Organisation has identified that having control over one's life and destiny is an important but often overlooked social determinant of health and wellbeing (WHO 2008). A number of Indigenous peak bodies in Australia's Northern Territory also emphasise the vital importance of 'community control' over decision-making that affects Indigenous lives and futures, including via community-controlled service delivery organisations (Cooper 2011; APO NT 2012a). If Australia's indigenous people have been collectively denied their distinct political rights as a consequence of colonisation, then seizing the right to collectively control decision-making that affects their own futures may be fundamental to communal wellbeing. Indeed, there is some Australian evidence that empowerment and increased control achieved via community development approaches in Aboriginal communities contributes to social determinants of health (Martin 2005; Hunt 2010).

Cape York leader Noel Pearson identifies how, in the context of the mainstreaming agenda dominating Indigenous service provision in the decade since the abolition of ATSIC, with government policies favouring outsourcing and competitive tendering, large non-government welfare agencies and private not-for-profit organisations have moved into the space, squeezing local and regional Indigenous organisations out. According to Pearson:

Mission Australia, the Smith Family and an array of mainstream bodies have pushed indigenous organisations to extinction. Their vast scale and capacity to win large government tenders mean local and regional Indigenous organisations cannot compete (Pearson 2013).

Pearson focuses on the aspect of *leadership*, which he sees as vital to changes to improve Indigenous lives, as a core element, which arises from Indigenous organisations. He argues that:

Although there is a role for mainstream NGOs and private providers... (governments) have failed to understand that while you can outsource government services you cannot outsource leadership. No amount of services to indigenous people will change

things without leadership. This leadership must come from the people whose lives and futures are at stake. (Pearson 2013)

Strong local indigenous organisations may provide the context and structure for empowered leadership to emerge, able to play the vital role of advocating and representing needs of community constituents, and participating in vital decision-making processes. In order for this to take place, it is important that Indigenous organisations are sufficiently resourced and supported to extend their capacities, without being unnecessarily burdened by red tape nor hobbled by remote resource challenges (Dwyer et al 2009; Morgan & Disney 2006a).

In a type of catch-22 scenario, the Auditor-General has identified that where government program managers detect risk in funding Indigenous organisations, due to capacity constraints, a primary mechanism to manage such risks involves increasing regularity of monitoring via reporting and linking payments with milestones. However 'reporting-related issues were the *cause* of non-compliance in 98% of funding agreement breaches' (emphasis added, ANAO 2012a: 83). The Auditor-General recommends instead that reporting burdens be reduced to a level 'commensurate with the actual level of risk' involved, and that governments need to 'take a longer term view on the nature of potential risks to service delivery', seeking to build local capacity and to address and reduce risks over time (ANAO 2012a: 83). This is preferred over taking paths that evade risk but disempower Indigenous people by either undermining or overburdening local Indigenous organisations.

Some stakeholders have lamented that governments have, until now, chosen a path of overlooking Indigenous organisations due to acknowledged capacity limitations, rather than taking a path to invest time in building capacity to enhance community-controlled service delivery (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, Section 5.8.3). Nevertheless, the importance of community-controlled service delivery, with its dual benefits of strong community engagement and opportunities for Indigenous employment, continues to be advocated by Indigenous community leaders (APO NT 2012a, 2013).

### **Need to cut red tape and build capacity in Indigenous service delivery organisations**

Whilst the principle of 'mainstreaming' service delivery to Aboriginal people has been an increasingly influential theme in Australia's Indigenous policymaking landscape since the Howard era (1996-2007), a 2012 report by the Auditor-General made clear that, based on expenditure levels alone, Indigenous organisations continue to play an important role in the overall service delivery model for Indigenous programs and services (ANAO 2012b: 56). The report argued, however, for considerably more emphasis by government departments on

facilitating capacity development for organisations in this sector, rather than focussing unduly on risk-aversion via the imposition of (onerous) reporting requirements.

Capacity development is needed, according to the Auditor-General, to ensure sustainability and reduce potential risks to the viability of organisations in this sector over time (ANAO 2012b: 80). His report points out that the Service Delivery Principles for Indigenous Programs and Services, articulated in the NIRA (2008, Schedule D, especially the 'Sustainability Principle'), commit COAG to investing in the service delivery capacity of Indigenous organisations to ensure long-term sustainability of programs and services. However, the Auditor-General identifies a number of systemic failings in the way governments resource this service sector that create risk and capacity issues for these organisations.

Identifying the overarching delivery framework as 'complex and dispersed', the Auditor-General's review found that a 'pattern of many programs of small value' was also reflected at service delivery level, where grant funding from a range of sources was dispersed over a large number of organisations. Over 50 government departments were identified as allocating Indigenous funding during one year (2009), and over the course of a five year period 2007 to 2012, FaHCSIA, as the largest Australian government department dispersing expenditure in this area, was found to have funded 820 Indigenous organisations, required to submit 20,671 performance, financial and acquittal reports (ANAO 2012b: 57). This high level of reporting impacts both the 'capacity of organisations to undertake the activities for which they have been funded... and places an administrative burden on government departments to assess the information received' (ANAO 2012b: 55-56).

Beyond onerous reporting requirements, the Auditor-General identified a range of other serious capacity constraints to the Indigenous sector, including: the proliferation of short term project-based funding allocations which ignore related overhead costs, while making no allocation for organisational capacity development; and that amounts allocated to fund services are often insufficient to cover actual costs of services provided (ANAO 2012a).

More than two decades earlier, the report of the RCIADIC had made specific recommendations to government about ways to radically improve the ways in which Indigenous organisations were being funded and regulated. To ensure stable and adequate funding to enhance Aboriginal service delivery the RCIADIC had recommended: triennial block core funding; funds allocated through a single source with one set of audit and financial requirements and 'the

maximum devolution of power to the communities and organisations to determine the priorities for allocation of such funds'; and that regulation procedures be adequate but 'least onerous and as convenient and simple as possible for the Aboriginal organisations and communities to operate' (RCIADIC 1991: recommendations 190-201).

Despite the many challenges such organisations face, Indigenous-controlled service delivery has a number of potential benefits to service outcomes. In addition, delivery of programs and services through the Indigenous sector in remote Australia can importantly provide employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people, even though salaries and service conditions in these organisations are typically lower than the public service or commercial organisations. Sullivan identifies that the Indigenous sector can offer unique career paths for people of ability within communities who may have had limited access to formal training, and who may be able to 'work their way to managerial levels and then influence in national forums' (Sullivan 2010: 9). It is noted, however, that capacity development in Indigenous organisations is frequently stymied by the fact that employees are less likely than others to have 'opportunities for off-the-job training and skill development because of scarce funds and the day-to-day urgency of the problems they deal with' (Sullivan 2010: 9-10).

Nevertheless, as Pearson has argued, the Indigenous sector does provide an effective training ground or launch pad that can enable the growth of Indigenous leadership and therefore participation in decision-making at regional and national levels (Pearson 2013).

### **Reasserting Indigenous control over service delivery: negotiating with NGOs**

One strategy designed to address these issues in the Northern Territory has been an innovative process to re-empower the Indigenous sector, developed via a set of 'NGO Principles' drafted collaboratively by Aboriginal organisations and NGOs, led by APO NT, ACOSS and other peak bodies (APO NT 2013). The NGO Principles establish fundamentals of partnership-centred approaches – about how NGOs should go about working *with* Aboriginal organisations and communities, to recognise and enhance existing capacity, ensure Aboriginal control, and support growth of strong viable local organisations, including devising succession and exit strategies, instead of competing in the same space as Aboriginal organisations for scarce funding and effectively, thereby, undermining them.

The NGO Principles encourage large organisations - what Havnen calls the NINGOs and BINGOS (Havnen 2013) - to consider carefully the impacts of their presence in the Indigenous service delivery system on local Indigenous organisations already operating in the same environment. NGOs are advised to recognise the value of local Indigenous organisations, to consider negotiating, partnering and mentoring relationships with them where possible, and working to grow and support local capacity rather than competing with and undermining the viability of local organisations.

The willingness of at least 19 large NGOs to sign on to the NGO Principles from the time of their establishment (APO NT 2013) speaks to the acknowledged value local Indigenous organisations bring to such partnerships, for being Indigenous and locally embedded, these organisations offer unique levels of community engagement and access. Whether the NGO Principles are adhered to, and are able to make a difference towards the reassertion of Indigenous control over service delivery as intended, will no doubt be closely monitored by Indigenous peak bodies in the years ahead. While large NGOs may sign on to cooperation and capacity building for smaller Indigenous partners in good faith, there is a tension between delivering these ideals and the competitive environment in which these organisations must operate. That is not to say that cooperation is impossible, for there is a strong heritage of capacity building between organisations in sectors like early childhood (Whalley 2006). However it seems likely that greater rewards for and reduced disincentives to collaboration are needed before the desired effect of the NGO Principles will be realised.

Indeed there is a unique and important role for NGOs that act in partnership with Indigenous organisations to invest and contribute their expertise in ways that are impossible for governments, however such partnerships need to be guided by Indigenous priorities not by outsider priorities and solutions. Behrendt points out that given the 'vast and complicated' problems facing Indigenous communities, the non-government sector has potential to play a key role, as it is not 'burdened with the expectations and responsibilities of governments' which need to respond to public opinion polls (Behrendt's foreword, in Hunt 2010: vi). However, Behrendt advises that NGOs must support and be guided by Indigenous aspirations; that, unlike governments, NGOs must not expect rewards for short-term investments; that 'listening, flexibility and innovation' are required to enable long-term solutions; and, most importantly, that trust is the 'essential oil in this relationship' (Hunt 2010: vi).



### **Starting where the people are: advocating community development approaches**

According to White's typology and theory of participation, ground-up initiatives and participation by local communities may be necessary in the design of measures to counter social injustice and enable transformative participation that leads to local empowerment (White 1996). Proponents distinguish between processes that involve bottom-up local problem framing and solution-finding, via community development-type approaches usually favoured by the Indigenous sector and international development organisations, and the top-down policies and service delivery approaches that are usually, and currently, favoured by government funding bodies (Hunt 2010; Ife 2013). Hunt identifies that Australian governments struggle to support or facilitate the community development initiatives of Aboriginal organisations, particularly those that are more 'holistic Indigenous-driven developments which do not fit neatly into particular departmental programs' (Hunt 2010: 1). Whilst she finds there to be very limited community development emphasis in government policies, international development policies are built upon it, with a 'raft of tools and processes to stimulate community participation in development', recognising that for sustainability, participation via a fully engaged community is needed (Hunt 2010: 2).

Meanwhile considering the Australian situation, Chaney has criticised what he describes as the 'myths of new public service management' when applied to remote areas, which 'presuppose a market able to deliver outcomes set by distant bureaucrats, who are able to contract out their responsibility to achieve good results' (Chaney 2012: 61). He describes a range of features predominating in this service delivery environment which undermine the success of various programs and policies:

One-year funding with no continuity guaranteed, onerous and hence costly reporting requirements, frequent policy changes, lengthy negotiations about working to shared objectives that are dropped without apology or explanation because priorities or policies have changed. Agreements are made and then not honoured (Chaney 2012: 61).

In contrast to the contract-based style of service delivery, Chaney advocates that any successful approach needs to be local, 'suited to local circumstances and realities' and therefore must 'start where the people are if they are to be engaged', emphasising that 'if, as at present, there is intergovernmental tension and rivalry, the game is lost' (Chaney 2012: 65).

## Conclusion

As this thesis was being finalised, the Federal Government was affecting substantial cuts in funding for Indigenous sector organisations. This is of great concern given the many important roles this sector plays for Aboriginal people, as conveyed in the literature surveyed in this chapter, including the vital role Indigenous organisations play participating in advocacy and decision-making processes on behalf of their communities.

The literature on human rights and social determinants of health, reviewed in this chapter, identifies strong associations between poverty and marginalisation, lack of control and negative impacts on health and wellbeing for indigenous peoples.

Sullivan contends that local Indigenous organisations ought to be better supported and valued by governments - beyond their status as 'optional sub-contractors' for the implementation of policy or the delivery of services in communities (Rowse 2005; Sullivan 2010) - for they offer so much more than this. A view frequently expressed by Indigenous leaders in Australia is that the *diversity* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities necessitates that 'tailored consultations and engagement mechanisms (be) implemented to facilitate (the Indigenous) right to participate in decision-making' (Gooda and Kiss 2013: 14). The extraordinary diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the variety of challenges faced by communities, means that local solutions are required for local problems, and that one-size-fits-all top-down solutions are unlikely be acceptable to or suitable for Aboriginal communities.

Well-resourced Indigenous organisations have potential to play a vital role in Aboriginal participation in decision-making, as community advocates and representatives, who hold local knowledge and expertise valuable to participation in policymaking. Representatives from local organisations are able to share knowledge about local needs and help shape appropriate local solutions, in particular when it comes to issues that affect the provision of quality local service delivery.



### Chapter 3: Methodology

We've got to go back, understand our history and then we can make the change we need today. And what I see with government, with funding and that, they want to *make* the difference with a bit of funding they're putting in - but until *we* go back and understand, and our kids know why we live in the conditions we live in and understand government decisions that put us on reserves and missions - we've got to understand that, and *then* we can make the changes we need today. We're slowly getting there.

(Eve, WGACWP member)

In the above quote, Walgett research participant Eve refers to processes that might be described as social learning or consciousness raising, which she advocates are essential to enable Aboriginal people to participate as informed policy decision-makers on issues that affect their own lives and communities. Eve's words have resonance as advice for people involved in research processes too, for taking the time to learn about and understanding the past may be essential to beginning to comprehend contemporary dynamics in remote Aboriginal communities. Inextricably impacting research relationships between local Aboriginal people and 'outsider' researchers who work with them, like myself, is a long history of race relations and local animosities, and the more mundane, often less visible, but ongoing structural barriers, everyday insults and injuries that continue to affect Aboriginal lives in Australia today.

Conducting ethically and culturally safe research within an Indigenous context today requires an understanding of many critical factors, including: the negative impacts research has had on Indigenous peoples in the past; new paradigms of Indigenous research that challenge the prevailing ontologies and epistemologies underpinning Western research methodologies, and aim to decolonise the research process itself; and careful observation of the protocols and guidelines established for conduct of research within Indigenous communities. This methodology chapter is divided into two parts: the first section provides a review of literature on Indigenous research methodologies; the second section outlines the particular approach taken by this researcher in collaborating with an Aboriginal community to devise the current case study research. The researcher's methodological approach, ethical processes and research design are described and justified.

## **Indigenous research methodologies**

### **Research and Indigenous communities**

From the vantage point of the colonised... the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary (Smith 1999: 1).

Aboriginal Australians have often described themselves, with exasperation, as the 'most researched people on earth' (Martin 2008: 1; Rigney 1999). There is indeed a long history of scientific and anthropological research that has been conducted in Aboriginal communities since the British invasion of the late 18th century. Negative feelings many communities have toward research emanate from experiences and shared stories of the dangers of research and the injuries it can cause - not only because of breaches of cultural protocols and values - but because Western research is rightly identified as having gone hand-in-hand with colonialism, dehumanising its victims and justifying its actions (Smith 1999: 2; Walter 2005).

The nature of past research engagements, interpretations and outcomes for Aboriginal communities directly affects the willingness of Aboriginal peoples to engage in further research. Before contemplating research in Indigenous communities today it is therefore vital to be cognisant of the historical context of research conducted within and about Indigenous communities since colonisation; to be aware of the debates and new paradigms emerging in Indigenous research methodology over the past decade; to review recent reflexive literature on conducting research practice; and to fully understand and commit to engaging in the principles set out by appropriate guidelines for ethical Indigenous research (AIATSIS 2011; NHMRC 2003).

### **Ongoing frustration: living under a research microscope**

In view of the damage that colonial and government policies have wrought on Aboriginal communities in the past, the intense suspicion that many Indigenous people still harbour of welfare and government information gathering is understandable. For example, information gathered about Aboriginal families and their living circumstances was once routinely used by the Aboriginal Protection Board to justify and facilitate the removal of children. The painful effects of that policy remain in living memory, continuing to affect communities today, so it is easy to see why fear and even hostility toward official information gathering persists. This reluctance is identified as one likely factor that contributes to substantial undercounts of

Indigenous people in the Australian census, especially in remote areas<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, Aboriginal people rightly identify the power held by those constructing questionnaires and data gathering instruments to control the construction of meaning made from that data. In Walgett, Aboriginal leader George Rose railed against the way that Aboriginal people were counted in the census post 1967 as a 'trick': trying to make Aborigines mark themselves down as 'Australian citizens' in the hope that 'we will stop existing as a nation'<sup>23</sup> (Zagar 1990: xix).

The frustrations so often expressed by Aboriginal people, over the extent and nature of research done in their communities, may be exacerbated today by the intensified focus on statistical data gathering and measuring of indicators that strategies like the National Indigenous Reform Agenda (Closing the Gap) involve. The rafts of layered reporting and measuring against key indicators have provoked some Aboriginal communities to express renewed frustration at being 'over-researched, pushed and prodded like God knows what.'<sup>24</sup>

It has been vitally important for this researcher to take account of these issues and not underestimate how they might shape and impact on my own research engagement with Aboriginal people.

### **New paradigms in Indigenous research methodologies**

Since the late 1990s Indigenous academics in New Zealand and Australia have challenged the very foundations of Western research methodologies, contributing new ontological and epistemological bases for 'decolonising' the research environment (Smith 1999) and advocating new 'Indigenist research' methodologies (Rigney 1999). Feminist theory, critical race theory and whiteness studies have all been influential to the development of new ideas and methodologies, challenging Western assumptions and ways of defining the world (eg: whiteness as the 'normal' human condition; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Indigenist research as defined by Rigney (1999) is formed around three principles: resistance, political integrity, and privileging indigenous voices. He emphasises that research must serve and inform the 'Indigenous liberation struggle to be free of oppression and to gain power' (Rigney 1999: 118). It is a struggle that involves development, rebuilding leadership, governance structures, strengthening social and cultural institutions, protecting and restoring

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<sup>22</sup> Conversation with ABS Indigenous Planner in Walgett 16/2/11; the Australian Bureau of Statistics identified a national undercount of 17.2% at the 2011 census (ABS 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Rose's use of the word 'nation' here refers to the way many Aboriginal peoples self-identify, within distinctive language and cultural groups associated with traditional lands, as distinct nations. The question of sovereignty remains an unresolved and important issue for many Aboriginal people.

<sup>24</sup> Phone conversation with Walgett community representative 11/08/11.

environs and revitalising language and culture. Indigenist research, according to Rigney, is carried out *by* Indigenous researchers *with* Indigenous communities *for* Indigenous communities (Rigney 2001, 1999). Others have described a ‘Renaissance’ of Indigenous approaches to knowledge’ (Foley 2003: 44), while emphasising the need to consciously privilege ‘Indigenous standpoints’ within all stages of research and knowledge production processes (Nakata 1998; Foley 2003). Nakata argues that to understand and challenge Western systems of knowledge, Indigenous scholars must first immerse themselves in ‘systems of thinking, logic and rationality that have historically not served Indigenous interests at all’(Nakata 1998: 4). He urges Indigenous researchers and scholars, however, to recognise that they can ‘constructively...(shape) practice in process’ once they recognise the ‘positive aspects of knowledge production that can be redeployed for their own interests’(Nakata 1998: 5).

Today Maori and Australian Indigenous scholars are actively engaging in what they describe as ‘decolonising’ research methods and practices: an agenda that involves transforming ‘the institution of research, the deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organising, conducting, and disseminating research and knowledge’ (Smith 2005: 88). The goal is to bring Indigenous worldviews into frame (frequently defined in Australia as ‘ways of knowing, being and doing’; Sherwood 2010; Martin 2008); and meanwhile to grow an Indigenous research community (Smith 2005: 92). The potential for transforming research practice, re-positioning and re-valuing what it may offer to Indigenous communities is well described by Tuhiwai Smith:

Research, like schooling, once the tool of colonisation and oppression, is very gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim languages, histories and knowledge, to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to an alternative way of knowing and being (Smith 1999: 91).

New methodologies tend to be based around participatory and transformative agendas, to overturn past ‘injuries’ of research practices, and encourage communities to own and drive research. The quietly spoken, and perhaps prophetic wisdom, of a Canadian Indigenous Elder at a workshop in 1992 has been quoted often since then: that if Aboriginal people have been researched to death, ‘then maybe it’s time we started researching ourselves back to life’ (Brant Castellano 2004: 98). In New Zealand Maori scholars have coined the approach Kaupapa Maori (Maori research) which is seen as a struggle over Maori language and the ability to ‘name the world, to theorise the world, and to research back to power’ (Smith 2005: 90).

Martin urges researchers 'not to assume you are entering a frontier, or to perpetuate the fiction of *terra nullius* (ideological, physical or intellectual)' but rather to work from a 'paradigm of relatedness to self and to all involved in the research study' (Martin 2008: 145). Martin's thesis 'Please knock before you enter' (2008) defines a theory of relatedness based around traditional Aboriginal ways of relating to and regulating contact with 'outsiders' (ie: visitors, tourists, researchers). Her study of a rainforest Aboriginal community in Far North Queensland, the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji (BKY), reveals the community's long established, formal ways of regulating outsider engagement based around three levels of relatedness: from stranger/unknown outsider, through whiteman/unknown outsider to friend/known outsider, with a series of 'enfoldments and evolvments' used to regulate and mediate the process of engagement, usually achieved by outsiders fulfilling conditions of 'honesty, co-operation and respect' (Martin 2008: 10). These important processes of staged evolvment of trust and respect in outsiders, as described by Martin, will be referred to later in this chapter in relation to the ways that the Aboriginal community in Walgett regulated and staged-in the involvement of the current researcher to the field of research and the relationships that were pre-requisite to carrying out the case study in this particular locality.

In her analysis Martin re-frames the research process as a 'research ceremony' (Martin 2008). She uses methods and research techniques defined as culturally safe and harmonised to 're-present' research stories she has uncovered by 'sitting amongst them, listening, thinking, talking, Storyworking and then reading, drawing and writing' (Martin 2008: 107).

In analysing Indigenous health research practices Sherwood (2010) identifies the historical context to problematic constructions of Indigenous people in health research today. She finds continuity in what she calls a 'colonial mindset', whereby the very existence of Aboriginal people was problematic for white Australia at its outset, contradicting the founding ideology of *terra nullius*. Today Indigenous Australians continue to be positioned within Western research knowledge production as a problematised 'Other'. Sherwood reveals, via a historical timeline of specific colonial policies and practices, the direct impacts on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. She finds fault in positivistic Eurocentric research perspectives that do not examine their own Western bias nor explore causal circumstances that have contributed to poor health status for Indigenous people. Sherwood finds evidence of a range of injuries and negative health outcomes reinforced by the dominance of Western knowledge production in what she calls the 'ongoing colonisation of Aboriginal health research' (Sherwood 2010: 12). The injuries include: the silencing of Aboriginal voices and views, and the subjugation of



Indigenous knowledge and solutions, not to mention the production of invalid research data that leads to further injury and poor health. Sherwood advocates a new approach involving 'co-generating' Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'ways of knowing' to improve health outcomes through collaborative participatory research. This necessarily involves privileging Indigenous ways of knowing about their health and solutions<sup>25</sup> and recognition by Western research practice of Indigenous worldviews as distinct ontological and epistemological traditions (Sherwood 2010: 84).

Sherwood makes the point that researching in Indigenous communities is 'not a god-given right to all Western trained academics, be they Indigenous or non-Indigenous' (Sherwood 2010: 28). Rather, researchers need to be aware of the privilege of the experience, which comes with responsibility and reciprocity. Researchers must be critically reflective of their own motives and purpose for undertaking the research and the context of the experiences of Indigenous peoples who have 'suffered as a result of the context of research over the last 200 years' (Sherwood 2010: 28).

Indigenous critiques and new research methodologies have made both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers keenly aware of the need for self-reflexion, with the onus on us as researchers to strive to guarantee and fulfil requirements for cultural safety, culturally appropriate and sensitive engagement with the right community representatives. It necessitates allowing plenty of time for consultation around development of and adherence to research protocols to prevent injury and ensure community consent, collaboration and co-ownership of the project and its benefits (AIATSIS 2011).

Tuhiwai Smith identifies a tendency for researchers to assume that their work with marginalised or oppressed people will automatically serve a greater good or go toward achieving an 'emancipatory goal for an oppressed community' (Smith 1999: 2). However this taken-for-granted ideal, that research is for the benefit of mankind, encounters deep suspicion and distrust in Indigenous communities where research has long been 'intertwined' with other forms of colonisation and injustice. Interestingly, Smith also argues that most Indigenous people don't differentiate scientific or 'proper research' from amateur collecting, journalistic approaches, film making or other ways of 'taking' indigenous knowledge (Smith 1999: 2). No doubt the same applies to other kinds of official data gathering, like the census, as already discussed.

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<sup>25</sup> For example a holistic approach to understanding health taking account of social, cultural and emotional factors affecting health and wellbeing of communities, not just individuals.

Cultural protocols, values and behaviours are now recognised as integral to Indigenous research methodologies: to be explicitly built in, declared openly within research designs, discussed in final results of study and disseminated back to people in culturally appropriate ways and language that can be understood (Smith 1999: 15). Reporting back and sharing knowledge are identified as two critical elements of the research process, requiring long-term commitment. Sharing means not simply providing surface information (or 'pamphlet knowledge') but to share the theories and analyses, which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented. Sherwood argues that to assume in advance people won't be interested or understand is arrogant, for the 'challenge is always to demystify, to decolonise' (Smith 1999: 16).

### **Transforming researchers into collaborators: new guidelines for research**

Early research involving Australia's Indigenous people was often intrusive, demeaning and unethical (Isaacs et al. 2011; Smith 1999). Though initially there were no clear policies and guidelines for the conduct of research, a paradigm shift has taken place in the past decade. Clear guidelines are now reliably invoked and carefully applied to medical and other types of research within Indigenous communities (AIATSIS 2011; NHMRC 2003). These guidelines advise and define standards around ethics to try to ensure respect, cultural safety and cultural sensitivity; they stipulate minimum standards and recommended practices in relation to community consultation and negotiation, participation and collaboration, informed prior consent, ongoing communication, recognition of participants, and agreed outcomes. The guidelines also explicitly describe processes involved in terms of consultation, invitation, access, cultural protocols and permissions.

Early consultation with communities to be involved in research is recommended, beginning consultation before the research proposal has been developed. Non-Indigenous researchers are advised to seek the involvement of a steering committee of Aboriginal Elders and other significant community members, or, where appropriate, the appointment of suitable cultural advisers.

The importance of observing cultural protocols and ensuring cultural safety was clearly stated by an Elder who pointedly told a non-Indigenous researcher: 'What you do is important but how you do it is more important' (Isaacs et al. 2011: 55).

## **Research methodology**

The remainder of this chapter outlines the particular research processes, cultural and ethical protocols, methodological approach and research design of this doctoral research, underlining how these were influenced by and respond to new Indigenous research methodologies, and the ethical and cultural safety protocols that have been discussed previously.

Importantly I start by making explicit my own position as a non-Indigenous, non-local researcher, approaching an Aboriginal community to propose social research and seek collaboration in the design and implementation of social research that might be of value to the community. I explain how, as a person with some prior knowledge of the historical context of race relations in Walgett and the impacts of successive waves of government policies on Aboriginal people, I chose to approach my contacts in the Aboriginal community in this locality with a view to conducting contemporary research about some aspect of their experience, on a topic to be identified as valuable to them. I outline the steps I needed to take in making my approach to the community, the cultural and ethical protocols I needed to fulfil, and the processes that took place between myself and community representatives in Walgett over time, to enable a suitable research topic to be agreed upon and appropriate research relationships and processes to be established.

### **Approaching the community**

My first awareness of Walgett came when I was employed as a research assistant to a historian in the early 1990s. The place began to loom in my imagination as a small town where significant battles had been fought since colonisation encroached on Aboriginal lands, including in 1965 a very public showdown between Aboriginal rights protesters and white locals which saw it labelled 'Australia's Little Rock' by the media.<sup>26</sup> Whilst Walgett had my imagination racing, I didn't have the opportunity to visit while conducting the historical research in the 1990s.

My undergraduate Honours thesis in history had investigated the experiences of Aboriginal girls systematically removed from their families by the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board and 'apprenticed' as domestic servants in well-to-do Sydney households. My focus was on the experiences of these Aboriginal girls, now elderly women, taken from their families and

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<sup>26</sup> Little Rock was a small town where some of the nastiest violent conflicts took place during America's civil rights movement of the 1960s.

communities across New South Wales, who would later be identified as members of the Stolen Generation (HREOC 1997; Walden 1995a, 1995b). My use of oral history as a process to explore Aboriginal people's experiences and my interest in race relations history were noted by Professor Ann Curthoys, who was then researching a book about the Freedom Ride of 1965. Ann had been a student participant in this significant protest activity, which set out to expose racial segregation and discrimination against Aboriginal people in New South Wales country towns. Her personal involvement meant that Ann wanted someone else to conduct the interviews with her peers. I was employed by her to interview 22 Freedom Ride participants, including then student Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins, about their personal experiences, motivations and recollections of the events that took place as the Freedom Ride bus toured rural towns.

Walgett and nearby Moree were two key locations on the Freedom Ride route where racial discrimination was clearly called out, tensions mounted and violence ensued, providing sensational media coverage that was broadcast nationally and even internationally. This infamous historical moment put the little town of Walgett on the map for the rest of Australia, conferring on it a reputation as a hotspot of racism that would not easily be lived down.

Half a century has now passed since the Freedom Ride, and at least two re-creations of the Freedom Ride journey have been made since 1965. I was invited to take part in one of those journeys, in February 2011, allowing me to visit Walgett for the first time and to make some initial contacts with the Aboriginal community there. Later that year I approached my contacts in Walgett again to propose conducting research there, explaining that I would like to seek direction from Aboriginal community leaders as to their interest in a research collaboration with me, and if so, what might be suitable topics of research inquiry that would be useful and beneficial to the Aboriginal community.

After an initial discussion by phone, I was directed to make a formal approach to the chair of Walgett's Aboriginal Community Working Party (WGACWP), who then asked for a written document and a presentation to be made by me in person, outlining my research interests and proposing a list of potential topics. I sensed that this invitation and my response to it was a first test of my willingness to show up, to show goodwill and pay my respect to the community. After checking with my supervisors that visiting the community so early in my research process would not be a breach of my university's ethical codes, I provided the requested written document to the WGACWP in a timely fashion, followed the formal community visiting protocols, filled out all the paperwork, organised a week off work and took

the 12 hour train and coach ride to Walgett. There I would introduce myself and pay my respects to WGACWP members at their monthly meeting, the very first step in what would become a long and fruitful journey of research collaboration. Over the ensuing months the dialogue between us would continue, with the WGACWP asking me for updates and clarification on research ideas and proposals, before discussing these and other local priorities among themselves, and eventually contacting me to say they had decided the research should be about the community's engagement with government/s over the RSD rollout.

The WGACWP identified that it would be very useful to the community to have an 'independent observation' of the interactions taking place between themselves and government officers rolling out the RSD at this time. Whilst many proponents of Indigenous research methodologies recommend research with Indigenous communities ought to be done *by* Indigenous researchers (Rigney 1999, 2001; Foley 2003), in this instance, the WGAWCP clearly identified advantages of the research being carried out by someone who was both an outsider to the community and to the locality, as I would be considered to bring a level of 'independence' to the research that would provide weight to any research outcomes. In addition, the WGAWCP identified that I appeared to have a level of understanding of policymaking and government processes that would be helpful in assisting their struggles to work with government and to understand and negotiate the maze of interactions taking place.

At the same time, the WGAWCP invited me to carry out reciprocal pro bono work to assist their policy decision-making and negotiation work, as will be discussed later in this chapter. It was mutually understood that this commitment by me was part of a process of 'giving back', in return for the opportunity to engage in research that would observe and monitor processes taking place.

### **Evolving research relationships**

Development of formal and informal relationships between myself as a researcher and key Aboriginal community representatives needed to take place before an invitation to undertake the research with the community could be given, and before Indigenous participants would feel comfortable taking part in this research. These relationships took time to develop, requiring repeat visits and stays in town, making formal presentations to the WGACWP and providing progressive sets of suggested research topics and questions for the members to consider and discuss, before deciding upon a direction in which they wanted the research to go.

More informal processes of befriending and socialising with people in Walgett were also important, helping me to build trust and relationships in the community which would assist people's acceptance of me as a research collaborator and a friend. My research engagement in Walgett involved many dinners enjoyed at one of two clubs, taking part in Melbourne cup day festivities (running the sweep!), and being invited for a special visit during the Walgett festival when I would 'be able to see the community at it's best'. Many insights were gained from social engagements and informal conversations, including introductions to other community members in the street or at the RSL club, catching up for coffee in a café or visiting the local elders organisation to share a cup of tea and piece of cake. Much time was spent visiting and paying respect, taking an interest in people and in the community, sometimes revealing my own vulnerability as a non-Aboriginal person and an outsider to the community.

While it was important to build trust with people in the community, it was also important to position myself in ways that made me accessible to the whole community, rather than embedded in particular family groups or social networks. To this end, I stayed at a riverside motel rather than in a home.

Whilst rewarding, my social and research interactions in Walgett were not always without difficulty. Fontana and Frey advise that researchers ought to reveal 'problematic feelings and sticky situations in the field' (Fontana and Frey 1998: 60) as this can be very valuable to make readers aware of the complex and cumbersome nature of interviewing people in natural settings, as well as lending 'a tone of realism and veracity to studies'. Uncomfortable moments that stick in my mind include an elderly woman entering a room where I was enjoying a cup of tea with others and declaring: 'There's too many white faces here today!' Another instance involved overhearing a person I was about to interview, who appeared quite nervous, call across the café: 'I've gotta talk to this wadjjin!'<sup>27</sup> Whilst these challenges stung a little at the time, reminding me about the impact everyday racial insults can have on individuals (Butler 1997), on reflection they also served to remind me that I was an outsider, white woman, researcher in the process of evolving trust in the community.

Karen Martin's description of a series of 'enfoldments and evolvments' (Martin 2008: 10) are helpful for thinking through the processes that took place in Walgett between me and community representatives in this case study. I, who first approached the community as a

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<sup>27</sup> Reference to my copy of the *Gamilaraay Yuwaalaraay Yuwaalayaay Dictionary* (2003, p136) later that day confirmed *wadjjin* meant white woman, from the English 'white gin'.

'stranger/unknown outsider', would eventually, through various processes<sup>28</sup>, become accepted as a 'friend/known outsider' (Martin 2008), someone who also possesses useful skills and knowledge that might be relied upon to advise on current and future policy developments by governments, and who may be asked to do further pro bono work for the community in future. I was expected by the community to demonstrate the levels of 'honesty, cooperation and respect' (Martin 2008: 10) necessary to garner trust and faith in both the research process and the researcher. First access, as already noted, was an important aspect to this, as I was required to fulfil community visitor protocols, attend and present to a WGACWP meeting at a time and date identified by the group.

Another important factor underlying research relationships in Walgett was reciprocity. I was able to prove my commitment to the community and build trust through a series of pro bono policy-related tasks assigned as requested by the WGACWP chair and overseen by the WGACWP's designated officer. These tasks included helping community representatives navigate, understand and interpret communication from governments in relation to RSD policy implementation and drafting responses to government on behalf of the WGACWP. The WGACWP acknowledged this assistance from the researcher in various ways, including via a Christmas card depicting an image of a maze with the words: 'Thank you for helping us negotiate the RSD maze'.

## **Ethical processes**

### ***IP Agreement to cover pro bono work in Walgett***

Carrying out pro bono work was a form of 'giving back' to the community for its research commitment to and knowledge sharing with me and to the WGACWP members individually and collectively dedicating their time to be part of the research process.

The pro bono work I undertook separate from my doctoral research focussed on the interactions between government and community representatives. A legally binding intellectual property (IP) agreement was drawn up between the researcher and an incorporated local Aboriginal organisation in Walgett, assigned to act as representative of the unincorporated WGAWP. The IP agreement was designed to protect the Aboriginal community's rights in any Project work carried out by the researcher for the community, and to define the separate processes by which any material or findings of her research with

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<sup>28</sup> Including processes formally set out and controlled by WGACWP community representatives, and more informal processes that involved the researcher socialising with locals.

Walgett's Aboriginal community would be reviewed and approved by the WGACWP's delegated person/s, before any publication or presentation in a public forum. This was separate to the formal ethics procedures required by the researcher's university and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW.

### ***Steering of the research: local and Aboriginal academic advisors***

The WGACWP appointed a delegated representative from the Elders' organisation to oversee my research in Walgett. The person in this delegated role frequently communicated with me on the WGACWP and the Chair's behalf. She also advised me on appropriate contacts, behaviours, and engagement processes to follow when carrying out the research. In addition, her local knowledge was invaluable as she was able to assist the researcher by inviting suitable, knowledgeable participants to take part in the research.

Back at the university, an academic advisory panel provided advice about this research. The panel consisted of one senior external Indigenous advisor (Larissa Behrendt) and one Indigenous advisor (Margaret Raven) internal to the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW Australia. The panel was asked to review and advise on the initial research proposal and on ethics protocols to ensure adequate rigor in research design and theorising as well as adherence to the ethical protocols required for Indigenous research.

### **Methodological approach to the research**

The research takes a qualitative approach, with a case study design used to investigate the experiences of a people living in a remote Aboriginal community during their involvement in negotiations with government around policy planning and implementation. The focus of the research has been the negotiation space between a particular Aboriginal community and the three tiers of governments interacting with them, as the rollout of a particular policy was planned and implemented within the community.

The research takes as its starting point an assumption that the particular ontological and epistemological worldviews of its Indigenous participants should and will have a strong impact on both research design and research outcomes concerning Aboriginal community members' policy interactions and the types of priorities and aspirations that Aboriginal community members choose to value and identify as most important. Clearly Aboriginal worldviews, when allowed to be heard and to impact the zone of policy decision-making, will also affect the way that policy problems are identified and solutions are devised and activities planned.



The research is positioned in the methodological field of interpretivism, valuing the quest to discover how individuals understand, explain and make sense of their own experiences; and subscribes to the constructivist line of inquiry which 'starts with the experience and asks how members construct it' (Charmaz 2006). Such research seeks to understand and analyse the ways in which research participants construct and interpret their own reality based on their experiences of a phenomenon. This approach recognises that the researcher plays a part in the construction of meaning during the process of conducting qualitative research and that analysis and interpretation of findings are in themselves constructions.

### **Grounded theory approach**

A grounded theory approach was taken in this thesis. Grounded theory has been described as 'an inductive, comparative, iterative, and interactive method' (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2012: 347). This means that rather than entering the research process with a preconceived set of research goals and/or hypotheses to test, the researcher approaches fieldwork in a state of inquiry that allows themes and particular lines of inquiry to emerge from the fieldwork data. Here, the perspectives of interviewees, their descriptions of their own experiences, responses, feelings and analysis are vital to the construction of each person's own reality, and in qualitative research terms these constructions are considered valuable and worthy of analysis.

Grounded theory is a methodological approach that aims to allow theorising directly from data gathered qualitatively in the field. Features of a grounded approach include that theory 'emerges out of, is created through and grounded on empirical data'(Sarantakos 1998: 200), and that everyday knowledge and experience are valued and studied as vitally important . One important criterion of grounded theory identified by Sarantakos is that of 'continuity from everyday thinking to scientific thinking' such that:

Everyday knowledge is an unrenounceable resource, which this theory makes a central element of its structure and approach. Primary experience is very significant for the development of grounded theory (Sarantakos 1998: 200).

Another 'hallmark' of grounded theory described by Charmaz and Belgrave is the 'strategy of simultaneous data collection and analysis' (2012: 348). This simultaneous process enables ongoing, iterative theorising to take place, and the researcher is able to delve into exploring with interviewees any new themes that arise from interviewee data during the research journey.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first devised grounded theory as a structured method of qualitative inquiry to enable the study of 'fluid, emergent processes' (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012: 348) and to allow theories to emerge iteratively from analysis of qualitative data. Importantly Glaser and Strauss also advocated a delayed literature review in order to prevent research data being viewed through the lens of pre-existing theories and categories, and to avoid having the work of others impose unhelpfully on innovative theorising (Charmaz 2006: chapter 7).

The theme of central concern to this thesis, Indigenous participation in policymaking, arose over time from analysis of data from interviewees. A number of themes emerging from the data were iteratively explored over a period of two years, as the first and second stages of interviews were conducted in the field, before participation was eventually selected as the organising theme for the research. As various themes arose from the dataset the researcher embarked on a process of exploring related literature, including participation as it pertains to other spheres that might shed some light on the particular events in the case study, such as international development.

### **Use of Aboriginal voice**

In line with emphases from Indigenous research methodologies and in keeping with the constructivist perspective, use of Aboriginal voices has been emphasised and prioritised throughout this thesis. This approach enables Indigenous standpoints and perspectives to have primacy in the case study. Quotes from community leaders and well-informed stakeholders are used to help illustrate salient points that emerged from the findings as a whole. The insertion of voice gives a greater level of human engagement to the reporting of findings, adding both colour and a sense of authenticity to the case study. Informants' evidence is frequently evaluative, revealing personal perspectives, describing experiences and presenting analyses of interactions and local issues, that often respond directly to the key research questions.

I have prioritised the voices of local Aboriginal people, to position the experiences, perspectives and 'standpoint' of local Aboriginal people at the centre of the story, rather than as secondary or treated merely as data from informants. The individuals and community representatives interviewed for the study are recognised for having expertise, unique perspectives and understanding of issues that affect Walgett's Aboriginal community, families and individuals. Aboriginal voices help to explain elements of lived experience as well as providing perspectives from an Indigenous point of view or standpoint about the interactions taking place within the policy negotiation space.

## **Research questions**

The overriding research aim of the thesis (emerging from the data) has been to theorise Indigenous community participation in policymaking by analysing the processes taking place as an Aboriginal community attempts to assert its right to participate in policy planning and decision-making, and to re-negotiate the terms of its engagement with government.

The overriding research question is:

What is the nature of Aboriginal participation in policy planning and decision-making with Australian governments?

Specific research questions used to investigate this:

1. In what ways is participation in policy planning and decision-making desired and pursued by Aboriginal people?
2. Are there signs that Aboriginal participation is being valued and enabled by Australian governments and if so what are they?
3. What sorts of action might an Aboriginal community take to assert a right of participation?
4. What issues and challenges impact the negotiation space between governments and Aboriginal communities when planning and implementing policy?
5. What are the outcomes of participation for community representatives and government officers, and what can we learn from this about participation in policymaking to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage?

## **Research design**

### **Case study design**

The flexible design of case study research is well suited to complex real-world contemporary social settings, allowing multiple sources and data collection procedures to be included in the analysis (Yin 2009). Whilst the main source of data collection for this research was semi-structured interviews and policy document analysis, various other sources were used to understand the historical and contemporary complexity of the case study community. The sweep of data for the case study included, for example, reading about key criminal cases that have taken place in the case study locality and other news stories about critical events and political commentary on the community. Anthropological accounts, histories and historical

documents were also in scope for the case study, as well as public inquiries and archival correspondence which helped to reveal the nature of local racial tensions and discrimination, the ways that governments over time have interpreted and attempted to deal with issues affecting this locality. Information about demographic trends and contemporary statistical data about the community was also included in the sweep of research for the case study, informing the researcher's understanding of the shape and trajectory of the local population, and the extent and nature of contemporary Aboriginal disadvantage in this locality.

Case studies have a key place in policy research, where they are frequently undertaken to provide an example of good practice or to understand the impact of a particular policy (Keddie 2009). The strong emphasis on evidence-based policy making in Australia today (Banks 2009) means that case studies are increasingly valued.

### **Single-case design**

While the community context and particular processes analysed in the current case study are unique, the policy problems that Walgett proposes to tackle are not. These problems have been identified by indigenous commentators in many other contexts. Given the rich diversity of Indigenous peoples in Australia, with diverse languages and cultures, it follows that the experiences analysed in one community will not necessarily be generalisable to other communities, where issues of cultural specificity are central to the line of inquiry. However, in this instance, the desire for opportunities to participate in decision-making is both a universally identified Indigenous right and one that is widely sought by Indigenous leaders across a diversity of communities. Hence findings from this research into the level, valuing, desirability and enabling of participatory processes have broader relevance than the single case outcomes for this community.

### **Rationale for choice of fieldwork site**

As already explained, I approached the Aboriginal community in Walgett because of existing contacts and knowledge of the unique history of the place, which was at one time described as signifying the 'high watermark of racism' in Australia (Edmonds 2012: 169). I was interested in finding out what social conditions and problems might remain there today. However, it was the WGACWP, as community representatives, who identified the particular topic to be investigated: their engagement with government over the RSD implementation.

The town's unique position in history, as a place where extreme inter-racial problems, segregation and Indigenous disadvantage are known to have existed, has led to a heightened

focus on the locality, via the media, in parliamentary inquiries and in historical accounts, providing a rich contextual tapestry as a backdrop to the chosen case study.

Anthropologists, ethnographers and historians have conducted locality-based research with Aboriginal people in this north western region of NSW (Beckett 2005; Gibson 2010; Goodall 1982, 1996; Reay 1945) and more recently, research in the field of education has been carried out there (Yunkaporta and McGinty 2009). These studies provide valuable contextual information for the current case study, in terms of understanding race relations and the impacts of successive waves of government policies on the lives and experiences of Aboriginal people in the region. However, the current research, situated within the area of social policy research, makes a unique contribution to the body of existing knowledge by virtue of a focus on contemporary Indigenous policy making processes.

#### **Data sources**

Key sources of data for the research included:

- semi-structured interviews with community representatives and government policy makers and implementers; and
- analysis of policy documents to consider their use of language in describing intended processes and outcomes in re Aboriginal participation
- review of available reports and terms of reference for local organisations, and a family mapping exercise to analyse Aboriginal community governance and service delivery

Data for the research was collected primarily via semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal community representatives on the one hand and with government officers on the other. Documents provided to the researcher by interviewees were also reviewed where relevant to the research. Analysis of key policy documents provided critical information about the context, purpose and framework of the policy being implemented, as well as providing clues as to how government policymakers intended to their officers to carry out their 'engagement' or interaction with Aboriginal people in the remote priority communities. Community governance and the landscape of Aboriginal service delivery in Walgett were analysed via a review of available documents, including terms of reference for the WGACWP, and via a family mapping exercise conducted with local informants (see p178).

### **Recruitment of research participants**

A cohort of 12 key research informants from Walgett's Aboriginal community was recruited to take part in the research. The majority, though not all, of these people were representative members of the WGACWP directly involved in RSD negotiations.

A further cohort of 10 research informants was recruited from among local (x2) and federal government officers (x2 senior and x3 community-engaged), the office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Service (x1) and NGOs delivering services into the town of Walgett (x2). No state government officers working on the RSD as part of the whole of government RSD exercise took part in the research.

Tape-recorded interviews were conducted either once or twice with each member of the two main interview cohorts, according to their availability and preference. Each participant was later provided with a typed transcript of their interview, which they were asked to review and approve, having an opportunity to make any edits or changes, according to their own discretion. The sign off phase was an important stage of the research process, designed to enable all participants to feel they had control and ownership over their part in the research process, with an opportunity to review, change or edit anything that they had shared and limit any aspect from being quoted in the final research. A number of participants chose to remove or restrict more personal elements they had shared during the interview, while others included additional information or commentary that came to them whilst reviewing their transcript of interview.

In addition, the Walgett research was informed by the perspectives and views of at least a dozen other members of the local community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, with whom formal interviews were not tape-recorded. Insights and points of view about topical issues frequently arose during informal discussions and conversations I had with locals while I was out socialising, visiting friends, at the Elders organisation or generally moving about the community in the course of ten fieldwork visits. Typically I recorded reflections daily in a field journal, so as to be able to refer to my notes later. Whilst these reflections were important and influenced analysis in this thesis, all direct quotes used in the thesis were drawn from transcripts of interview that were reviewed, edited and approved by each interviewee.

I was mindful that the recruitment of suitable interviewees from the community and government might take some time and that requesting the involvement of public servants would involve some careful approaches at the appropriate level of seniority, creating

potentially lengthy approval periods. Some additional research participants were added via snowball sampling, as some interviewees suggested others who would be well placed to provide perspectives of interest to the case study. The additional interviewees are included in the overall numbers of interviewees noted above.

### **Interview guides and scenarios**

Data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews, using two sets of interview guides, one for community representatives and another for government officers (attached as **Appendices A and B**). While 2nd and 3rd round interview guides were drafted as a guide, these were not always implemented for subsequent interviews. Usually these subsequent interviews involved targeted questions being asked of each person based on their first round interview and what the researcher knew of the person's involvement so far. With community representatives, stage 2 and 3 interviews were particularly informative as they provided an opportunity to ask participants to reflect on their involvement in the LIP Refresh process, how being involved in that process made them feel, and which of the Community Priorities they would most like to see implemented.

Hypothetical scenarios were drafted for both sets of interviewees. These were not always used with every research participant however. During each interview, the interviewer decided whether and which scenarios to use based on whether certain themes had already been covered by an interviewee in their responses to preceding questions. Other factors, such as time available for the interview, also sometimes prevented the full range of scenarios being used.

For government officers the purpose of using scenarios was to enable people to speak about issues affecting the policy negotiation space that they might otherwise be unable to disclose for confidentiality reasons. Federal government and CGRIS officers interviewed typically held responsibilities under RSD that were far broader than Walgett alone, and the scenarios were designed to encourage them to consider a generic Aboriginal community Y and discuss processes and interactions that might occur, in ways these officer might feel constrained about revealing if discussing a particular community.

The scenarios prepared for use with community representatives were mainly only used during first round interviews, to seek people's reflections on what wellbeing or self-determination might mean for Walgett, and to expand the discussion beyond RSD to priorities for the community that exist beyond the specificity and processes of this particular policy interaction.

### **Anonymity and use of pseudonyms**

As this thesis makes an analysis of everyday negotiations between particular government officers and Aboriginal community members working together within a small remote community, I have been acutely aware of the particular difficulties entailed in anonymising and protecting the identities of research participants. I have adopted a number of strategies to do so, employing pseudonyms and sometimes obfuscating who has spoken in a given situation. I have sometimes changed the gender and/or other details in order to maintain the anonymity of research participants.

### **Field diaries and RSD timeline**

I used field diaries to record and reflect on fieldwork in the community. This was particularly valuable in enabling me to be reflexive, diarising and actively reflecting on interactions taking place during fieldwork, including outside the context of formal interviews, documenting my own responses and observations along the way. Field diaries also allowed me to keep track of various critical incidents, events or issues that arose and became salient for the community during the 3 year period of my research engagement there. Events like the IGA supermarket fire, the prominent reporting of the Education minister's criticisms of Walgett high school, and Walgett council's public criticisms of the Community Working Party, are examples of events that impacted local people's experiences and perspectives, so it was important for me to keep track of when and how these events took place and how they appeared to affect perspectives and relationship dynamics in the community.

Using field diaries allowed me to continuously analyse what I was learning, and to become more aware of how interactions and power dynamics were playing out. They also enabled me to remain reflexive about my role as a researcher, the negotiations and interactions that needed to take place in the research environment to enable friendships and trust to develop which in turn enabled participants to feel comfortable to take part in the research.

I also used a table to log events related to RSD in Walgett, where I recorded events that unfolded as well as including policy phases and events that pre-dated the period of my research to help me take account of their impact on ongoing RSD processes (see **Appendix D**).

### **Analysis and verification**

NVivo was used to help code and thematically categorise data gathered from successive fieldtrips and interview cycles, to facilitate analysis of findings, and allow new questions to be



introduced into next rounds of interviewing. Early transcription and coding of interview data using NVivo facilitated thematic analysis of the data along the way.

### **Staged feedback and verification processes**

Four layered stages of verification were built into the research process to ensure cultural and ethical safety for Indigenous research participants:

1. transcripts of interview were returned to participants for review and signoff before being used, with participants able to make changes to transcripts for any reason;
2. overall findings were presented to the community for feedback and verification prior to final analysis and write up of the thesis;
3. checking and sign off of the researcher's analysis was done by a designated community representative, prior to any presentation, publication or public discussion of the findings, in accordance with the IP agreement; and
4. the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council provided ethical clearance for the research to take place, on the basis that analysis and findings were submitted to them for review and approval in advance of any publication or presentation.

Special presentation of the research findings to the WGACWP and other community members in Walgett (point 2 above) was made, with participants provided with a printed A5 size colour booklet detailing the major community findings. This was a very important stage of the research process, providing an opportunity for me to present and discuss the findings with participants and other community members before committing to the final writing up of the thesis and any other publications. This process provided local people with the opportunity to verify or challenge any aspects of my analysis of their experiences, in advance of the final thesis being written up for submission.

I also heeded Linda Tuhiwai Smith's calls to demystify and decolonise research (Smith 1999: 16) via the process of disseminating results to people in ways that are more sophisticated and meaningful than 'pamphlet knowledge'. Most importantly I was aware that the community report needed to be carefully drafted to ensure that it contained sufficient information without being overwhelming or onerous, and that it was pitched in language that could be understood by non-academic readers. I wanted to make sure it contained a level of sophistication of research concepts and analysis of findings that provided a good context for participants to understand what local findings meant in relation to the wider picture of Indigenous claims for participation rights nationally and internationally, as well as the way participation rights are defined within the UNDRIP.

## Chapter 4: Broad policy context – Australian Indigenous policy

Isn't it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmoniously multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians – the people to whom the most injustice has been done?

...I say the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with an act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me? (Keating, 1992)

In this excerpt from Prime Minister Keating's now famous Redfern Speech, made soon after the high court's historic *Mabo* native title decision, the power of recognition is strongly emphasised. Elsewhere in the speech Keating describes the newly formed Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's mission to 'forge a new partnership built on justice and equality and an appreciation of the heritage of Australia's indigenous people'; he declares that to give meaning to 'justice and equity' it is vital also to commit to achieving 'concrete results' via 'practical building blocks of change' (Keating 1992). This was a rare moment in Australia's Indigenous policy history, when acknowledgement was made that both recognition *and* equality are important and that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It was also a period of policy history marked by unprecedented Aboriginal participation and influence over policy decision-making and control over service delivery. A national representative body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), fulfilled the roles of advising government policy and delivering services to communities. This is not to say that the policy period known as self-determination (1972-2004) ultimately achieved broad or high level participation to the extent desired by Aboriginal people<sup>29</sup>, however compared with periods

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<sup>29</sup> ATSIC's voter turnout was notoriously low (Chappell, Chesterman and Hill 2009: 141).

before and since, it was undoubtedly a high point of Indigenous influence over policy decision-making and control of service delivery.

This chapter provides context for the case study by reviewing the major phases and themes in Australia's Indigenous policy history. It considers how problems and solutions have been framed at various times, and the forces that have come to bear and impact upon both public opinion and government decision-making in this sphere. It traces vacillations of interest in and responsibility for Indigenous policy by federal, state and territory governments over time, and subsequent shifts in ideologies, approaches and resources committed during different policy phases.

### **Who divines policy problems and solutions?**

Australia has a long history of 'oppressive and domineering' Indigenous policymaking (Dodson and Cronin 2011: 189). Over time Australian governments have designed policy initiatives to control, disperse, assimilate, normalise or equalise the lives and living conditions of Aboriginal people in relation to non-Indigenous Australians. Rarely have Aboriginal people had the opportunity to identify and define the nature of problems that beset their own communities, or design and implement solutions according to their own conceptualisations of need, priority and aspiration.

Since federation in 1901, government approaches have been defined by a waxing and waning of effort and resources applied to tackle policy problems variously described as 'the Aboriginal problem' (Markus 1990: 2; Dodson 2000: 10), as 'Aboriginal affairs', and most recently, as 'Indigenous disadvantage'. Whatever the name attached to this policy area, policy formulations have generally failed to involve Aboriginal people as partners in framing and solving problems. Rather, Aboriginal people have frequently been constructed as a worrisome 'other' (Carpenter and Ball 2012; Walter 2005: 31), a minority population of troubled and impoverished families and communities, who persist in maintaining identities and worldviews that run counter to or sit outside of mainstream social values and aspirations frequently ascribed as Australian (Altman and Hinkson 2010). Yet Aboriginal people rightfully call out the misrepresentation of themselves as the problem, identifying colonisation and its aftermath as a problem white society has imposed upon Aboriginal peoples. Actor and Aboriginal elder Rosalie Kunoth-Monks powerfully asserted on a popular television talk show in 2014: 'Don't try and suppress me, and don't call me a problem, I am not the problem' (Kunoth-Monks 2014).

In relation to policy, the framing or conceptualisation of problems is vital to the way that solutions are formulated and implemented (Bacchi 2009). A particular dilemma for Indigenous policymaking in Australia today is that, whilst there may be broad agreement about the extent of disadvantages faced by Aboriginal people and that improvements are needed, there is little agreement about the nature of problems faced, nor confidence about the type of policies needed to solve them (Dillon and Westbury 2007: 2). Fatigue and disenchantment with Indigenous policymaking appears to affect everyone, from politicians and the general public to Aboriginal people themselves (Sullivan 2011a: 6-7).

Aboriginal people may be unwilling to embrace policies they consider to be mainstream, top down approaches imposed upon them, particularly if such policies are perceived to inadequately account for community values and priorities. It is clear that Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews frame policy problems and solutions in divergent ways. This means that policy made *for* Aboriginal people, without their participation and primary involvement, excludes distinctive Indigenous worldviews and will likely fail to take account of what matters to them. Aboriginal leaders have long asserted that for Indigenous policy to be effective, initiatives need to be embraced and supported by local communities (Calma 2008, 2009; Gooda 2010). Analysis by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse also confirmed 'strong Indigenous ownership and control' to be a 'key element in overcoming disadvantage' (Al-Yaman and Higgins 2011: 2). At the present time, there is little opportunity for Indigenous representatives to participate in setting the course of Indigenous policy making at the national level<sup>30</sup>. Meanwhile, inadequate processes to enable Indigenous participation in local decision-making continue to frustrate communities (as findings of the current research reveal).

Gooda identifies that while there has undoubtedly been considerable change in approaches to Indigenous policy making in Australia since the 1970s, there is 'still a perception - and a

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<sup>30</sup>The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples was formed in 2010 in an effort to 'ensure participation in policy-making processes at the national level by freely chosen representatives' (Calma and Dick 2011: 168). Its model was designed to be an independent non-government entity, not aspiring to service delivery, but rather maintaining a clear advocacy and representational role to government. The National Congress has since been a vocal advocate on Indigenous policy issues at the national level over health issues in particular, as well as engaging at international levels. However Australian governments have no obligation to heed Congress' advice nor to enable its ongoing existence, a fact that was highlighted when the Abbott Government revealed soon after taking office in late 2013 that it would discontinue funding for the National Congress, although the body had not yet achieved its desired goal of self-sufficiency (Altman 2014; Harrison 2013). Instead the incoming Prime Minister appointed his own hand-picked Indigenous Advisory Council of 12 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, to assist oversight of Indigenous policy. This Advisory Council included a number of 'corporate big hitters' with the economic credentials considered vital to create 'commercial opportunities' to solve Indigenous disadvantage (ABC News (online) 23 November 2013).

practice - that reinforces the view that governments hold the solution to the so-called 'Aboriginal problem' (Gooda and Kiss 2013: 13). Gooda laments that:

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have not had genuine decision-making authority and power over our lives and futures. That power and authority continues to rest in the hands of governments (Gooda and Kiss 2013: 13).

## **Four major phases of Indigenous policy**

Four major phases have defined Indigenous policy making in Australia during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21st centuries: protection, assimilation, self-determination and mainstreaming.

### **1. Protection**

The *protection* era (1880s-1940s) was marked by paternalistic state control over Indigenous lives. During this period, Aboriginal people were deemed to be in need of guardianship, incapable of possessing rights and managing their own affairs (Bennett 2013: 8). Colonial and later state or territory governments enacted legislation to empower appointed officers to force Aboriginal people onto managed reserves or missions where they were subjected to segregated, controlled lives. At least 180 such reserves were declared in NSW by 1939, and the forced placement of people from different Aboriginal language and clan groups together on reserves would initiate 'widespread familial, social and cultural disruption, as well as conflict' (Bennett 2013: 8). After the primary colonising phase of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the protection era would codify oppressive practices to deny Aboriginal people a range of ordinary citizenship rights: freedom of movement, freedom to marry whom they chose, the right to own property, to vote and be counted in the census. Systematic removal of Aboriginal children by the state (and churches in some instances) also began during the protection period, with between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970 (HREOC 1997: Part 2, 30-32). Civil rights activism by Aboriginal people and their supporters in the 1930s, against the oppressive control and paternalism of the protection era, would pave the way for a new policy era that would, however, introduce its own difficulties.

### **2. Assimilation**

During the period known as *assimilation*, from the 1940s to the 1960s, a major goal of government policy was that Aboriginal people would blend into mainstream society. Aboriginal people previously segregated from mainstream society on government reserves and missions, would now be pressured to abandon their distinct cultural practices and customs and adopt mainstream ways of life. Government policies emphasised measures to coerce Aboriginal

people to stop practising their cultures and ways of life on country in return for the promise of socio-economic advancement and acceptance by mainstream society. Assimilation was a period when loss of Aboriginality was considered inevitable and desirable (Macdonald 2008: 343). In addition, practices of enforced child removal continued, and children with lighter skin tones were targeted as they were considered to be more likely to blend in to 'white' mainstream society than darker skinned children (Read and Edwards 1989; Walden 1995a).

### **3. Self-determination**

*Self-determination* would be the third major policy phase of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Whitlam government's introduction of this new approach in 1972 responded to strong Indigenous political demands. This policy era would see a radical shift toward Indigenous people's participation in managing their own affairs. While Australia's states and territories had overseen Indigenous policy during the protection and assimilation eras, the federal government assumed shared jurisdiction over Indigenous policy after a 1967 referendum importantly enabled this (Goot and Rowse 2007). Under new arrangements significant levels of resourcing and control over Aboriginal service delivery would be transferred into Aboriginal hands. As discussed in Chapter 2 (pp82-85), the enthusiasm with which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders grasped opportunities to form community service, governance and other types of organisations at this time created an enduring nation-wide network of Indigenous community-controlled service organisations.

Altman and Hinkson have described the self-determination phase as the 'first comprehensive shift to recognise difference in positive rather than negative terms, and to put in place mechanisms by which Aboriginal people could pursue aspirations that differed from the mainstream' (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 186-187). Despite the optimism and gusto with which it was adopted by Aboriginal people however, self-determination did not deliver all it had promised. For many Aboriginal people, the promise of self-determination was not fulfilled by a genuine handover of decision-making power. Sullivan also identifies a sense of disenchantment among public commentators, politicians and the broader Australian public, perceiving self-determination as something that has been tried but failed (Sullivan 2011a: 6-7).

During the self-determination phase, governments who had previously exerted controlling and coercive influences over Aboriginal lives and communities, now withdrew almost entirely from the realm of remote Australia, abdicating responsibility for governance and service delivery into the hands of inexperienced and woefully under-resourced, often fledgling, Indigenous sector organisations. Given the challenges these organisations faced, inheriting

responsibilities for deeply entrenched problems affecting their constituent Aboriginal communities, it is perhaps little wonder that the longed-for 'dream' of self-determination failed to bring rapid improvements in life expectancy and other social indicators, failed to materialise (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 187). In relation to remote regions in particular, Dillon and Westbury have argued that the 'removal of the government footprint' in remote Aboriginal communities at this time compounded what was already grossly inadequate investment by state and territory governments in infrastructure and services for remote Aboriginal people (Dillon and Westbury 2007). As discussed in Chapter 2, the Indigenous sector continues to face a range of steep resource-related challenges.

The policy phase of self-determination would formally last from the early 1970s until 2004, when the government of the day unceremoniously dismantled the Indigenous representative body ATSIC, without consulting Aboriginal people and without replacing it with an effective representative body. It seemed that both major political parties had deemed ATSIC a 'failed experiment' and this effectively put quietly to bed broad Australian support for the principle of self-determination (Chappell, Chesterman and Hill 2009: 129). Since 2005, Indigenous policy has lurched further away from ideals of self-determination. The introduction of Shared Responsibility Agreements in that year and the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), which began mid-2007, discussed further below, were clear examples of policy diverting away from principles of Indigenous autonomy, toward 'mainstreaming' and top-down management (Maddison 2009: 25).

#### **4. Mainstreaming and the 'anti-rights' era**

The forth policy phase considered here is *mainstreaming*, which arguably started well before the formal end of the federal policy phase of self-determination. With the abolition of ATSIC, mainstream state and territory agencies were forced to resume greater responsibility for Indigenous service delivery via mainstream mechanisms and state agencies. A marked shift occurred, away from prioritising Aboriginal participation in decision-making and control of service delivery towards a 're-engagement of the state with Indigenous citizens' (Sullivan 2011b: 4). In what has been identified as either a mainstreaming or 'normalisation' approach, governments would now claim to be dealing with Aboriginal people on the same terms as all other Australian citizens (Sullivan 2011b; Altman and Hinkson 2010). This change has strong implications for service delivery to Aboriginal people, for as Sullivan points out, mainstream service agencies are 'not normally run by people whose needs they propose to meet'; Aboriginal not-for-profit sector organisations, on the other hand, are usually directed by a board elected from the client group, and staff are also usually recruited from this group

(Sullivan 2011a: 77). Cooper has described the sidelining of priority for Indigenous participation and control in service delivery in the post-ATISC period as a 'whitewashing of Indigenous service delivery' (2005).

Well before the abolition of ATSIC however, the start of John Howard's Prime Ministership in 1996 saw a significant change in Indigenous policy emphasis, away from talk about addressing rights and historical injustices, or the need for reconciliation, towards concentration on the 'practicalities' of providing individuals with access to jobs, education, health and housing, regardless of their cultural identity (Chappell, Chesterman and Hill 2009: 119). Howard's adamant refusal to apologise to Indigenous Australians for past injustices coincided with his government's introduction of the idea of 'practical reconciliation' and Shared Responsibility Agreements, which tied Indigenous grant moneys to behaviour change commitment. The latter has been described as shifting responsibility for the appalling state of many remote settlements onto the people who live there, while casting 'government in the role of benevolent patriarch engaging in community-based behaviour modification'(Morrissey 2006: 352).

This period has also been dubbed the 'anti-rights era', for it involved a 'powerful collection of voices' arguing that continued Indigenous disadvantage could not and should not be characterised as a denial of rights, but rather as a series of policy challenges, hinging upon a combination of 'lifestyle changes and acceptance of individual responsibility' and on better provision of government services (Chappell, Chesterman and Hill 2009: 119).

Sullivan notes a change in the way that Aboriginal people were depicted and positioned at this time, which enabled a reversion in orientation of Government policy, away from self-determination back toward a more managerial, top-down approach. Neoliberal-inspired notions ascribed Aboriginal peoples' disadvantage and 'dysfunction' to their own failure to take responsibility for themselves and their families (Sullivan 2011a: 75-76). Thus framed, the solution to the problems of Aboriginal communities was to introduce levers, penalties and incentives to make people become more responsible Australian citizens - to 'engage' in activities that make them more 'like the rest of us'. This emphasis on the 'individualisation' of Aboriginal subjects, aligned with the neoliberal focus on individual citizens, moved away from recognition of Indigenous peoples' collectivities (Maddison 2009: 88), and is directly at odds with Indigenous conceptions of communal wellbeing and emphasis on collective welfare and rights (described by Foley in Maddison 2009: 85).



Influential at this time was Cape York Indigenous leader Noel Pearson's view that the disabling effects of welfare dependency were a root cause of Indigenous problems. This was a view that dovetailed with the Howard Government's anti-rights stance, its rejection of 'white guilt' (Maddison 2011), and inclination to 'individualise' Indigenous citizens (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 185), rather than dealing with them as members of communities capable of claiming distinct rights and political aspirations.

While the Howard government generally rejected 'rights talk' in favour of 'practical' measures, it would ironically invoke rights protection to justify a heavy handed imposition of state powers over Indigenous lives during the NTER. This intervention saw militaristic control measures in the Northern Territory justified as needed to protect the rights of children and community members to be safe from child abuse and alcohol-fuelled violence, whether or not these claims were valid (Calma 2007; Hollingsworth 2010: 10). In a reiteration of protectionist discourse, Aboriginal people were depicted as needing guardianship for their own protection, justifying the *denial* of a range of citizenship rights and paternalistic control measures imposed on Aboriginal lives (Hollingsworth 2010: 9). Measures carried out by the state as part of the NTER were so draconian and discriminatory that they required the suspension of Australia's Race Discrimination Act (Calma 2007: 257-261). Hollingsworth has derided various oppressive measures of the NTER, as the continuation of a long history of racism enabling policies that deny Aboriginal people's human and civil rights (Hollingsworth 2010).

### **Closing the Gap continues a mainstreaming approach**

Australia's two main political parties have been publicly committed to bipartisan approaches to Indigenous policy for some time, however this has not necessarily served Indigenous people well, underpinned as it has been through various policy phases, by the assumption that governments hold the authority and the solutions in Indigenous policy.

In 2008, a change of federal government saw Australia's incoming Prime Minister Kevin Rudd make a formal apology to the Stolen Generation, however there was no significant change in the approach his government would take to Indigenous policy. The policy orientation was renamed 'Closing the Gap' rather than mainstreaming or normalisation<sup>31</sup>, however the latter

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<sup>31</sup> The term normalisation was coined by Howard's Indigenous Affairs minister Mal Brough in 2007, who identified that the aim of the military-style Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) operation would be to 'normalise, stabilise and exit' Aboriginal communities. Since that time analysts have tried to unravel what the Government's admitted goal of 'normalising' Aboriginal people and communities might mean (Altman and Hinkson 2010; Sullivan 2011b).

term has continued to be used by a number of policy analysts because it encapsulates both the positive goals of the current policy phase, that Aboriginal people should be able to expect a standard of living at the national norm, and the challenges it can pose, if it means that 'Aboriginal people are required to reflect socially, culturally and individually an idealised profile of the *normal* citizen, established by the remote processes of bureaucratic public policy making' (emphasis added; Sullivan 2011b: 3).

A stated intention of COAG's National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA, 2008) for Closing the Gap and its associated National Partnership Agreements (NPAs)<sup>32</sup>, described in detail in Chapter 5, was that state and territory governments should apply more resources and take more responsibility for Aboriginal development. Alongside this is the expectation that Aboriginal people are themselves also required to 'normalise in terms of their education, employment, health and habitation' (Sullivan 2011b: 4). Sullivan points out that state bureaucracies are affected by a 'legacy of mistrust' with Aboriginal communities, an 'atrophy of expertise' since 1967, and the existence of perverse incentives, as Commonwealth grants are allocated to the states and territories according to need, including additional allowances for states with larger disadvantaged Indigenous populations, without a corresponding obligation that moneys are in fact spent on reducing Indigenous disadvantage (Sullivan 2011b: 5, 18). He demands to know why the Commonwealth has persisted in leveraging the states to share responsibility, when, after a considerable period of time (two decades by his calculation) it seems the states/territories either cannot or will not take responsibility to the extent required.

## **Key influences on Indigenous policy**

### **Pressure from below: Indigenous advocacy as participation**

In considering various phases of Indigenous policymaking by Australian governments it is important to consider the impacts made by Aboriginal people's ongoing resistance, advocacy and political strivings in many parts of Australia, against significant odds (Coombs and Smith 1994). Since colonisation, Aboriginal people have sought to take on the power of authorities at various times in various locations, with occasional assistance from non-Indigenous supporters. In the face of systematic efforts to exclude, control or assimilate Aboriginal people and to eradicate their cultures, Aboriginal people have shown extraordinary adaptability, courage and resilience, retaining their own sense of identity and identification (Peters-Little

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<sup>32</sup> RSD is one of these National Partnership Agreements of the NIRA, as is further described in Chapter 5.

2000: 7; Cornell 2006: 6). Today the population of Australia that identifies as Indigenous is believed to be greater than at the time of invasion in 1788 (Taylor 2006: 62).

Through strikes (Wave Hill 1960s), protest movements (Day of Mourning 1938, Tent Embassy 1972), high court challenges (*Gove*, *Wik* and *Mabo*<sup>33</sup>) and by initiating and collaborating with public inquiries (into Aboriginal deaths in custody and the Stolen Generations<sup>34</sup>), Aboriginal people have fought to have their voices heard, their rights protected and for wrongs to be redressed, to receive equal wages for work, to achieve land rights and recognition of native title, to expose and end conditions that lead to deaths in custody, for an apology and compensation to the Stolen Generations (Chaney 2012; Bennett 2013; Goodall 1996; HREOC 1997; RCIADIC 1991). In addition, Aboriginal people have advocated for reconciliation, for a treaty to recognise sovereignty and other Indigenous rights, and most recently for constitutional recognition (Dodson 2000; Behrendt 2003; Australian Government 2014).

While Australia's Indigenous policies have frequently been formulated via top-down mechanisms that provide little or no opportunity for Aboriginal people to participate and influence policy decision-making, a number of innovative contemporary policy initiatives are emerging to overturn that pattern, as already noted in Chapter 1 (p45, footnote 6). Heiss points out that historically Aboriginal people have strenuously resisted the imposition of policies that have restricted or impinged on their rights to equal treatment as citizens or to particular Indigenous rights, such as those now recognised in the UNDRIP:

The official records reflect this opposition and contain letters written by Aboriginal people seeking to recover their land, to receive the right to vote, to have their children returned, to receive citizenship rights and so on (Heiss n.d.).

Indigenous people have not been the passive recipients of government policymaking, but have consistently tried to impact policy via their enduring strivings to expose injustice and achieve rights, against the odds.

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<sup>33</sup> *Gove*, *Wik* and *Mabo* were important legal cases taken to Australia's highest courts by Aboriginal people to establish native title rights: *Gove* (1971) first tested the survival of native title, but was rejected by the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory in favour of *terra nullius* (the doctrine that the land had belonged to no one at British settlement); later the historic *Mabo* (1992) decision rejected this and recognised native title over land and waters (based on Indigenous laws, customs and traditions) could persist despite colonisation in some cases. In *Wik* (1996) the issue of co-existence of native title with pastoral leases was tested. The High Court found that while such rights could co-exist, in any conflict over rights, native title rights were subordinate.

<sup>34</sup> These important inquiries produced the RCIADIC (1991) and HREOC (1997) *Bringing them home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*.

By the 1960s civil rights were on the agenda internationally and here in NSW the 1965 Freedom Ride and a subsequent parliamentary inquiry had raised public awareness about the plight of Aboriginal people (NSW Parliament 1967; Curthoys 2002). The introduction of the self-determination policy phase was a key moment when Australia's federal government acted in response to Indigenous advocacy. A small but vocal Indigenous movement emerging at this time gained significant coverage in the media and garnered sympathy with the wider Australian community. What Beckett has called 'the politics of embarrassment' would enable Aboriginal people to 'secure substantial legal and redistributive concessions' from the Federal Government in the early 1970s (2004: 305).

### **Impact of the 'history wars'**

The outbreak of 'history wars' during the Howard-Government era (1996-2007), saw revisionists decried as exaggerating and dwelling on 'black armband history', too negative and not celebratory enough of the positive achievements made since British colonisation of the Australian continent (Macintyre 2003; Cowlshaw 2006).

It is important to note that two key players in the history wars were Prime Ministers Keating and Howard, men with the power and responsibility to shape national policy directions. Clearly interpretation of the past directly impacts policy agendas in the present. While some deride the importance of history, contending that Aboriginal people ought to move on from dwelling on its negative effects (Howard 1996), others identify long lasting intergenerational impacts of past injustices that cannot easily be swept away nor ignored (Atkinson 2002; Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2004; Bennett 2013; Bessarab and Crawford 2013). The desire for recognition of past injustices to Aboriginal people and a formal apology for them, would remain a highly conflicted issue in Australia for decades.

### **Symbolic recognition needs to be backed by substantive rights**

According to Behrendt, 'symbolic recognition' of past injustices is fundamental to achieving social justice for Aboriginal people (Behrendt 2003). It may take many forms, including formal apologies, memorials to mark sites of injustice, observance of protocols, preambles to legislation, and flying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. Such gestures, according to Behrendt, can serve as 'small reminders, acknowledgments and displays of respect' and 'go to the heart of recognition of past injustices such as denial of sovereignty, dispossession and the child removal policy' (Behrendt 2003: 133-134). Of course symbolic recognition may be tokenistic if not accompanied by 'substantive rights', however such gestures do have potential

for a profound effect on the relationship between Indigenous people and the rest of Australia. Behrendt argues that symbolic gestures 'restore dignity to Indigenous people that is fundamental to self-respect and a feeling of acceptance', as well as redefining power relations within Australia, eroding 'intolerance, ignorance, negative stereotypes and overt racism' that work to alienate the Indigenous community (Behrendt 2003: 134-135). Symbolic recognition is also seen to provide an environment more conducive to the protection of substantive rights.

Evidence of the impact that such gestures can have has been provided by two important moments when Australian Prime Ministers made speeches that had profound effects on (healing) both Indigenous people and other Australians: Paul Keating's Redfern speech in December 1992 and Kevin Rudd's February 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations. Although Whitlam had acknowledged Aboriginal land rights in his symbolic pouring of Australian soil into the hand of traditional owner Vincent Lingiari at Wave Hill in 1975, Keating's Redfern speech was the first time an Australian prime minister had given such a detailed account and public acknowledgement of the impacts of colonial and contemporary policies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people. The speech put 'reconciliation' on Australia's political agenda, and has been credited with paving the way for Rudd's formal apology to Indigenous Australians in 2008. Rudd's willingness to do what the previous Prime Minister Howard had long refused, in giving an apology to the Stolen Generations, was a symbolic act that had extraordinary impact on Australians. However, this gesture was undermined by the Government's refusal to establish a compensation scheme for those affected.

### **Binary debates**

Indigenous peoples' numerical minority status, at less than 3% of Australia's population, and their subsequent electoral disempowerment affect their ability to participate via electoral representation, other than in the Northern Territory (Pearson 2014: 38-39). However the proactive involvement of Indigenous people in struggles and protest movements has been described as seeing them punch well above their weight in terms of influencing both public opinion and the actions of governments and policymakers at various times (Beckett 2004: 305). Nevertheless, Sullivan points out that Australia's Indigenous policy tends to be more reactive to what non-Indigenous people think and believe than to the actual people it is purporting to assist (Sullivan 2011a: 7).

The voices and strivings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are frequently drowned out by others taking part in incendiary debates played out within academia, politics and the media.

Such debates concern conflicting ideologies and narratives about history, rights and policy directions: whether governments should emphasise symbolic recognition and reparation for past injustices or address the immediate impacts of socio-economic disadvantage; whether the emphasis should be on equal rights *or* recognition of difference. Such polarised binary debates do not admit the possibility that equality *and* difference might be achievable.

Debates that continue to be played out in the media are influential on public opinion and therefore on the directions and decisions taken by governments and policymakers. Today such debates include voices of prominent Indigenous leaders and academics,<sup>35</sup> but in the absence of well supported and resourced Indigenous representative bodies capable of participating in decision-making and formulation of policy from the national level down<sup>36</sup>, control of policy making remains in the hands of governments which are more responsive to general public opinion than to Aboriginal people.

### **Impacts of top-down government policy approaches on Aboriginal people**

Aboriginal people have experienced government policies as lurching between pernicious and contradictory extremes, aiming to control, segregate, assimilate or disperse their people and cultures at different times. Macdonald cites the exasperation of one of her Aboriginal informants, responding to the perverse manipulations of government policies:

I started thinking to myself, what the hell do these white politicians and white society want from us as Aborigines? Do they really want us to fit in? Do they want us to be a part of things, or do they just want us to be depending on them all the time?  
(Macdonald 2008: 346)

The inconsistency of expectations placed upon Aboriginal people by mainstream society and by government policies, seems a cruel irony. For example, the very adaptations and 'assimilations' made either strategically by Aboriginal people or enforced upon them since colonisation, would later be used to justify denial of legal recognition of native title, as the persistence of traditional laws and customs could not be proven (Drabsch 2004: 16; Peters-Little 2000: 17-18; Cowlshaw 2006: 186).

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<sup>35</sup> In fact the media may well be the most powerful forum for Indigenous participation in policy debates, given a lack of direct representative influence and their disempowered minority electoral status.

<sup>36</sup> As already noted (footnote no. 28), the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has struggled to achieve ongoing support and recognition of the national policy advisory role it could potentially play.

### **Culture or equality: a devilish choice**

Various commentators describe what they see as an oscillation or pendulum swing in approaches to Indigenous policy in Australia (Sullivan 2011a: 9, 18; Chaney 2012; Sanders 2010), influenced by a theoretical and political divide that focuses on either rights *or* socio-economic equality, either cultural difference (identity) *or* equality (Austin-Broos 2011). The distinction between these two options is perhaps most obvious in remote Australia, where Indigenous cultural difference is most marked and where market economies and so-called 'mainstream' jobs are frequently absent. Policies that aim for socio-economic equality via mainstream education and jobs may also necessitate uprooting and moving people to places where such opportunities exist. That Indigenous people are required to leave ancestral lands in search of work inevitably undermines their involvement in cultural practices and customs (Brueckner et al. 2014: 9). In addition, Aboriginal migrants from remote communities frequently find that their low educational status and economic marginality undermines their ability of to find work after moving to regional or urban environments.

A devilish either/or choice is often imposed on remote Indigenous peoples, who are expected to choose to either pursue cultural values and customs *or* experience improved living conditions and socio-economic wellbeing. Altman advocates support for what he describes as 'hybrid economic activities' involving the state, market and customary parts of the economy; in remote regions innovative initiatives in areas such as land management, health and the arts may serve to protect social, cultural and environmental values at the same time as improving livelihoods and economic prospects in remote communities (Altman 2009b; Russell 2011; Brueckner et al. 2014). However, contemporary policy directions, toward mainstreaming and normalisation of lives in remote Aboriginal Australia, place little emphasis on this type of innovative Aboriginal development activity.

Past policies of assimilation are now decried as having been racist and injurious to Aboriginal people and their cultures, and there is rarely overt discussion about 'assimilating' Aboriginal people into mainstream society and culture. Rather it has been replaced by discourses of 'mainstreaming' and 'normalising', as already noted. Several analysts identify what they see as an 'impliedly assimilationist tone' in contemporary policy debates, and in contemporary Indigenous policy agendas (Chaney 2012: 63; Sullivan 2011a; Bradfield 2006; Behrendt 2002).

## **Indigenous aspirations of participation and self-determination**

It is important not to confuse the human rights principle of self-determination with the past Australian policy phase of the same name. The principle or right to self-determination, as recognised in international law, remains an enduring goal for Australia's Indigenous people (Behrendt and Vivian 2010). Distinguishing the human right and ongoing Indigenous desire for self-determination from the policy phase of self-determination, Behrendt defines the former as: 'an Indigenous aspiration that involves the participation of Aboriginal people in decision-making that will affect their lives' (Behrendt 2007: 102). She argues that this has never been recognised nor protected in the way that Aboriginal people and international law define it, and that: 'there is no evidence that, were it to be implemented in practice, self-determination would fail, in fact evidence from other countries points to the contrary' (Behrendt 2007, p102).

### **Self-determination as an Indigenous right**

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, the right to self-determination is about achieving full and effective participation of Indigenous people in Australian society 'on equal terms - not on the basis of 'sameness', but through the recognition of the cultural distinctiveness and diversity of Indigenous peoples' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2003). MPRC, the former ATSIC regional representative body for the western region including Walgett, defined self-determination as:

...the capacity and authority to make the decisions on all matters affecting our wellbeing, including the way government agencies meet their responsibilities for providing services. The fundamental pillars of self-determination are legitimacy, credibility, acceptance, participation and accountability expressed through governance arrangements.<sup>37</sup> (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 168)

Self-determination is a central right of the UNDRIP, which, after twenty years in the making, was adopted in 2007, affirming Indigenous peoples' collective rights to self-determination and decision-making powers. The UNDRIP promotes the type of institutional structures, arrangements and processes needed for Indigenous peoples to be able to effectively participate and realise these rights, with articles 18 to 24 specifically relating to participation, development and social rights (2007). Although Indigenous representatives from Australia were instrumental in drafting the document, Australia was one of just four countries that initially voted against it (along with Canada, New Zealand and the USA), only finally supporting

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<sup>37</sup> This definition, cited by Jeffries and Menham, was included in Murdi Paaki Regional Council's draft Charter of Governance, still in development at the time ATSIC was abolished.



it in 2009 after the change in federal leadership. It remains to be seen whether the ideals of the UNDRIP can be realised in Australia, enabling Aboriginal people to leverage their rights to participation and self-determination, at a time of public and political disenchantment with both (Sullivan 2011a: 6-7).

Experiments in so-called 'whole of government' approaches, requiring significant state and federal agency collaboration, have been introduced by COAG in a number of targeted policy settings, including the Indigenous sphere since the 2000s. The next section analyses this style of initiative, how and why it has been applied in Indigenous contexts.

### **Whole of Government and partnership approaches**

Whole of government denotes public service agencies working across portfolio boundaries to achieve a shared goal and an integrated government response to particular issues. Approaches can be formal and informal. They can focus on policy development, program management and service delivery (APS 2004: 1).

This definition comes from a 2004 Australian Public Service (APS) report promoting whole of government (WOG) collaboration as a vital mechanism for tackling wicked policy problems facing Australia today. It provides case studies of particular applications where cross-government coordination and collaboration have been beneficial to solving complex and uniquely challenging modern policy problems: resource and climate challenges, illicit drug strategy, terrorism and national security, and Indigenous disadvantage. WOG approaches, also referred to in policy literature as 'joined-up government, connected government, policy coherence, networked government (or) horizontal management' (APS 2004: 3), are emphasised as key to ensuring Australian governments have capacity 'to respond quickly and effectively to emerging issues and future crises' (APS 2004: 1).

The challenge to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people is often referred to as the most 'stubborn' of Australian public policy problems (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 259). By the 2000s, state and federal governments were becoming increasingly aware that standardised forms of public administration and service delivery were simply not meeting the needs of Aboriginal communities. COAG was looking to introduce 'new ways of working' with Aboriginal people to achieve better policy outcomes. In addition, the policy context itself was recognised as 'complex, conflicted and multi-layered' (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 259). COAG began considering a WOG approach that would involve increased emphasis on both intra-governmental cooperation and partnerships between Aboriginal people and governments

(Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 259). WOG action, underpinned by strong community engagement and place-based planning, was seen as a promising way for agencies to change their old ways of working with Aboriginal people and better service their identified needs.

The COAG Trials (2002-2007), discussed in more detail below, would be Australia's first significant attempt at WOG coordination in Indigenous policy making. These Trials also embodied principles of place-based planning and community partnerships, reflecting similar approaches taken internationally.

There has been considerable international interest for over two decades in the potential of place-based partnerships to help address complex, longstanding disadvantage in regional or local communities. As strong resonances have been identified between the Australian WOG approach and international policy literature on partnerships (Morgan & Disney 2006: 47), it is useful to consider what this literature has established.

Based on a study of partnerships carried out in a number of its member countries, the OECD identified success elements including: shared goals, vision and outcomes; collaborative, flexible structures; strong partner communication; adequate resources and achievable work programs (OECD LEED 2006). While the original impetus for a partnership may be locally driven and bottom-up, policy driven and top-down, or driven by incentives, a key element is trying to ensure 'all relevant actors' in a location are invited to join the partnership and formal agreement is made between partners (OECD LEED 2006: 4). This optimally includes state, private and community sectors, NGOs, community governance bodies, 'non-formal communities' and individuals (OECD LEED 2006: 30). As trust and commitment to equality between the partners was identified as vital, best practice involved mechanisms to prevent those partners with more resources and expertise from dominating partnership decision-making (OECD LEED 2006: 11). A number of other factors that can undermine partnerships were identified, including: no sharing of risks, responsibility and accountabilities; power imbalances; and inadequate training and support to provide capacity to address conflict or differences (OECD LEED 2006: 11).

#### **COAG Trials: Australia's first Whole of Government experiment in Indigenous affairs**

The COAG Trials were described as exemplifying 'the greatest degree of both joined-up government - horizontally across departments and vertically with different levels of government - and networked governance, through partnerships with Indigenous communities in a variety of governance arrangements' (Hunt 2007: 166). It is therefore important to

consider what can be learned from findings of the COAG Trials, toward interpretation of the next WOG policy phase that is the subject of this thesis.

By the year 2000, COAG - Australia's high-level forum for intergovernmental cooperation on issues of national strategic importance and cross-jurisdictional concern<sup>38</sup> - had been initiating processes for inter-government collaboration to address Indigenous disadvantage. As an initial step it agreed to 12 national priority outcomes, and key indicators designed to measure progress on tackling Indigenous disadvantage. COAG pledged to ensure periodic assessment and a public report on progress, via a series of roughly biennial publications to be released by the Productivity Commission called *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: key indicators*, from 2002 (SCRGSP 2011). Next, the five year COAG Trials were launched in eight regions around the country.

### **The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial**

It is pertinent to this research to consider the COAG Trial that was run in the Murdi Paaki region of western NSW. This region covers a vast area of western NSW, crossing eight local government areas and including 16 remote Aboriginal communities, including Walgett and Wilcannia (which would later be RSD communities). With its population of 8000 Aboriginal people, comprising 13% of the regional population, Murdi Paaki was one of the largest and most disadvantaged of the ATSIC regions (Jeffries and Menham 2008).

### **Shared Responsibility Agreements**

A central mechanism on which action and reporting was focussed in the COAG Trials were Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs), introduced as a means of formalising commitments between communities and governments. In the context of the COAG Trials, SRAs were described as a 'genuine innovation' that introduced formal, albeit non-legally enforceable, agreements between communities and governments (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 261).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Formed in 1992, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the forum within which heads of Australia's federal and state governments negotiate inter-governmental national partnerships over policy matters of important strategic or cross-jurisdiction. The federal government typically leverages policy collaboration from state and territory governments via funding tied to bilateral agreements.

<sup>39</sup> If SRAs were considered useful in the COAG Trial WOG context, their use would be resoundingly criticised in other contexts, such as when the agreements were hastily introduced between governments and small remote communities in isolation, without the long-term WOG commitment to working with Aboriginal communities that the COAG Trials offered. SRAs were effectively quasi-contracts which offered discretionary funding for identified Indigenous priorities, beyond basic service delivery, in return for compliance with identified mutual obligations and responsibilities. However, power differentials between governments and small Aboriginal communities inevitably led to coercive agreements (Hunt 2007, p166). SRAs frequently introduced conditionality for government investment in

In the Murdi Paaki Trial an overarching SRA was signed between the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) and the Australian and NSW governments in 2003, identifying four main goals: improving health and wellbeing of children and young people; improving educational attainment and school retention; helping families to raise healthy children; and strengthening community and regional governance structures. Most progress in the trial would be achieved in the last of these priorities, as discussed further below. A total of seventeen SRAs would eventually be signed as part of the MP Trial, which equates to approximately one per community.

### **Structures established for the Murdi Paaki Trial**

Various structures were established for the COAG Trials to enable collaboration between various government agencies, and with Aboriginal governance bodies representing regions and local communities. How these operated in the Murdi Paaki trial is considered in some detail, to provide useful comparison with the structures and processes later established for the WOG RSD initiative.

While regional governance was already well advanced in Murdi Paaki, it has been viewed as a strong positive that a particular focus of the Murdi Paaki (MP) Trial was to improve governance capacity (a focus other trial sites did not include). Evaluators noted the MP Trial was one of the most successful sites (Morgan & Disney 2006). Trial mechanisms involved: Community Working Parties (CWPs) as the Aboriginal community governance bodies in each of the 16 communities, a MP Action Team, MP Steering Committee, MP Regional Group and MP Data Working Group. A high level Secretaries Group oversaw the COAG Trials, consisting of secretaries of lead agencies for each trial site, Prime Minister and Cabinet and the CEO of ATSI<sup>40</sup> - a mechanism designed to provide high-level, cross-departmental support of a kind that had not previously been applied in Indigenous policy (Jarvie and Stewart 2011:261).

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services and facilities routinely provided to non-Aboriginal citizens without strings attached (installation of petrol bowsers or health checks, for example). Designed to leverage behaviour change and get Aboriginal people to engage in mainstream activities that could, theoretically, lead to a 'normalisation' of Aboriginal lives in remote communities, such mechanisms were challenged as ideologically-driven, top-down and implicitly blaming of Aboriginal people for their own problems (Cooper 2005; McCausland 2005). Many SRAs were described as demeaning, racist and paternalistic to Aboriginal people (Cooper 2005).

<sup>40</sup>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSI) operated as an executive agency of the Commonwealth Government, established mid-2003 to administer programs previously the responsibility of ATSIC. By April 2004, Government announced its intention to abolish both ATSIC and ATSI and distribute their programs and services to mainstream Australian Government agencies (this occurred between July 2004 and March 2005).

CWPs already existed in a majority of the Murdi Paaki communities, having formed to enable communities to work with NSW government agencies on previous initiatives (as discussed in more detail later in this chapter), and each of the CWPs were 'refreshed' at the start of COAG Trials.<sup>41</sup> The CWPs would now have a greater governance remit than they had as part of previous initiatives (MPRA and USYD 2015).<sup>42</sup> As part of the MP Trial, governance workshops were held twice a year, while the Action Team - a small team formed by Australian and NSW Government lead agencies based in the region - engaged directly with each CWP, attending their monthly meetings, and serving as an effective new channel of communication between communities and government. A Steering Committee provided overall direction for the Trial, including strategy, communications and evaluation; while the Regional Group consisted of regional managers from key Commonwealth and State agencies responsible for implementing the CAPs (Urbis Keys Young 2006: ii).

Eight project officers were employed to assist the 16 CWPs, including most importantly aiding the development of a Community Action Plan (CAP) for each community in the Murdi Paaki region, to identify key community priorities and inform place-based service planning by government agencies working in collaboration. The CAPs were completed between 2004 and 2006, taking much longer than anticipated given the COAG Trials would wrap up by 2007. One clear finding the trial evaluators identified was that long, flexible timeframes are therefore needed to enable ground-up, place-based planning in Indigenous contexts; and this means timeframes allocated for overall policy cycles need to be far longer than is usually allocated. This finding reinforces international literature which indicates 10 to 20 year timeframes are needed for partnership approaches to address changing economic, health and social circumstances of disadvantaged communities (Morgan & Disney 2006: 4).

### **Key outcomes of the MP COAG Trial**

The COAG Trial period has been described as a high point of interaction between MPRA and governments, enabling 'vision on both sides' (MPRA and USYD 2015: 29). While evaluators found that both governments and communities were frustrated by slow progress of

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<sup>41</sup> COAG Trial action teams supported 'refreshing' the CWPs, with the intentions to ensure that the community had confidence in its CWP membership. This might involve checking current members were still interested and prepared to engage, identifying new members who could assist and inviting new members to nominate (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 272).

<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that during the earlier phase, when most CWPs were mainly operating as consultative bodies for NSW Government's housing and community development initiatives, Walgett's CWP had already begun operating as a governance or 'umbrella body' to represent a cross section of needs and issues of importance to Walgett's Aboriginal community. This was described by a research participant as a result of the CWP's 'visionary' chair, at that time.

improvements, this was partly attributable to unrealistic expectations about the impacts the Trials could be expected to achieve on complex problems in a relatively short timeframe; rather, the Trials were designed to change the way key parties worked together, as essential towards long term improvements (Morgan & Disney 2006: 30).

Evaluators found strong government support for the MP Trial. Officers at all levels reported that they gained an understanding that 'the way... governments deliver programmes can contribute to lack of ownership and action by communities' and that this became a 'significant factor in relation to (their) supporting Indigenous communities to be viable partners' (Morgan & Disney 2006: 5).

Whilst the CAP process was slow, it was reported as being regarded positively by most stakeholders (unlike Walgett's LIP document for the RSD initiative that followed) and 'an accurate reflection of community priorities' (Urbis Keys Young 2006: ii). MP was identified as the most advanced of the eight COAG Trial sites in terms of community capacity and governance and the capacity of both governments and the communities to work together was found to have been enhanced by the MP trial. The abolition of ATSIC part way through the COAG Trials left a considerable vacuum in Aboriginal governance where the ATSIC Councils had been; however in the MP region a successful transition in regional governance from the MP (ATSIC) Regional Council to the MPRA allowed the MP trial to progress relatively smoothly regardless.

In their analysis of the MP Trial, Jarvie and Stewart support this type of WOG initiative, arguing that interactive and cross-jurisdictional solutions were clearly required. However they emphasised the imperative that Aboriginal community is the 'driver of government action - allowing coordination and support to be formed outwards from community, not downwards from government to community' (2011: 271). Jarvie and Stewart insightfully attest that WOG coordination is not an end in itself, but is a 'necessary condition for governments to meet their obligations and responsibilities to the community'. WOG action should come about as the 'result of community engagement not (as) the driver' (2011: 272).

Stakeholders emphasised a need to continue to support key elements of the MP Trial after the COAG Trial period lapsed in 2007 (Urbis Keys Young 2006: iii), as the challenges it was designed to address were complex and long-term, so commitment needed to be sustained by both community and government. MPRA was determined not to allow the new arrangements to lapse, and worked with its federal and state agency partners on a strategy to maintain the

collaborative regional planning focus of the trial period (ANAO 2008: 72). By early 2009 MPRA had been able to negotiate a further Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) with state and federal governments to continue the WOG approach begun during the COAG Trial period.

As will be elaborated in the findings chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis, it is concerning that lessons learned from the COAG Trials were not apparently heeded in the setting up of the next WOG exercise RSD: such as the need to properly resource Aboriginal community governance, and to allow adequate, long time frames for community planning processes (MPRA and USYD 2015: 23).

### **Other key findings from the COAG Trials**

Hunt has pointed out that the challenge of joining-up government by networking across the boundaries between jurisdictions and agencies is already difficult enough, and that working in collaboration with Indigenous communities adds yet another 'dimension'. She has also highlighted that such arrangements raise issues of politics and power (for there is 'no sense of equality between a poorly-serviced Indigenous community and the Commonwealth' (Hunt 2007: 166)), as well as challenges to align policy values and goals within an inter-cultural space where governments and Indigenous people each have their own 'cultural values, institutions and systems' which are divergent and mismatched (Hunt 2007: 165).

An important finding of the COAG Trials was that Aboriginal participation in these types of WOG collaborations requires strong Aboriginal community governance and well-developed skills and capacities to negotiate with governments; in addition, government agencies need well-developed skills and capacities for collaborative work with each other, at the same time as working collaboratively with Aboriginal people in a cross-cultural environment (Hunt 2007; 2013).

### **Ongoing collaboration issues between Australian and NSW government agencies**

While intensive WOG efforts were applied during the COAG Trial period, ongoing challenges of jurisdictional and cross-agency collaboration in the Indigenous space are not to be underestimated. The complexity of government remains a key identified barrier to successful service delivery for remote Aboriginal communities.

In evidence to a 2008 NSW parliamentary inquiry into overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, a senior government officer described poor collaboration between different levels of Australian government as 'parallel universes in operation' (NSW Parliament 2008: 10). She identified that non-cooperation continues to be problematic despite bilateral agreements on how state and

federal agencies should work jointly, plan and streamline Indigenous service delivery. The officer further explained that the 'demarcation of responsibilities between levels of government was often perceived by Aboriginal communities as a way for government representatives to shirk responsibility' (NSW Parliament 2008: 10).

## **NSW Aboriginal affairs policy environment**

Key recent initiatives in the NSW Aboriginal policy environment are considered in this section for their relevance to the case study, having either immediately preceded, coincided with or followed on from the period of RSD engagement.

### **Formation of a system of Community Working Parties in NSW**

Aboriginal Community Working Parties (CWPs) were first formally established in the 16 communities of the Murdi Paaki region of NSW in the 1990s. In the first instance they would enable community participation in the planning and delivery of housing and infrastructure improvements which were part of a regional agreement struck between Murdi Paaki and NSW Government in 1996. Given that Aboriginal community organisations are often service providers however they may only represent one section, clan or group of families within their communities, a stated approach taken by the MPRC, in fostering a system of CWPs at this time, was to enable the ATSIC Council to 'fund communities not organisations' (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 22).

MPRA has emphasised that this was by no means the first time community governance and/or action groups had been established in the region's communities, for there had been significant drive in many communities to work collectively, advocating for rights, social, housing and other initiatives (MPRA and USYD 2015: 19). However formation of a system of CWPs for Murdi Paaki region would build on those previous initiatives and pre-existing governance arrangements. While government would later implement a process to 'refresh' the CWPs (ensuring terms of reference and processes to elect representatives, for example) at the start of the COAG Trial period, MPRA emphasises that 'CWPs in Murdi Paaki region were not constituted passively in response to a whole-of-government policy agenda' but rather they represented 'spontaneous outgrowths of community aspirations for governance and self-determination' which had 'autonomously developed an appetite for governance across the gamut of issues their communities contend with (MPRA and USYD 2015: 19, 22).



From the outset CWP were, and remain, unincorporated bodies, which do not employ staff nor manage funds. Whilst certain fundamental elements and criteria for forming CWP were standardised, each of the CWP was to be formed by Aboriginal communities 'in their own way' (NSW Parliament 2008: 107). For example, the composition of a CWP was to be determined by each community, as were the processes for nominating and electing members.

The CWP model was considered so successful that NSW government decided to replicate it as a mechanism to advise on implementing an investment of \$240 million over 10 years to raise health and living standards in priority communities where environmental health needs had been identified (the Aboriginal Communities Development Program starting 1998; (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 24)). Later, the membership and role of CWP in the MP region would be broadened during the period of the COAG Trials, as already mentioned, to enable CWP to function as the key points of contact between government and local Indigenous communities across any number of issues that were deemed relevant to the needs of Aboriginal communities. Importantly the support of a project officer was provided to assist each of the CWP with their work at this time.<sup>43</sup>

Representation on CWP would ideally include a 'large spectrum of voices', including a 'dynamic mix' of youth and elders, Aboriginal organisations, government and other service providers, fundamentally 'designed to avoid undue influence by particular sectional interests' (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 22). Whilst there was flexibility in how each community would constitute its working party, representation on each CWP typically included: 'representatives of all local community controlled Aboriginal organisations; non-affiliated members of the community representing young people, elders, women and others; local government; ATSIC; the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs; NSW Health; and other state and Commonwealth agencies as relevant' (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 22). Importantly however the voting and decision making was strictly reserved for community representatives.

CWP were also intended to encourage local community capacity building through consultation, community development and participation, meanwhile providing a culturally appropriate mechanism for self-determination and local decision-making about the practical implementation of plans and improvement programs to take place in a community (Jeffries and Menham 2008: 24). While each working party was to have terms of reference and

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<sup>43</sup>This differed from the RSD experience, when paid secretariat support position was sought but not initially made available to the WGACWP, something that would be a particular sticking point in the relationship between government and the WGACWP as revealed in Chapter 6, p215.

protocols for behaviour in meetings, there were concerns from a couple of communities involved in the COAG Trials (including Walgett) about poor processes and meetings described as 'spiralling out of control' when certain family factions dominated and government workers present failed to intervene (NSW Parliament 2008: 110). Nevertheless, in other communities people found the CWP to be a useful mechanism to allow a 'diverse community melting pot to come together with a constructive focus' despite ongoing tensions between different tribal groups and traditional owners (NSW Parliament 2008: 113). Some people described the working parties and community action plans as the first time planning processes were able to be 'completely owned by Aboriginal people' (NSW Parliament 2008: 118).

Despite some teething problems in their establishment and ongoing vulnerabilities of such bodies to be challenged or dominated by factions (NSW Parliament 2008: 109-113), the formation of working parties represented considerable progress towards achieving local decision-making mechanisms. Community working parties have, on the whole, continued beyond the end of the COAG Trials (and the subsequent withdrawal of community project workers who had supported them<sup>44</sup>) to remain as important local governance mechanisms for external and government agencies to address or negotiate with over service delivery to Aboriginal communities.

A 2008 inquiry into overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage in NSW noted the significant time and energy invested during the MP Trial into making CWPs work as 'genuinely representative bodies in control of self-identified community priorities', but the Trial also illustrated significant 'challenges faced by Aboriginal communities attempting to take control of their affairs' when governments and agencies they are partnering and building commitment with change and leave behind considerable uncertainty (NSW Parliament 2008: 124).

### **Two Ways Together Partnership Community Program**

Beyond the demise of ATSIC and the federal government's abandonment of the self-determination policy phase, NSW has been the only state government to officially maintain a commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal people as an underpinning or guiding principal for Indigenous policy making. The state's 10 year Aboriginal affairs plan 2003-2012 was called Two Ways Together - Partnerships: new ways of doing business with Aboriginal

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<sup>44</sup> Project officers had played a brokerage role between meetings and engaged other groups to advance projects (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 265). A lack of resourcing to support CWPs to do their work would be a major hurdle for Walgett's participation during RSD, and has remained an ongoing issue of concern in relation to the LDM initiative of OCHRE.

people (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2003). A program belatedly introduced under this plan would provide targeted support for Aboriginal community governance, as discussed below.

Launched in 2009, the Two Ways Together Partnership Community Program (TWT) is worthy of closer focus for its relevance to the case study. The initiative aimed to enable participation and self-determination for local Aboriginal communities in planning and decision-making via measures to strengthen governance in Aboriginal communities around the state. A key goal of the TWT was to reduce the multiplicity of separate agency engagements and consultations with Aboriginal community representatives that place onerous demands on them; for agencies are widely perceived as 'over-consulting yet under-delivering' to Aboriginal communities in NSW. Another key aim of the initiative was to build the skills of Aboriginal communities to negotiate with governments. Importantly, community governance bodies working with the TWT program could become 'formally recognised' by governments (state and federal) as the group that agencies, local councils and NGOs must meet and consult with about local service delivery. Particular criteria to be met for recognition included that such bodies be broadly representative of the diversity of the community, that they have terms of reference and mechanisms in place to consult the wider community (Audit Office of NSW 2011: 20). These criteria are discussed further in Chapter 5 (pp191).

Ambitiously the TWT initiative, led by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, aimed to work with 40 discrete Aboriginal communities across NSW where 45% of the state's Indigenous population reside (Audit Office of NSW 2011: 26). A community by community approach was taken, with project officers assigned to provide support for formation and capacity strengthening of local Aboriginal community governance bodies, and towards development of place-based community plans to identify local community priorities and service needs. However by the time of the NSW Auditor General's 2011 report on the NSW Aboriginal affairs plan, the department acknowledged there had been 'limited successes and substantial shortfalls' in the outcomes of its 10 year plan. Recognised community engagement bodies had so far been established in only 16 of the 40 communities, though planning for another 24 was underway; and limited progress had been made on the intended improvements in outcomes for Aboriginal communities (Audit Office of NSW 2011: 6).

Nevertheless, the Auditor General's report urged a continued focus on the need to support and value Aboriginal participation in local service delivery planning. Key recommendations of

the report included that greater effort is needed to build and strengthen partnerships between government and Aboriginal people; and for government agencies to be more publicly accountable for how they spend resources to improve Aboriginal well being (Audit Office of NSW 2011: 2).

### **OCHRE: NSW government's plan for Aboriginal affairs since 2013**

To develop for the next phase of Aboriginal affairs policy in NSW, the incoming Liberal Government invested considerable energy and high level strategy into the staging of a participatory process of policy development from 2011. A Taskforce consultation process was run over a two year period, to enable opportunities for Aboriginal participation in the development of the state's new Aboriginal affairs plan. Membership of the Taskforce comprised senior government ministers with responsibility for Aboriginal service delivery, as well as a number of key Aboriginal representatives. Two cycles of regional forums were held around the state to enable Taskforce members to listen and learn from representatives of local communities about the preferences for areas and initiatives to be included in an Aboriginal affairs plan for the state. A series of feedback reports were released from the Taskforce consultations, before release of the state's current policy for Aboriginal affairs, OCHRE was launched in 2013.

The suite of initiatives that form the OCHRE policy were developed via long-term, ground-up participation and consultation processes. They introduce Aboriginal perspectives and priorities into policy making, including initiatives that emphasise the importance of language and culture, the need for healing, and desire for local decision making. The Local Decision Making initiative, which involves regional Aboriginal representative bodies striking accords with NSW government to work together on agreed priority policy themes, is one that has a particular focus on enabling and growing the opportunity for participation of Aboriginal people and communities as decision makers and planners when it comes to service delivery and programs designed to assist them (NSW Government 2013; Aboriginal Affairs 2014).

MPRA was the first of the LDM regional representative bodies to strike its accord with NSW government, identifying 5 priority themes (NSW Government 2015). The next step is for each CWP in the region to update its local community action plan and for governments to follow through on commitments via the accord, taking account of particular priorities identified each of the local plans. The LDM model is replicating the hub and spoke model of governance applied in the Murdi Paaki Trial, with MPRA as the regional governance hub partnering with

government, and each of the local community governance bodies as spokes, devising their own local plans and priorities. A Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) for NSW has been appointed and tasked with monitoring and iteratively advising government on the roll out of the OCHRE policies around the state (NSWO AR 2015). A tender to undertake a ten year evaluation of OCHRE initiatives was awarded in December 2015 and is due to get underway in mid-2016, despite OHCRE being launched in 2013.

### **Other recent NSW initiatives to enable participation and improved service coordination**

A number of other NSW initiatives being trialled as this thesis was being completed augur well for increased participation in Aboriginal policy making.

NSW Community Services has begun staging co-design workshops to involve community members in improving or re-designing service systems in particular geographic areas of the state. Co-design processes enable participation by inviting service users, workers, community members and other interested parties to come together with a view to reshaping the way service systems deliver what communities need. The purpose of co-design is to allow unique insights and local knowledge to be brought to the table and to spark system innovation via carefully facilitated group deliberations. The first in a series of co-design sessions on the Central Coast was initiated by Community Services in late 2014 to facilitate participation of Aboriginal community members, service workers and other key stakeholders in the re-design of Out of Home Care services for Aboriginal children and service systems that support Aboriginal families in the region, in view of the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children being removed from their families under the NSW child protection system (FACS 2014).

A 2015 NSW parliamentary inquiry into service coordination in communities with high social needs investigated and recommended trials of a number of other place-based service delivery models with potential to address complex disadvantage and improve Aboriginal access to services. Walgett was one of several disadvantaged communities this inquiry specifically named in its recommendation for One Place Service Centres to be introduced, which co-locate numerous government and non-government service agencies under one roof, both to enable triaging of people presenting with complex problems into the services they need, and meanwhile to afford workers from various agencies opportunities to work together on a daily basis, to collaborate on the case management of shared clients (NSW Parliament, 2015: 62-63).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided broad state and federal policy context for the case study, highlighting some of the jurisdictional and ideological tensions in federal and state policy and processes that affect Indigenous people and their ability to participate in policy making. Initiatives applied within the Murdi Paaki region were highlighted, in particular the previous whole of government exercise the COAG Trials, which is particularly relevant to the case study. That NSW Government policy still accepts self-determination and claims to focus on strength based initiatives, whilst federal government policy does not, may explain some of the conflict evident between governments in the case study. The next chapter focuses on particular policy and community contexts of the case study of Walgett and RSD.



## Chapter 5: Case study context: policy and community context

We're trying to haggle or try to get funding for basic human essential services. You know like we're trying to get the roads fixed, to get the electricity raised a little bit higher so that when floods come through the people on Namoi (reserve) don't have to move out because the power lines are too close to the river. You know like basic human essential services, to me it should be a given. (Eve, WGAWP member, 2013)

This quote emphasises both the unique physical and elemental challenges of life in remote Australia and some of the critical challenges faced by Aboriginal people as they strive to achieve access to equitable safety and service needs. Whilst all residents of remote areas experience service challenges compared with regional and urban dwellers, services available to Aboriginal people in remote locations are clearly not on par with those available to non-Aboriginal residents of the same or similar-sized towns.

The case study community of Walgett was one of 29 priority communities participating in the whole of government initiative Remote Service Delivery (RSD), which aimed to address critical shortfalls in service delivery for remote Aboriginal communities and thereby contribute to Australia's national Closing the Gap (CTG) targets. This chapter provides an overview of the policy, community and service system contexts of the Walgett case study of RSD implementation.

Part I analyses the policy context of CTG and the RSD National Partnership initiative applied in Walgett over five years from 2009 to 2014. It outlines the policy framework and architecture of CTG and RSD, analyses the policy underpinnings of CTG and major critiques that have been made of it. Part II provides an overview of the approach Australian governments have taken to servicing the needs of citizens living in remote parts of the country since federation. It considers particular deficiencies in resources, services and governance that have been applied to assist communities residing in remote regions, and identifies that Indigenous and non-Indigenous settlements have been supported very differently by Australian governments. Part III reviews the particular historical, geographical and demographic features of Walgett, issues of race relations and contemporary social problems that face the town's Aboriginal community. It maps the structure of Aboriginal community governance in Walgett and the community's Aboriginal service system built over many decades. Attention is drawn to critical service shortfalls that impact the lives of Walgett's Aboriginal community and which RSD was applied to address.



## Part I: Case study policy context

### The National Indigenous Reform Agenda: Closing the Gap

Tackling Indigenous disadvantage has been identified as one of the most challenging areas of contemporary Australian social policy (Head 2008; Hunt 2007). Aboriginal people experience significantly poorer opportunities and life outcomes across a wide range of areas, including health, education, employment and other factors, compared with non-Aboriginal Australians (SCRGSP 2014). This high level of inequality, and the fact that Australia's first peoples continue to endure extreme hardship and disadvantage despite high levels of national prosperity, are a cause of concern and embarrassment for many non-indigenous Australians and for state and federal governments. The United Nations adoption of the UNDRIP in 2007, supported by Australia from 2009, has heightened international scrutiny of Australia's poor performance in relation to the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2008 all Australian states and territories committed through COAG to work toward the federal government-led National Indigenous Reform Agenda (NIRA), which committed \$1.2 billion to CTG over five years from mid-2008 to 2013 (COAG 2008). Six high-level national targets were introduced, each with a dedicated timeframe, towards reducing or closing significant gaps that had been identified in a range of key life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (**Figure 4**).<sup>45</sup> Whilst the set of targets was described as 'ambitious' and government investment to achieve them as 'unprecedented' (COAG 2015), most of the targets only aimed to 'halve' or reduce disparities between the two population groups, rather than to eliminate them entirely. Only two of the six targets aimed to definitively achieve parity with the non-Indigenous population. Aligned with the six CTG targets were seven building block areas for strategic action. It was anticipated and intended by policy makers that activity carried out within each of the building block areas (**Figure 5**) would bring about the improvements required to achieve the six the national CTG targets.

As will be revealed in Chapter 6 (p217), Walgett's Aboriginal Community Working Party would critique the building block framework (**Figure 5**) and propose addition of an eighth building block for 'land and culture', urging government that this was a glaring omission from a framework designed to guide improvements in local conditions and community wellbeing, and ultimately contribute to CTG.

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<sup>45</sup> An additional seventh target to reduce gaps in school attendance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians would be added by the Abbott government in 2014.

Figure 4: Closing the Gap targets (COAG 2009)

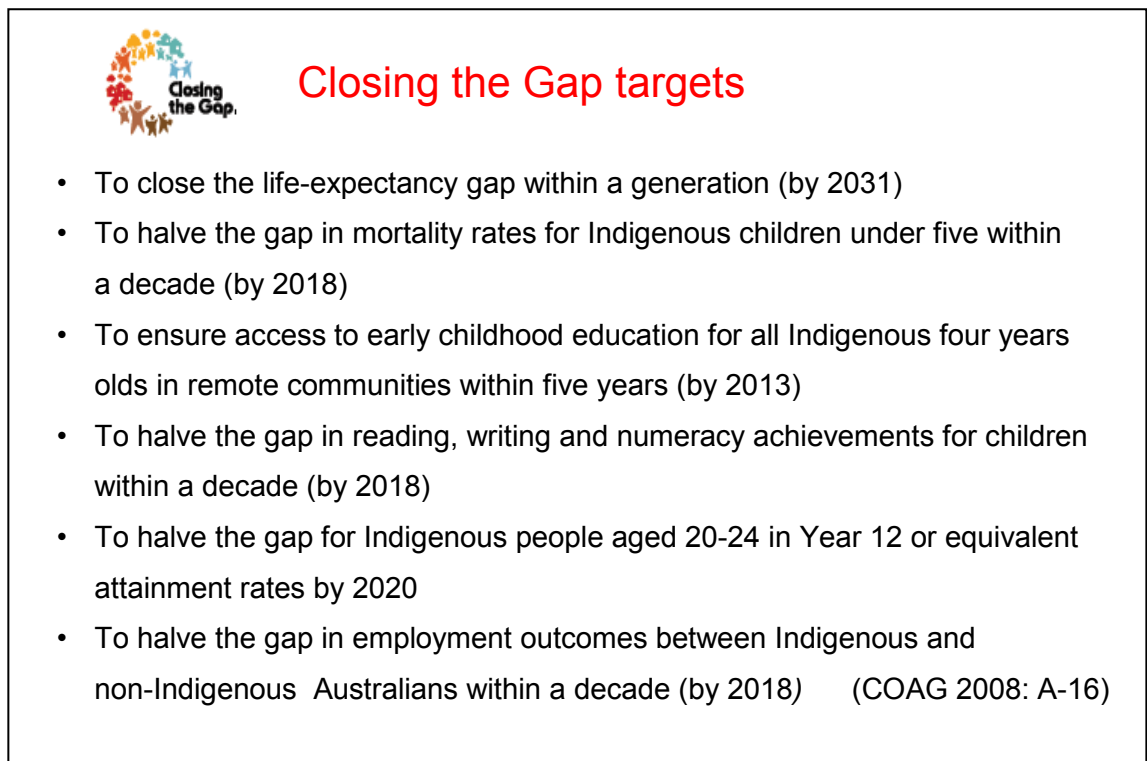
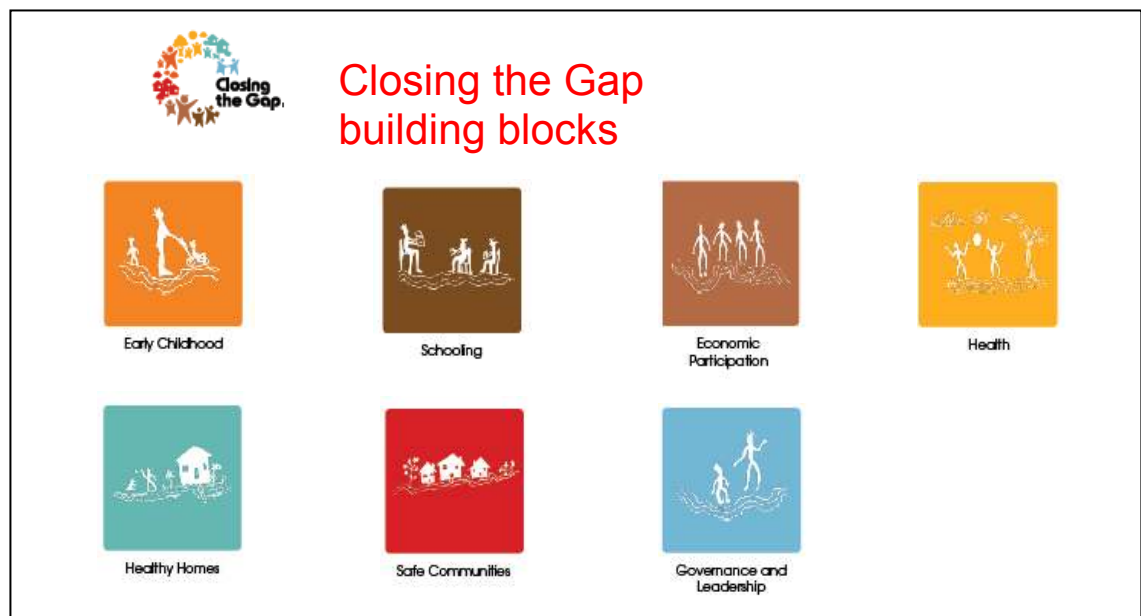


Figure 5: Closing the Gap building blocks (COAG 2009)



### **National Partnership Agreements toward CTG**

A series of high-level inter-jurisdictional National Partnership Agreements (NPAs), related to CTG targets and building blocks, were signed off by COAG in 2008 as part of the NIRA, along with bilateral state/federal agreements to ensure cooperation and commitment by the states and territories with the national plan. The purpose of the NPAs was to mobilise renewed effort and resources from state and federal agencies and commit to a WOG approach, involving cross-jurisdictional collaboration between government agencies, as well as with Aboriginal communities, towards achieving the identified CTG targets. RSD, in which the case study community was involved, was one of these NPAs. In addition, the final RSD evaluation report would reveal how other NPAs also impacted on services and facilities provided to the Aboriginal Community in Walgett during the period (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

While each of the seven National Partnership Agreements struck by COAG, was accompanied by substantial new funding for work to achieve the top level CTG targets, Remote Indigenous Housing and Indigenous Health are allocated the largest financial commitment (Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet 2013):

- Indigenous Early Childhood Development (\$564.6 million over 6 years)
- Remote Service Delivery (\$291.2 million over 6 years)
- Indigenous Economic Participation (\$228.8 million over 5 years)
- Remote Indigenous Housing (\$1.94 billion over 10 years)
- Indigenous Health Outcomes (\$1.57 billion over 4 years)
- Remote Indigenous public internet access
- Northern Territory (\$807.4 million over the 3 years, to continue the NTER)

As with the COAG Trials before them, a key challenge for each of the NPAs would be managing the complexity of whole of government arrangements (Hunt 2007: 155; Jarvie and Stewart 2011). Agencies situated in different jurisdictions would be required to cooperate and work together, as well as with non-government agencies, and with Aboriginal communities themselves, toward improving the coordination (and hence, theoretically, the quality and reach) of service provision, especially in remote regions.

### **The Remote Service Delivery (RSD) National Partnership Agreement**

It is well recognised that remote Aboriginal communities are among the most disadvantaged and poorly serviced in Australia (Australian Government 2009a; Dillon and Westbury 2007; Remote Focus 2012). To address this, COAG's Remote Service Delivery (RSD) National

Partnership Agreement committed \$291.2 million, over five years from mid-2009, to improve service delivery in 29 priority communities, including Walgett and Wilcannia in NSW. Objectives of RSD included:

- improving the access of Indigenous families to a full range of suitable and culturally inclusive services; and
- raising the standard and range of services delivered to Indigenous families to be broadly consistent with those provided to other Australians in similar sized and located communities (Australian Government 2009b).

Theoretically, better coordination of service delivery by governments, working with a place-based focus and via the collaboration of responsible senior officers across various agencies (known for the purposes of RSD as Senior Responsible Owners), would lead to improvements in service delivery itself; and as service delivery and outcomes improved in each priority remote community, strides would also be made toward the nation's six high level CTG targets. Importantly, the NPA committed governments to 'engage' Aboriginal communities in the RSD process too, principally via joint development of local plans, which would provide a key mechanism to direct agency collaboration toward improving services.

### **Architecture and processes of RSD**

The Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments agreed to a Bilateral Implementation Plan for RSD (the Bilateral Plan) for the period 2009-2014, which broadly defined the strategies, responsibilities, timeframes and performance benchmarks the two governments would apply to progress key 'milestones/outputs' (COAG 2009d).

Given the focus of this thesis on researching the nature of Indigenous participation, the Bilateral Plan's first identified milestone 'Engagement with Indigenous communities' is of vital importance to understand the intentions and success benchmarks established by government for RSD, and this will be more closely scrutinised in Chapter 7.

Other core processes and mechanisms for RSD established by the Bilateral Plan were:

Baseline mapping and service auditing to be undertaken at the outset of the policy cycle for each priority community, to establish 'current social and economic indicators, government investments, services and service gaps (and) provide benchmarks to measure improvements';

A Regional Operations Centre (ROC) established in Dubbo, designed as a 'whole of government regionally based operations centre supported by locally based staff from NSW and Commonwealth agencies', providing co-location of officers from the two governments to facilitate working together to develop and implement RSD planning;

A local team employed by the ROC to include an RSD Co-ordinator (RSDC), Partnership Community Project Officer and Indigenous Engagement Officer (IEO), hired to be located in and work with each of the communities toward RSD objectives;

Local Implementation Plans (LIPs) 'arising from the baseline mapping' were to be developed for each community, the responsibility of ROC staff 'in partnership with the Aboriginal community' as well as other parties, including 'non-government organisations and business/industry partners'; and

A high-level State Management Committee (SMC) for RSD would be established in NSW by the FaHCSIA State Manager and NSW Executive Director Community Programs for Aboriginal Affairs, in accordance with the Bilateral Plan requirement for development of 'appropriate overarching governance and coordination mechanisms to facilitate problem solving and agree mechanisms to ensure... development and implementation... including service plans, proceeds smoothly' (COAG 2009d).

Within these processes and mechanisms established under the Bilateral Plan, it was clear that the ROC's role would be pivotal to the gathering of data, monitoring and identifying of gaps, coordinating delivery of resources and activities, to address agreed priorities, supporting RSDCs, liaising with three tiers of federal, state and local governments and any other relevant authorities, and importantly, to ensuring 'community engagement so that communities know what is happening and why' (COAG 2009d). It is worth noting that in Walgett's LIP a slightly expanded description of this aspect of the ROC's role was described as: 'Community engagement to hear from communities about their priorities and to feed back to them about what is happening in response' (Walgett LIP 2010: 11). The latter version emphasises a more active process of two-way communication, with governments both listening and responding to priorities identified by the community, beyond government merely communicating what it is doing and why.

For the majority of the period of RSD in Walgett there would not be anyone in the IEO position, leaving the RSD Team slimmer than intended, though government and the WGACWP

would eventually negotiate redirection of some salary funding for unfilled positions toward engaging a secretariat position to support the Community Working Party (as described p246).

As will be discussed in Chapter 6 (pp1-242) the architecture of RSD would prove problematic for the WGACWP, as high level SMC meetings of senior managers almost always held an urban or regional centre to enable attendance of officers with sufficient clout to make enforceable decisions, resulting in considerable physical distance and disconnect between these officers and local Aboriginal communities.

### **Baseline mapping and comparison communities**

The extensive baseline mapping exercise conducted for each of the RSD communities was intended to provide an information base at the outset of RSD to facilitate better planning and provide a baseline for evaluation of any improvements. Conducted at the outset of RSD, it aimed to enable place-based visibility of the existing web of services and programs funded by commonwealth and state governments, in addition to comparing these against services delivered to a non-Indigenous 'comparison' community of similar size and remoteness. In Walgett's case the comparison community chosen was Nyngan.

Though the baseline exercise was regarded as valuable, making visible the funding and types of programs in place for each of the remote communities, what was not entirely visible in this process was the significant mismatch between the very great service needs of disadvantaged Aboriginal families and communities and the accessibility or suitability of funded programs to meet their needs. In addition, the comparison community approach announced by government at the outset of RSD was identified during the mapping exercise as often clouding rather than elucidating the challenges (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 12-13).

For example, Walgett and Nyngan both have public schools, post offices and medical services, but the outcomes for service users may be significantly different in each location due to different levels of need and approaches to use of services within each community. Aboriginal school students have significantly poorer attendance, retention and post-school transition outcomes than non-Aboriginal students in NSW schools, and it is increasingly recognised that addressing the needs of Aboriginal students may require place-based, innovative approaches to supporting them and meeting their particular needs.<sup>46</sup> Both Walgett and Nyngan have operational post offices, but research participants identified that in Walgett there is no

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<sup>46</sup> In NSW the Connected Communities and Opportunity Hub initiatives, as part of OCHRE, have been implemented since 2013 to address significantly poorer outcomes achieved by Aboriginal compared to non-Aboriginal students, via place-based approaches (NSW Government 2013; CESE 2016).

mailbox postal delivery made, with serious implications for confidentiality and safe access to important correspondence within a community that has high levels of domestic violence and interaction with criminal justice systems. Both Walgett and Nyngan have medical services, but comparing service levels may be misleading, given there is a recognised difference in the way Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people access such services, with Aboriginal people tending to rely more heavily on community or public hospital services while non-Aboriginal people rely more on use of private GP services. In addition, the well recognised 'gap' in health outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people means Walgett's large Aboriginal population has significantly greater needs than the largely non-Aboriginal comparison community of Nyngan.

This flawed comparative aspect of RSD's objectives appears to have been sidelined by government analysts as a not particularly useful device for benchmarking the meeting of service delivery outcomes. On the other hand, baseline mapping provided some clarity for government agencies at the outset of RSD about social and economic indicators, government investments and service gaps (see key findings of the baseline report later in this chapter, p201).

### **Features of the RSD model**

The RSD model relied on the assumption that WOG commitment and coordination of activities would improve coordination of service delivery. The RSD model is also designed to have a place-based focus. The merits of these two key aspects of the model have been critiqued in the literature, as described in Chapter 4. Particular challenges for the RSD model, drawn from that literature, are identified here.

#### **1. Whole of government**

A complex array of government departments and agencies, across different jurisdictions of government, are responsible for various aspects of service delivery into remote Aboriginal communities. WOG approaches therefore prioritise the need for collaboration across jurisdictions and across agencies as an essential requirement to ensure various activities are streamlined and coordinated, avoiding duplication and waste and encouraging helpful service links and cross-referrals to be made. As noted in Chapter 4 (p146), there is no doubt that cross-jurisdictional, multi-agency initiatives, requiring WOG cooperation, as well as engagement with Aboriginal communities, are extremely complex, and this complexity was evident in the COAG Trials that preceded RSD (Jarvie and Stewart 2011; Hunt 2007). Sullivan has not been optimistic about the utility of WOG approaches in Indigenous affairs. He describes Australia's

attempts to achieve WOG coordination in this sphere as a 20 year failed experiment in the 'central direction of Aboriginal development brokered through COAG' (Sullivan 2011a: 121). Chaney too sees no evidence that the particular pre-conditions required for successful whole of government activity in this policy arena have ever been present (Chaney 2012: 59).

Sullivan argues forcefully that the WOG approach has been 'doomed by its distance from the site of struggle, the coalface of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development in the regions and in local communities distant from the centres of power' (Sullivan 2011a: 121). If WOG approaches have not worked, in Sullivan's view it is time to change course in favour of Aboriginal people 're-engaging in their own development' by taking control of local government where they are a significant part of the population; meanwhile ineffective states and territories must 'largely step aside' in favour of direct funding from Commonwealth to the 'regions with targeted Aboriginal development' (Sullivan 2011a: 121).

Meanwhile the remoteFOCUS report went so far as to describe the complex governance environment in remote Australia as a 'failed state', expressing the view that the 'present configuration of governance, policy and practice' are simply not working in remote Australia, where they are in fact a 'threshold *cause* of policy failure' (remoteFOCUS 2012: 36). High executive level control established by COAG structures may appear useful to help the Commonwealth in its efforts to leverage state commitment and resources, however this may run counter to participation by Aboriginal communities in decision making. In addition, poor CTG results reported annually indicate that WOG initiatives have thus far failed to achieve desired improvements in outcomes in the CTG target areas (Australian Government 2016).

## **2. Place-based focus**

The place-based aspect of the RSD model follows international trends towards implementation of location-specific policy and planning initiatives (Abele 2012). On one hand it is highly appropriate within the Indigenous domain that a focus is placed on the local as the locus of prime concern. International literature has outlined success factors and important features of place-based partnerships, as outlined in Chapter 4 (pp140-141). However, within the RSD policy model it seemed that an emphasis on locality was somewhat overwhelmed by policy architecture which saw high executive-level control exercised by senior agency heads gathering in capital cities to make joint decisions about lives and livelihoods in small Aboriginal communities far away. This model ran counter to Aboriginal participation and the inclusion of local knowledge and insights towards innovative solutions. In addition, having place-based decision-making carried out via a highly centralised (yet remote from the local community)



decision-making body was clearly not well received by the case study community, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

### **RSD funding and the IRSD special account**

Funding of \$291.2 million for RSD equated to approximately \$10 million per priority community. It was not clearly understood by the Aboriginal community in the case study that this allocated money was not however intended to be spent within each RSD community (DEG *Yundiboo* 2009), but rather it was budgeted towards staging whole of government collaboration toward improvements in coordination of service delivery systems. Significant resources were committed by government (and the community), particularly in the early stages of RSD, toward baseline mapping of the service environment in each of the 29 communities, identifying areas of need, gaps and areas to be targeted for improvement.

That the RSD funding was earmarked for allocation in this way was apparently a widely misunderstood aspect of the policy initiative. RSD funding was to be dedicated to improving *governments'* systems and their processes for whole-of-government coordination of services into Indigenous communities. It was never intended to be spent within the communities on particular projects, programs or initiatives. While the agencies participating in RSD seem likely to have prioritised the RSD communities, allocating greater resources to them during the NPA period, this funding was not sourced from the RSD budget, but rather was drawn from each agency's own service delivery budget.

In response to communities expressing their expectations around additional project funding for identified community priorities, a separate stream of RSD funding for 'special projects' was established in early 2010. \$46 million was committed to this fund over three years as a flexible funding pool able to provide one off grants for community identified projects, including improvements to infrastructure that might contribute to improved service delivery (Australian Government 2011b).<sup>47</sup>

### **Selection of priority communities**

It was clear that the 29 priority communities chosen for RSD were all disadvantaged remote Aboriginal communities with service levels below what might be considered desirable for

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<sup>47</sup> As the case study would document however, RSD communities would be profoundly disappointed when, after a change of federal government from Labor to Liberal in late 2013, many commitments previously made for projects to be funded from the flexible RSD special projects pool were formally rescinded, including two new roads to Walgett's outlying Aboriginal reserves and a refurbished community hall in the main street of town that had been promised.

Australian citizens. However what was not clearly discernible from information on the public record or my inquiries, was how and why the particular 29 priority communities were chosen from a total of around 1200 remote/distinct Aboriginal communities Australia-wide. Whilst the responsible Federal Government department had developed criteria for the selection of priority communities, should the RSD be rolled out further, a performance review by the National Audit Office found little evidence that these criteria had been specifically applied to the selection of the initial 29 RSD priority communities by the various states and territories (ANAO 2012b).

In fact, Jarvie and Stewart have claimed that selecting Walgett and Wilcannia as the two NSW RSD towns was questionable given evidence from the prior whole of government experiment working with these communities, as part of the MP COAG Trial (2002-2007). The authors identified difficulties for government working with these communities as they were considered two of the 'more fractured communities', affected by 'family-based factions... and competitions for power and resources that swirled in and around the community working parties' (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 17-18). According to Jarvie and Stewart, these findings about local community governance in Walgett and Wilcannia would not bode well for further similar engagement as part of the RSD (Jarvie and Stewart 2011). Other evidence, submitted to a NSW parliamentary inquiry into overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, agreed that Walgett's community governance had been highly conflicted at the time of the COAG Trial, however it charged that government officers could have done much more to help correct power imbalances and ensure more equitable representation of the community at that (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2007).

### **Case study governance and service sector environment**

In the case study locality, three tiers of Australian government intersect: while federal government sets national Indigenous policy, state governments provide many major services including education, policing and health. Walgett's local Shire Council is a third layer of government that arguably has the most direct impact on the day-to-day lives of people in the town, with responsibility for municipal services. Yet local government had an uneasy relationship with CTG, because it was not actually a signatory to Walgett's Local Implementation Plan. While the NPA for RSD was designed as a federal/state bilateral agreement, the Australian Local Government Association is a member of COAG and therefore was aware of the initiative. Nevertheless, within a year of RSD's operation the CGRIS identified

that local government should ideally be included in RSD engagement, and that this had been a particular oversight in the design of the NPA.

Dillon and Westbury identify as problematic the complex architecture of government in Indigenous affairs, given the 'reality of political competition and conflict between the states and territories on one hand and the federal government on the other', as providing 'enormous scope for miscommunication, misunderstanding, misdirection of effort and at times mischief in the implementation of politics and programs by governments' (Dillon & Westbury, 2007, p. 63). As the case study would reveal, significant tensions between officers of different government agencies and jurisdictions did have a negative effect on the governance environment for RSD, both in terms of the relations between agencies and their ability to engage with the Aboriginal community.

If inter-governmental collaboration was required for RSD, the other critical player in engagement in the case study was Walgett's Aboriginal CWP. The Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party would be recognised formally by government as the Aboriginal community governance body for RSD. A more detailed account of representation on the WGACWP is provided later in this chapter (p193).

Key players in Walgett's service sector, with a stake in RSD, were non-government organisations and local Aboriginal organisations like the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Dharriwaa Elders Group, and the Local Aboriginal Land Council (as elaborated at p191 and pp195-199 below).

## **Closing the Gap**

As RSD was part of the broader CTG agenda, it is important to analyse the overarching policy agenda more closely. This section considers policy underpinnings and major critiques of the CTG approach, analysing what it signified in terms of Indigenous participation in decision-making.

### **Genesis of the new policy slogan**

Adopting the slogan Closing the Gap for its national Indigenous reform agenda - from a popular Indigenous health equity campaign and a New Zealand policy initiative before that<sup>48</sup> -

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<sup>48</sup> In the year before coming to power, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had endorsed the 'Close the Gap' campaign targeting Australia's 17 year life expectancy gap, that was championed by Oxfam, Get Up, ANTAR and other non-government organisations (Altman 2009b: 227; Pholi, Black and Richards 2009).

proved an effective public relations exercise on the part of the Rudd Labor Government that introduced it. If, in the past, some media commentators had slammed Australian government expenditure on Indigenous affairs as 'hand-outs' or focused on risks of waste and misappropriation by Indigenous organisations (Owen 2012), the new emphasis on CTG simultaneously justified government spending in this area and disarmed potential antagonists. Evidence of stark statistical Indigenous disadvantage - extensive gaps in life expectancy, high rates of Indigenous infant mortality, and significantly poorer Indigenous education and employment outcomes relative to non-Indigenous Australians - clearly justified the injection of federal spending.

At its outset the CTG agenda encouraged optimism and garnered widespread bipartisan political and public support in Australia. Some ascribe this broad consensus of support to its promise of measurable progress, apparent political neutrality and an image of all Australians pulling together for a common goal (Pholi, Black and Richards 2009: 3-4). Indeed, since 2008 the term 'closing the gap' has become a ubiquitous short-hand term for what is generally agreed by government and community sectors: that the levels of disadvantage facing Indigenous citizens are unacceptable, and that effort should be applied to improve Indigenous lives and outcomes.

Nevertheless Sullivan has questioned whether CTG offered anything more than a new slogan to the Indigenous policy landscape. He suggests the Rudd Government's introduction of the phrase 'closing the gap' may in fact be little more than a substitution of a new moniker for continuation of the less palatable assimilatory notion of 'normalisation' described in the early days of Howard's NTER (Sullivan 2011a: 100). Upon assuming government in late 2007, Labor continued the majority of initiatives instigated as part of the NTER, but softened the message: the NTER became 'Stronger Futures', and efforts to 'normalise' Aboriginal communities became 'closing the gap' on their disadvantages, a spin that was much more positive and palatable (Sullivan 2011a).

Two major problems with the CTG agenda have been strongly criticised: its comparative statistical basis and 'top down' approach. In addition, CTG seemed unlikely to account for cultural difference, a point identified by both Indigenous communities and policy commentators (Bennett 2013: 18; Cornell 2006: 9-10).

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The use of the term 'closing the gap' appears to have been borrowed from special programs of New Zealand governments in the 1990s (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009: 226).

### **Critiques of the Closing the Gap approach**

Some critics argued that the formation of CTG placed far too much emphasis on statistical gaps in health, education, employment and other life outcomes, with gap data providing both 'means and ends', statistical gaps defining the targets for policy action, and measured changes in the size of gaps taken as evidence that action is working or not (Pholi, Black and Richards 2009). These analysts see CTG as policy made in a vacuum: 'virtually devoid of theory and (existing) outside of historical, social and cultural context' (Pholi, Black and Richards 2009: 7). Other commentators agree that deeply entrenched disadvantage will unlikely be resolved without addressing its underlying causes and the ongoing structural forces that reproduce disadvantage (Altman, Biddle and Hunter 2009).

While there is no question that profound levels of Indigenous disadvantage are unacceptable, CTG has been described as an overly simplistic, mainstreaming approach, skating dangerously close to assimilation policies of old (Hunter 2008: 18; Altman 2009a: 14). Altman found its focus on 'statistical equality' problematic for it privileged mainstream values and ways of life, while reframing difficult, deeply-entrenched problems that emanate from settler-colonial interactions as a-historical technical or statistical ones (Altman 2009a: 13-14). Like Sullivan, he felt CTG was a rebadging of old policy rather than anything new, for previous governments also set particular goals to reduce statistical inequality: Hawke set targets, and even Howard's 'practical reconciliation' focussed on outcomes measured statistically (Altman 2009a).

According to Altman, 'goals expressed in such statistical terms become somewhat rhetorical and hollow if they are not matched by effective policy action or analysis of the causes of socioeconomic difference, and if such goals do not reflect Indigenous aspirations' (Altman 2009a: 6). CTG was seeking to apply 'mainstream solutions to deeply entrenched non-mainstream problems', by applying mainstream social indicators based on the dominant society's values and social norms (Altman 2009a: 1).

Blindness to Indigenous-specific priorities and aspirations was another major area of deficiency with the CTG policy framework identified by both scholars and Aboriginal communities (Pholi et al 2009: 10). It is notable that CTG building blocks did not include factors like culture and connection to country, which Aboriginal people frequently identify as fundamental to their wellbeing, and could, if properly resourced, provide opportunities to improve both wellbeing and livelihoods (such as via Aboriginal development enterprises that draw on cultural

strengths). The policy design of CTG did not admit Indigenous-specific priorities as these are irrelevant to reducing comparative statistical inequality.<sup>49</sup>

### **Lack of Indigenous participation in devising Closing the Gap**

Closing the Gap (CTG) has also been criticised as a top-down, technical and managerial approach to Indigenous policymaking running counter to community control, local empowerment and self-determination (Cooper 2011; Altman and Fogarty 2010). The absence of Indigenous consent and input into development of the national policy was strongly criticised, as were significantly reduced 'opportunities for Aboriginal control over their lives and communities' that came with mainstreaming of service delivery and 'top-down control by government', described as core elements of the CTG approach (Cooper 2011: 4).

The high-level formation and processes of COAG itself have been described as signalling both increasing executive power of governments and reduced transparency in policy decision-making, for it provides little opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny nor external input to decision-making (Botterill 2005). In fact, the executive decision-making structure of COAG has been described as 'inherently ill-adapted to Indigenous engagement or partnership, being a closed shop of government leaders and high level bureaucrats that effectively excludes external input, participation and scrutiny' (Cooper 2011: 4-5).

Altman and Fogarty (2010: 113-114) pointed out that much focus of CTG National Partnerships was on the remote or sparsely settled regions of Australia, comprising 86% of the continent where 26% of Indigenous people live (but only 2% of non-Indigenous people) and where inequalities or statistical 'gaps' are greatest. The authors also identified this as the first time an Australian government had explicitly articulated a drive to bring 'Indigenous human action into the domain of the market', reducing welfare dependency in favour of jobs in the market economy, whether or not these types of job markets even exist or could exist in remote locations (Altman and Fogarty 2010: p113). Also highly troubling was the emphasis on 'normalisation' and behaviour change toward 'positive social norms' - which or whose social

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<sup>49</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 6 (p210), in the Walgett RSD case study the WGACWP would identify what it saw as critical missing Indigenous-specific element in government's CTG framework, advocating for the inclusion of 'land and culture' as an additional 8th building block. They would argue that actions and resources applied under their proposed new building block would help improve local wellbeing and contribute to achievement of government's six CTG targets. From the point of view of government however, support for these additional elements was outside the scope and core agenda of RSD, which had a clear focus on service delivery coordination, rather than on broader initiatives that might also improve lives and reduce critical demand for service delivery in the local community.

norms were deemed 'positive' was not specifically addressed within the NIRA however (COAG 2008: 7, A24).

Altman and Fogarty identified that while CTG was not based on any consultations with 'the subjects of the project of improvement', it rendered 'deeply entrenched development problems... statistical, to such an extent that the CTG goals have almost become abstractions divorced from the lived reality of Indigenous subjects' (Altman and Fogarty 2010: 112). The authors say CTG fails to 'address politico-economic relationships that are the structural and historical sources of inequality' and that it is fundamentally based on a 'highly problematic form of evolutionary thinking linked to the modernisation paradigm' (Altman and Fogarty 2010: 113), in many ways akin to past policies of assimilation. CTG was based on the premise of behaviour change, that gaps will close for those Indigenous people who adopt mainstream social norms and values, and engage in education and mainstream jobs, and they will eventually achieve livelihoods equal to other Australians.

However Aboriginal people in remote Australia may not choose to be 'normalised', equalised or measured up against non-Indigenous Australians, via targets established by government; they may in fact choose to maintain vital differences, or aspire to do better than non-Indigenous Australians in terms of certain benchmark elements important to them. At any rate, it seems likely that had Aboriginal people been afforded the opportunity to participate in decision-making to formulate a set of high level policy targets, they may have focused on a range of different elements.

Altman identified the CTG agenda's top-down approach as at best only a partial solution to Australia's Indigenous 'problem', and at worst as a policy approach that might exacerbate problems for many Indigenous communities because it explicitly denied 'recognition of difference, choice and self determination for first Australians as 'special' citizens' (Altman, 2009 p1). Aboriginal commentators identified this as highly problematic for they continue to strive for recognition of their distinct political, social and cultural status as indigenous peoples (Bradfield 2006).

### **Focussing on deficits rather than strengths**

Defining people by their limitations, disadvantage or deviance may have the effect of creating 'social identities based on paternalistic notions of powerlessness and victimisation' (Pholi, Black and Richards 2009: 9). Unintended consequences of a CTG approach may therefore be

further disempowerment of marginalised and disadvantaged Aboriginal people, as deficiencies are repeatedly highlighted at the expense of other valuable personal or community assets (the specialness of culture, importance of cultural identity for example). As CTG is about comparing gap data, 'anything that may be uniquely positive about being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is of little relevance to the 'evidence base'' (Pholi, Black and Richards 2009: 10).

That the Australian policy concept of 'closing gaps' was borrowed from outdated New Zealand policy deserves further consideration. In fact, the very basis of 'closing gaps' is built on an intellectual device, developed since the 1970s in New Zealand and Australia (both modern settler societies), of a population binary that compares data for two population groups - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - against one another. Rowse (2008) has pointed out the particular problems that arise within the discourse of social justice when Indigenous people are represented, as they are within official data, lumped together as a statistical population group. High-level aggregation discounts diversity of cultural and ethnic identities, and the varied socio-economic circumstances experienced within population groups. Acknowledging a diversity of Indigenous peoples enables communities to be recognised as consciously identifying 'consent and dissent groupings' so Rowse points out that conservative governments may conveniently opt to focus on Indigenous populations rather than peoples, by way of sidestepping rights-based claims (Rowse 2008). Humpage notes that in New Zealand a needs-based discourse around gaps may indeed have been employed as a means to avoid rights-based discourses (Humpage, 2005 cited in Altman 2009a: 6).

It is telling that New Zealand moved away from its 1990s policy discourse of 'closing gaps' to address Indigenous disadvantage more than a decade ago, towards more the positive goals of 'Maori development' and 'Maori wellbeing'. The constant reporting of gaps across the life course between Maori and non-Maori citizens was found to lead to negative public perceptions of Maori as 'underperforming New Zealanders' and erode self-perception for Maori people (Trethewey 2010: 3-4; 2008: 24-25). Durie suggests that discourses of social inclusion also 'presuppose that Maori are aiming to be as good as Pakeha when they might well aspire to be better, or different, or even markedly superior' (2003: 202).

As an alternative approach, an advisory body of Maori scholars and leaders called the Maori Statistics Forum developed policy frameworks to put 'Maori wellbeing' and 'Maori development' at the centre, rather than simply focussing on Maori/non-Maori comparisons (Statistics New Zealand 2002; Statistics New Zealand: Tatauranga Aotearoa 2009). Maori



potential, capability and cultural distinctiveness were defined as the three guiding principles of the 'Maori Potential Approach' established by Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry for Maori Development, as the basis for its public policy framework (Trethewey 2008: 18-19; 2010; TPK 2011). The policy framework would allow better understanding and progress of Maori aspirations for a diversity of Maori organisations involved in policy, service delivery and development, for settlement of historical grievances, and explicit recognition of Maori as capable and aspirational (Trethewey 2010: 25; 2008: 4). New Zealand's example clearly demonstrates that there are alternate ways of conceptualising problems and solutions in the realm of Indigenous policymaking, and that these conceptualisations necessarily determine the type of policy formulated.

## **Part II: Servicing remote Australian communities**

The next section provides context for the case study by considering the particular challenges of servicing remote Australia and approaches Australian governments have taken to this area of policy over time.

Australia is a vast continent with a highly urbanised population. As long ago as Federation (1901), the country's population distribution was well established, with a majority of people living in coastal cities of the south-east and south-west. Equal provision of services to farming regions was once considered a legitimate subsidy by government to support agricultural producers making a vital economic contribution (Brett, 2011). State and federal governments were monopoly providers of many basic services so they were able to cross-subsidise service provision relatively easily. Equal access to communication technologies, for example, was considered a citizenship right that could conquer distance for people living in remote and scattered communities (Brett, 2011: 23). Costs of unique outback services like the School of the Air and Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) were also cross-subsidised by governments, becoming iconic outback institutions to support citizens living remotely (Dillon & Westbury, 2007, p. 26).

It is important to note however, that while the RFDS services both non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in the outback, there has generally been a lack of corresponding long-standing investment by governments in services for remote-living Indigenous communities (Dillon and Westbury 2007). Colonisation had a brutal impact on the lives and livelihoods of Australia's first peoples with many communities decimated by disease and violence, and progressively dispossessed from traditional country (Elder, 1999). Across the continent, including in NSW, many Aboriginal people found themselves forced onto managed reserves, with appallingly substandard facilities and restricted freedom, as white settlers encroached and took over land for farming and grazing.

Meanwhile, governments' subsidised support of non-Indigenous settlers in rural and remote Australia was to drop off by the 1980s, as the nation's 'city-country compact' dissolved under the influence of neo-liberalism (Brett, 2011). As large state-owned enterprises were privatised or corporatised in the 1980s and 1990s, government agencies and private businesses increasingly based decisions on user-pays market principles that removed the notion of service equity for rural citizens. Country towns experienced declining levels of service in areas like hospital facilities and communications, bank branches closed, and rail and air services were cut

back or discontinued, causing a domino effect that impacted on the viability of local businesses, and left many townships struggling to survive.

At the same time, a strong new trend emerged, with non-Indigenous people starting to move away from rural and remote Australia, migrating to better serviced regional or urban centers. Whilst there has also been a shift of Indigenous people to higher order centres, Aboriginal communities with their higher rates of population growth and less propensity to move away from traditional country, have begun to make up an increasing proportion of the population in rural and remote Australia<sup>50</sup>. The indigenisation of many country towns has been a notable effect (Dillon & Westbury, 2007, pp. 20-22; Taylor, 2006). Demographer John Taylor stresses an urgent need for proactive policy planning to take account of this change, rather than just continuing to play historical catch-up, for trends predict that younger Indigenous populations will have escalating needs in the areas of education, jobs and housing for new families (Taylor, 2006).

Remoteness affects the cost-effectiveness and capacity of governments to provide services (Dillon & Westbury, 2007: 63). Increasingly there are arguments that Indigenous people ought to be coerced or encouraged to move away from traditional country to regional and urban centers to access jobs and services. However there is little evidence that those that do migrate from homelands to larger towns or urban centers are able to improve their social standing or job prospects by so doing (Dillon & Westbury, 2007: 20,27), and policies that encourage out-migration may simply shift problems of under-servicing and infrastructure shortfalls from remote to regional locations.

There is also emerging evidence that Australia will need to continue to support people residing in remote regions beyond those involved in mining and resource extraction, in order to have people on the ground to monitor and care for country. As climate change and other forces pose myriad threats to land and seascapes of the nation, there is increasing recognition of a role for traditional custodians to 'conserve and rehabilitate the outstanding natural and cultural resource values of their ancestral lands' (Altman and Kerins, 2012: 1). The importance

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<sup>50</sup> While the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today live in urban and regional parts of Australia, there are still 120,000 people, around 20% of the total Indigenous population, residing in remote or very remote locations; there are approximately 1200 remote and very remote Indigenous communities (Dillon & Westbury, 2007, pp. 62-63; Taylor, 2006, p. 5). While non-Indigenous population growth has been negative, Indigenous populations of remote areas have grown by 23% since 1981 (Dillon & Westbury, 2007, p. 24).

of sustaining remote Indigenous communities as natural and cultural resource managers over vast remote estates is something Australia is perhaps only belatedly coming to acknowledge.

### **The 'failed state': government disengagement blamed for problems in remote Australia**

The authors of a 2012 remoteFOCUS report identify remote Australia as a 'failed state', with consequences including social crisis and a drift of population, without a proactive and coherent investment strategy to address Aboriginal impoverishment (2012:16). A 'dual economy' in remote Australia is identified, with one part 'completely dominated by transnational corporate investors and commodity cycles' while in the other 'economic activity, employment and welfare is, de facto, mostly the result of government spending' (remoteFOCUS 2012: 36). Demographic trends indicate increasing public expenditure is needed. Meanwhile remote service delivery challenges have been compounded by the failure of 'arms-length, performance based contractual arrangements' involving NGOs and for-profits delivering services via 'progressively more elaborate accountability arrangements' to 'discipline and monitor performance and results achieved'; and the failure of such arrangements has prompted, and been complicated by, further 'top-down crisis-driven interventions' (remoteFOCUS 2012: 36).

RemoteFOCUS identifies a continuing 'failure of governance (despite good intentions)' that perpetuates 'an institutional and national indifference (and) creates despair and loss of hope for those impacted' (2012: 26). In the view of report authors, the 'present configuration of governance, policy and practice' are simply not working in remote Australia. In fact, they identify current governance arrangements as a 'threshold cause of policy failure in remote Australia' today (2012: 36). They advocate a strong need for systemic reform and new governance arrangements in remote regions, suggesting a regional governance authority, body or agency that is authorised and mandated by different tiers of government and communities to override existing arrangements that continue to fail remote Australia and damage those who live there. The suggested approach would be designed to 'change the dynamic of under-development that afflicts the region' (remoteFOCUS 2012: 70).

Other authors have also criticised governance in remote regions, attributing deeply entrenched disadvantage in remote Indigenous communities to a 'longstanding lack of coherent policy engagement by governments' that allows the needs of Aboriginal communities to fall between jurisdictional gaps (Dillon and Westbury 2007: 5). In Dillon and Westbury's

view, it is government that has long been *disengaged* in remote communities, not Aboriginal people themselves. Neglect of the remote Indigenous domain, according to these authors, has seen governments fail to establish the institutional frameworks needed for nation state, those elements that underpin citizenship rights and responsibilities and the operation of markets (2007: 5). Contrary to other commentators, who consider Aboriginal-controlled organisations to be vital though significantly under-resourced service providers in remote regions (as discussed in Chapter 2), Dillon and Westbury see the sector as a 'second tier' that enables inequity and inferior standards of service to Indigenous people. The solution they propose is a combination of mainstreaming and significantly greater investment by governments (Dillon and Westbury 2007).

Another perspective is provided by Altman and Hinkson, who identify a theme running through Australia's Indigenous policy history, whereby governments devise policies to eliminate perceived risks posed by Aboriginal people (Altman and Hinkson 2010). They note that Aboriginal people are increasingly depicted today as a risk to themselves 'via the increasingly publicized spectre of widespread social pathologies', and to the Australian nation state, as the 'rapid growth of an unhealthy and impoverished population that would represent an escalating cost in the future' (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 187). Unless Aboriginal impoverishment and welfare dependency are addressed, they pose 'social risk to the public health and criminal justice systems; to the economic foundation of remote Australia, mining, tourism and pastoralism; and to the very social fabric of society' (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 187-188). Altman and Hinkson point out that contemporary neoliberal policies aim to 'normalise' the Indigenous citizen, turning him/her into a 'mobile, formally educated, individualized Aboriginal citizen who will embrace the values of the free market' (2010: 185), and in so doing, effect 'risk-reducing order' in the outback. Meanwhile, they argue, governments simultaneously overlook their 'own role in creating chaos' for Aboriginal people's lives (Altman and Hinkson 2010: 203).

This section has provided broad context about the challenges facing Australia's remote communities and how they have been serviced by governments over time. The third and final part of this chapter provides an introduction to the particular case study community of Walgett: its history of race relations, geography, changing demographics, Aboriginal community governance and the nature of the local service system, including particular service shortfalls.

### **Part III: Case study community context - Walgett**

Walgett is a remote New South Wales community with a large Aboriginal population, ranked as one of Australia's most disadvantaged communities (Vinson 2007). It was chosen in 2009 as one of 29 remote Aboriginal communities to be prioritised as the focus of the RSD commitment of COAG's Closing the Gap strategy. This section outlines some of the key influences and demographic trends that shape life for Aboriginal people in the case study community.

#### **People and place**

Around 1800 people reside in the town of Walgett and the two nearby Aboriginal villages, according to the 2011 census. More than half the population identify as Aboriginal (ABS 2011b). Situated at the junction of the Barwon and Namoi rivers in the north west of the state, Walgett's name is believed to be derived from a Gamilaraay word meaning 'meeting of two rivers' (or 'higher ground'). Aboriginal people living in Walgett today are mostly of the Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Ngemba nations. As in other Aboriginal communities, government policies that forced the co-location of different nations, families and clans has left a legacy that can result in intense social pressures and conflict at times.

The disruptions and dispossessions wrought by colonisation have clearly had major impacts on the way Aboriginal people relate to one another in Walgett as elsewhere in Australia. If traditionally relations between clans and Aboriginal peoples from neighbouring parts of the country were finely balanced and managed via established protocols and reciprocal arrangements, the brutal force of colonialism smashed and reshaped these social relations, often forcing rival clans, families and peoples together into the confines of reserves and missions, regardless of whether they had cultural affinity or rights to that area. Older members of Walgett's Aboriginal community recall the force and coercion used to relocate Aboriginal families from their riverside camps to managed reserves set aside by governments. They also recall the devastating impacts of child removal policies that split families apart. Since those times other forces have arisen to drive new tensions between Aboriginal people within modern communities like Walgett, including the impacts of legal processes required to make and sustain native title claims over land. These processes have caused distress and division between local families, such as when overlapping claims were made on the same land in the vicinity of Walgett in the late 1990s (Peters-Little 2000: 17).

## The Aboriginal population of Walgett

A 1965 survey revealed that Walgett had one of the two largest discrete Aboriginal communities in the State, with over 600 people living on 2 large reserves and smaller fringe camps around the town (Long 1970: 73).<sup>51</sup> At this time Aboriginal people were employed by non-Aboriginal townsfolk and farmers and they were inclined to live close by in order to access this work, however they had also not yet been permitted nor enabled to live in the houses of the town of Walgett. Soon the impact of new policy directives would see relocation schemes begin that would encourage Aboriginal families to move away from crown lands and reserves into housing commission homes within town parameters. In 1965 the first 12 houses for Aboriginal families were being built within the town of Walgett on a street that would be named Hope Street. One resident told Peters-Little it seemed to him 'a bit of a back handed way of saying it was supposed to be new hope for the Kooris<sup>52</sup>, to see if they could handle the new houses' (Peters-Little 2000: 11). The new houses were built partly in response to the exposure of poor Aboriginal living conditions by the 1965 Freedom Ride. Among other measures, the Aborigines Welfare Board reported it planned to 'provide cheap, *temporary* housing to raise living standards in the reserve area' (Long 1970: 75). In a show of tenacious, ground-up participation, the first Aboriginal families that moved into the town houses soon organised a steering committee to put their concerns to Council about their aversion to being given poor quality homes in what amounted to an attempt to 'create black slums' (Peters-Little 2000).

By 1970 less than a third of Walgett's Aboriginal population was accommodated on the Welfare Board's managed station (Gingie) around 9km away from town, with the majority of families opting to live closer to town on the Namoi Reserve or one of the smaller fringe camps around the town like Montkeila Bend on the Namoi River or the Dewhurst Camping Grounds. Though there was a primary school located on the managed reserve, there was no shop nor public transport available to give people to access the town for work, shopping or leisure purposes (Long 1970). Progressively Aboriginal people moved in to houses in the town and today the majority of the Aboriginal population lives within town parameters.

Walgett has two outlying Aboriginal settlements, Gingie and Namoi Villages, situated some distance from the town on land where authorities once sought to force Aboriginal families to

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<sup>51</sup> The non-Indigenous population of Walgett was 1,726 at the 1961 census. Aboriginal people were not counted in the Australian census until after 1967.

<sup>52</sup> Koori is a term used to describe indigenous Australians that traditionally occupied modern-day New South Wales and Victoria.

live on reserves segregated from the rest of the community. Today both settlements are on land that is owned and managed by Walgett's Local Aboriginal Land Council, under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*. A number of families and older residents continue to reside in the two villages, but the largest proportion of Aboriginal residents now live in town.

### **Dramatic changes in Walgett's economy and demographics**

Walgett was once a thriving commercial hub for surrounding agricultural properties, at a time when the majority of town residents were non-Indigenous. As already noted, local Aboriginal people were employed as farm and domestic labourers, but they were marginalised, physically segregated and largely excluded from enjoying the wealth and amenities of the town. Today both the population make-up of Walgett and its economic prospects have changed dramatically.

Significant shifts in the demographics of the Walgett community over time are typical of many rural towns<sup>53</sup>, with the Aboriginal proportion of the population growing, compared with the non-Indigenous population, which is aging and further decreasing due to out-migration and lower birth rates (Taylor 2006; Ross and Taylor 2000; Taylor 2000). Aboriginal people constitute a growing portion of Walgett's population. In the decade to 2011 the Aboriginal population rose 9%, while the non-Aboriginal population fell by 33% (NSW OAA 2013: 5). Aboriginal people represented more than half the population of Walgett at the 2011 census, but only 2.5% of NSW state population (ABS 2011b). The Aboriginal population in Walgett is also significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with a median age of 23 versus 37 years. Children 0-14 years represent the largest age group, about a third of Walgett's Aboriginal population, while only 6% of Aboriginal residents are over 65. **Figures 6 and 7** show comparative age distributions for Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations for Australia 2011 and for Walgett NSW 2011. These changes pose particular challenges and needs, both due to existing disadvantage and service delivery gaps, but also because of predicted increases in demand for housing, education, training and jobs for younger Indigenous residents into the future. While Australian governments increasingly focus on the needs and consequences of an ageing national population, Taylor identifies that the Indigenous population will remain relatively youthful due to higher fertility and premature mortality: 'Most Indigenous people barely reach retirement age, and their concerns are at the opposite end of the social policy

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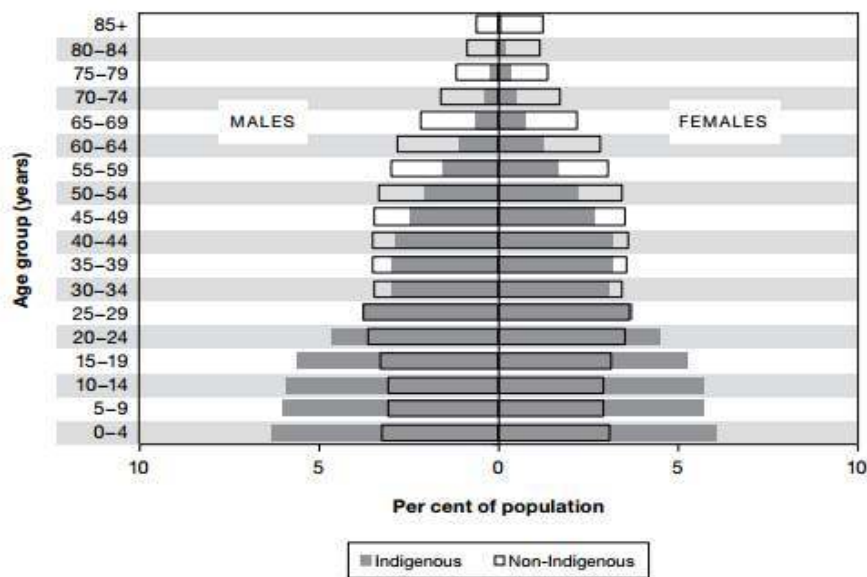
<sup>53</sup> Taylor notes that despite historic shifts in Indigenous population distribution to urban locations, they remain 'far more likely than other Australians to reside away from cities, and especially in remote areas'. In fact, almost half of the resident population across three quarters of the Australian continent are Aboriginal and their share of that population is rising (Taylor 2006: 62).



spectrum to do with child health, education, criminal justice (especially in relation to youth), transition to work, family housing, and asset accumulation' (Taylor 2006: 62).

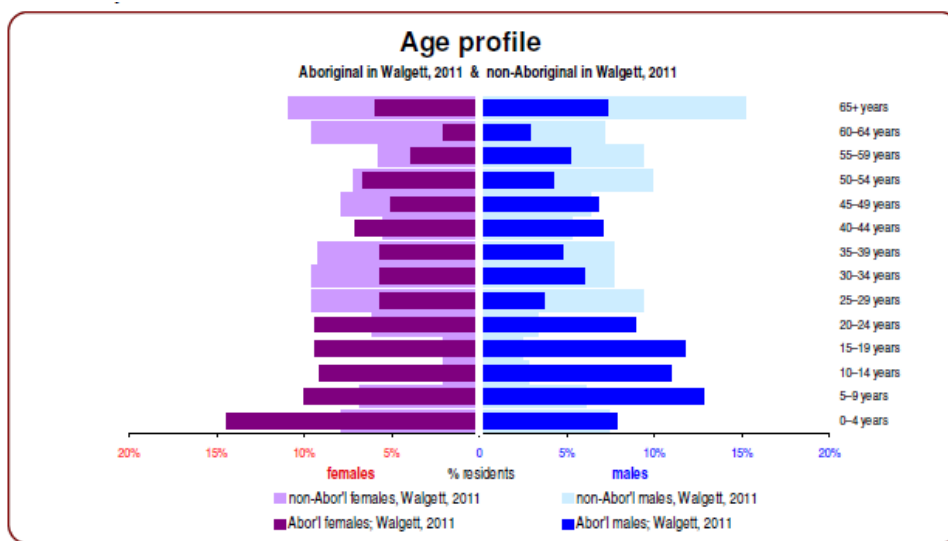
This reinforces the vital importance of policy planning not just playing catch up in relation to Aboriginal service delivery but being ready to predict and respond to future needs based on strong demographic trends and growing demand for services (Taylor 2006: 62).

**Figure 6: Age distribution of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Australia 2011**



Source: Biddle N (2012) CAEPR Indigenous Population Project 2011: Population & Age Structure, p5.

**Figure 7: Age distribution of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Walgett 2011**

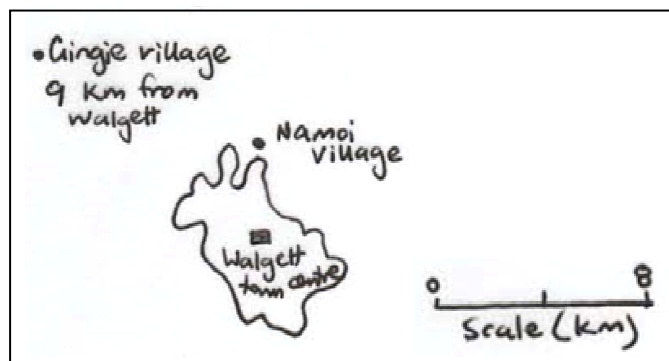


Source: NSW Office of Aboriginal Affairs (2013) Community Portrait Walgett from 2011 and earlier censuses, p7

### Remote farming country

Walgett is classified as a remote community, situated 10 hours drive north west of Sydney and three and a half hours from the nearest regional centre Dubbo (population 41,000). The Shire of Walgett covers some 22,000 square kilometres in the far north of the state, with a population of almost 6,500 people living in a number of small towns and communities as well as Walgett (ABS 2011a). Being flood-prone, the town of Walgett is surrounded by a 9km levee bank. The surrounding country features sweeping plains, with a vast artesian water table steaming below. It contains black opal fields, a significant wetland reserve and numerous sites sacred to Aboriginal people. Sadly some of these sites have been desecrated (DEG website).

Large agricultural properties farming wool, cattle, grain and cotton operate within Walgett Shire. While Aboriginal people were once in demand locally as agricultural labourers and domestic workers, changes to farming practices in past decades have greatly reduced employment opportunities. Cowlishaw has identified a profound shift that loss of rural employment since the 1960s has had on Aboriginal people and race relations in towns of the north west, where younger generations are denied what their grandparents had experienced: 'demand for their labour, pride in skill, productive work and honourable relationships with employers' (Cowlishaw 2006: 190-191), in addition to providing opportunities to access country. For Aboriginal people the shift to welfare dependency has seen relations with non-Aboriginal employers and fellow workers replaced by relationships with state institutions, welfare providers, police, hospitals and government-funded Aboriginal service organisations. Past experiences of Aboriginal labour should not be falsely portrayed as entirely positive, for clearly there was exploitation and even cruelty (Reay 1945), however Cowlishaw identifies that it did enable different types of interactions between people in rural communities.



**Map 1: Location of Walgett's outlying settlements Namoi and Gingie:**

Namoi and Gingie villages are each situated some distance away from the town of Walgett and outside its flood levee bank, creating particular risks and service delivery challenges.



## **Colonisation and resistance**

It's chilling to think that some of the most bloody and notorious massacres of Aboriginal people took place here in the north west plains in the 1830s, as white settlers attempted to take over land to graze livestock. Violence had been sanctioned by the colonial government when squatters were advised to take 'vigorous measures' for their own defence against 'the natives'. When Aboriginal people resisted with a type of guerrilla warfare, there were casualties on both sides (Elder 1999). From the 1880s a profusion of contradictory local and state policies saw officials act to try to remove, contain, assimilate or disperse Aboriginal people in the region, implementing policies we now recognise as racist, misguided, culturally damaging and traumatising for communities, families and individuals.

During the 1930s Aboriginal civil rights activism began to emerge in western parts of the state, including Walgett, protesting the paternalistic restrictions and control imposed by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board on people's lives. A formal protest was held in Sydney to mark a Day of Mourning on the 150th anniversary of colonisation in 1938. As noted earlier, in 1965 Walgett became a key site of the civil rights protests staged by Charles Perkins' Freedom Riders from the University of Sydney. Inspired by the American civil rights movement, the Freedom Riders travelled around the state by bus, conducting public protests and transgressing colour bars in country towns to bring about non-violent confrontations. They picketed segregated swimming pools, hotels and clubs, theatres and dress shops, raising the ire of locals in many places and drawing national and international media attention (Curthoys 2002). Strong local leadership would continue the struggle for Aboriginal rights in Walgett long after the bus had left town. For many years after the Freedom Ride, which attracted international attention, the towns of Walgett and Moree became the 'media's measuring stick to gauge the level of racism in rural NSW' (Peters-Little 2000: 8).

Despite the many hardships they have lived through, Aboriginal people of the north west have survived on country, retaining their Aboriginality and their own concepts of social and geographical boundaries. Today, the population of Aboriginal people living in the north west may well be higher than it was prior to colonisation. There is a proud history of political activism and resilience on the part of Aboriginal people in the Walgett community that is reflected in a number of Aboriginal community-run organisations established there since the 1970s: the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Walgett Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Dharriwaa Elders Group to name a few.

### **Race relations, public safety and criminal justice**

Walgett was known in the 1980s as 'warrior town' and continues to be stigmatised as a troubled and disadvantaged Aboriginal town and many locals and police argue there has been significant change in the level of violence in the community since that time (Hohenboken 2009). This may be true to a certain extent, in terms of street violence for example, and Walgett still has the second highest recorded rate of domestic violence in the state (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2013). Today there are at least 40 police stationed in Walgett at any time, a very high ratio to population in a community of under 2,000 people<sup>54</sup>.

Two significant criminal cases in Walgett in the 1990s have had important repercussions in Australian law, as well as providing important insights into the town's underlying racial tensions and the impoverished, violent and troubled social conditions in which Aboriginal people are often raised there. Principles distilled in the judgement in the 1992 case of an Aboriginal man from Walgett who bashed his defacto wife while drunk have become known as the 'Fernando Principles'.<sup>55</sup> In that case the judge found that dysfunctional, violent behaviour and alcohol abuse can be associated with severe disadvantage and that when sentencing an Aboriginal offender, judges should take into account any social conditions of extreme disadvantage which the defendant has experienced being raised as an Aboriginal person (Legal Aid NSW 1992). The brutal 1994 case of the rape and murder of nurse Sandra Hoare was another Walgett criminal case that was both shocking and revealing because of the deep interracial community tensions it provoked. A young white nurse, the fiancé of a local police officer, was abducted from her overnight post at the Walgett base hospital and brutally murdered by two intellectually disabled Aboriginal cousins. Widely reported in the media were the grizzly details of this crime, including that the murdered woman was decapitated and her head left in an ants' nest in the park at the end of Hope Street (Glendinning 2004). Such events clearly have strongly reverberating effects on small country towns, creating trauma and long-lasting tensions for the whole community. The interracial nature of such crimes also serves to unleash pent up racial tensions that might ordinarily be more covertly held or expressed. This

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<sup>54</sup> Full strength allocation for the town is 43, however at any time there are around 35 to 40 operational police on duty; confirmed by Walgett Acting Local Area Commander 2/10/13. Analysis of 2011 police to population ratios reveals the state-wide ratio for NSW was 1:460, in the Castlereagh Local Area Command, of which Walgett is a part, the ratio was 1:108 (calculated based on ABS census data for 2011 and information provided in Parsons 2011). Meanwhile the ratio of police rostered at the Walgett police station to the town population was 1:50.

<sup>55</sup> *R v Fernando* (1992) 76 A Crim R 58, NSW Supreme Court, Wood J, 13 March 1992.

was a notorious crime with a long afterlife, associated in the minds of out-of-towners with the town Walgett itself.<sup>56</sup>

Today, heavy wire mesh and bars cover every shop front and business entrance on the main street of Walgett, projecting an unfortunate, uninviting impression to those less familiar with the area. But the sense of foreboding tensions and violence these façades project, according to many locals, does not match the reality of life there today<sup>57</sup>. Many residents feel the mesh is not needed, and that if it was once deemed necessary, it is no longer so. One local explained that passing 'grey nomads' typically took one look at the bars and 'put their foot down to shoot straight through' out of town. He expressed a strong desire to 'take down the bars and live in a real community'. The NSW town of Bourke further west, which once had the same wire mesh and bars across shopfronts, has since taken them down and replaced them with roller doors pulled down at night, allowing the main street to feel less 'bordered up' and unwelcoming by day. Walgett Shire Council has been considering similar moves to make the town streetscapes more inviting.<sup>58</sup>

### **Significant challenges and service delivery shortfalls in Walgett**

In a landmark study of the geographical concentration of disadvantage in Australia, conducted in 2007 and repeated in 2015, Walgett ranked among the state of NSW's most disadvantaged postcodes (Vinson 2007; Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015). The study considered how a range of factors combine to create social disadvantage that blocks life opportunities and prevents people participating fully in society. It identified a range of highly correlated factors for locations in NSW, including low family income, long-term unemployment, early school leaving and poor post-school qualifications, disability and sickness, and lack of computer and internet access (Vinson 2007; Vinson and Rawsthorne 2015).

Walgett's Aboriginal community is undoubtedly affected by a number of significant disadvantage factors: strong reliance on welfare, low average household weekly incomes,

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<sup>56</sup> A framed copy of an article with a photograph of the murdered nurse is displayed in the foyer of Walgett's \$17 million new police station opened 2015.

<sup>57</sup> For example, the 2004 funeral of TJ Hickey, whose Redfern death on a bicycle while being chased by police sparked enormous tension and protests in Sydney, was undoubtedly a time of significant grief and trauma for the community, yet it was marked by a peaceful ceremony in his home town of Walgett. Walgett local Police said they had not anticipated nor needed to respond to violent unrest in town on the day ('Calm after the storm as hundreds farewell TJ', *SMH* 25/02/2004), however a research participant recalled the Police riot squad had been in Walgett for the funeral, in anticipation of a unrest which did not eventuate.

<sup>58</sup> This was discussed during a Council meeting I attended in Walgett in 2012.

overcrowded housing, low employment participation and particularly poor high school educational outcomes.

In its submission to a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) identified particular examples of ways that poorly resourced infrastructure and service delivery impact Walgett's Aboriginal community (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008). That town water supplies were not fluoridated was identified as a critical public health issue and service delivery oversight, which had continued to be neglected by NSW Health and the Shire Council despite a strong campaign from local Elders and doctors. The resulting health burden was described as causing community members to suffer 'medieval tooth decay and infections, further burdening immune systems' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008: 4).

The DEG submission explained the frustrations of community members when preventable environmental health hazards failed to be addressed. It detailed an example of how the organisation sometimes took matters into its own hands:

Sometimes the lack of co-ordination of service providers becomes untenable and the community sector has to take action. At times like this it appears to Elders that government doesn't care about its Aboriginal citizens. In 2002 the DEG became concerned about uncollected garbage entering the water supplies at Gingie and Namoi Villages, two Aboriginal communities outside Walgett. DEG brought doctors, Walgett Shire Council, Walgett hospital, the Walgett CDEP, NSW Land and Water Conservation, Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council and NSW Department of Education staff together to show them where uncollected garbage was falling into the rivers which supplied the town's drinking water. After that meeting the local Outback Division of GPs bought wheelie bins for the two communities, Council began to collect rubbish regularly and a big rubbish clean-up was undertaken by the Walgett CDEP and Walgett Council (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008).

Social gambling and addiction to poker machines, leading to family poverty and child neglect, were also identified in the DEG's submission as significant problem areas for the community:

It is not right that a town with a population of little over 2,300<sup>59</sup>, a majority being welfare recipients, has the local RSL Club earn over \$1 million annually in poker machine

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<sup>59</sup> That this population figure differs from the ABS 2011 figure cited at p168 reflects that population data varies considerably from one census to the next because of the known undercount of Aboriginal people, and due to different ways the ABS population boundaries are determined.

revenue alone. Keno, TAB and the sale of lottery tickets by the local newsagent are other legal forms of gambling, which attract disproportionate revenues from Walgett (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008).

Other critical areas of concern included unsafe levels of drinking related to boredom and depression, and high incidence of domestic violence, often related to alcohol misuse. DEG recommendations included the need for provision of air-conditioned community meeting places (given temperatures are regularly over 40 degrees Celsius in summer) and social activities that don't rely on income from poker machines; providing men's support and rehabilitation programs, a children's safe house and activities and that income management measures be applied to people identified as at risk or neglecting their children 'so food money isn't wasted on grog' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008: 7-8).

### **Walgett's Aboriginal families and community dynamics**

Walgett's Aboriginal community has a number of large long-resident family groups that act as local networks and strongly influence community dynamics in terms of the way that people relate to one another within the community on a daily basis. The particular history of Walgett is important to note as it continues to impact community relations today. Geographically Walgett lies at the crossroads of a number of different language groups (**Map 3**); and it is a place where Aboriginal peoples from many regions came to reside, initially as refugees, after displacement from their own country.<sup>60</sup> As family allegiances play a strong part in Aboriginal community governance, it is important to consider the means by which different family groups can be represented today, such as via their membership of particular local Aboriginal organisations and groups.

Clearly the existence of strong family networks can have both positive and negative effects on community life. Various families may tend to align with one another at different times, over different issues and may also strongly support certain local organisations and groups. At times they may be considered to wield undue influence over organisational governance to the exclusion of non-family members. This can be highly problematic when it affects the ability of some people to access services provided by organisations. Tensions between members of different families or clans may spread to include other members, escalate as lateral violence and endure over long periods of time.

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<sup>60</sup> Friction between clans and families has historically been sparked by the forced displacement of Aboriginal people as lives were progressively disrupted by colonisation. Waves of forced removals of Aboriginal people from Angledool and Namoi Bend at Walgett caused terrible distress to families and also forced members of different clans into unusually close proximity on managed or unmanaged reserves (Goodall 1996).



That factions in Aboriginal communities are typically formed around allegiances to relational family and clan members can, in an organisational context, undermine governance accountability when seen from a Western non-Aboriginal point of view. In the context of significantly under-resourced and disadvantaged communities like Walgett, there is potential for this to unfairly restrict the distribution of resources and access to vital services. The tendency to factional dominance of some groups may however be mitigated and managed in the context of community governance by terms of reference for Aboriginal organisations or governance bodies that try to ensure all families and sectors of a community are entitled to representation, especially when it comes to important community-wide consultative bodies like community working parties. Such measures are not failsafe however, and factional control over both local Aboriginal organisations and community governance bodies can persist when there are no adequate mechanisms in place to manage these. For example, evidence suggests this took place in several - but not all - of the communities involved in the MP COAG Trial (OID inquiry 2008).

### **Mapping the family dynamics of Walgett**

For the purposes of the case study, a mapping exercise was conducted with key informants to identify how various families align and which organisations they are members of.<sup>61</sup> A striking outcome of this mapping exercise, which surprised all involved, was that all but one local family of approximately 40 Aboriginal families identified were strongly associated with one or more of the local Aboriginal organisations. This is very important in terms of representation on the WGACWP, as we shall see, for the four key Aboriginal organisations and three demographic sector groups can be seen to broadly represent the whole community, including almost all the Aboriginal families.

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<sup>61</sup>The map created cannot be reproduced here for confidentiality reasons, but it sits with the community as a resource.



Walgett, at the meeting of rivers, is a place where many Aboriginal language and cultural areas intersect. Many people came to the district displaced, by successive waves of colonisation, from country to the north, east, south and south west. Today Aboriginal people of Walgett hail from Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay, Yuwaalayaay, as well as Weilwan and Ngemba language groups. Children are born in Dubbo, on Wiradjuri land, as there is no birthing facility in the more remote communities of western NSW.

**Map 3: Map of NSW showing Aboriginal cultural country areas**

Map adapted from e-Atlas of NSW (2011) [www.atlas.nsw.gov.au](http://www.atlas.nsw.gov.au); and *Gamilaraay, Yuwalaraay, Yuwaalayaay Dictionary* (2003), p2

## **Walgett Governance**

Like other Aboriginal communities, Walgett's community governance is both multi-faceted and fluid, with key local groups and Aboriginal organisations fulfilling governance functions that enable networking, social support and information sharing, and provide mechanisms for group decision-making to take place (on behalf of the community) where necessary. Local families affiliate with groups and organisations at different times, to seek assistance or friendship, take part in sporting and social events, attend meetings that help organisations to run or advocate for the things that need to get done in a community (such as improvements to housing, power or water supplies). Typical affiliations include membership of the local Aboriginal land council, elders' group, men's and women's groups, and local resident committees.

Walgett has a long history of grassroots organisations established to advocate for and assist Aboriginal people's welfare and rights<sup>62</sup> - often at great personal cost to those involved (WGACWP 2012a). Groups and organisations may be issue, service or activity focused, such as the Aboriginal Education Consultative Committee, and membership groups may be family or clan-based, demographic or location specific, such as Gingie and Namoi resident committees. More formally, Walgett's Aboriginal Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (WGACWP) has, since the 1990s, provided a more structured representative body with which government agencies and service providers can consult and deal.

### **Legitimacy of community governance bodies: issues of representation and recognition**

The NSW Ombudsman's report on Brewarrina and Bourke identified that in any community a range of competing interests and divisions can exist and these can pose challenges for government agencies seeking broad endorsement of plans to improve service delivery (NSW Ombudsman 2010). Thus initiatives like the COAG Trials, TWT and RSD have each included mechanisms by which government has tried to ensure that the Aboriginal community governance bodies it deals with are considered by community members to be legitimate and representative of various community sectors and families. Government provided support at the outset of the COAG Trials and RSD to try to ensure representation was broad, fair and equitable, and was supported by the Aboriginal community as its legitimate representative body.

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<sup>62</sup> Branches of the Aborigines Progressive Association and Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs formed in Walgett in the 1960s, followed by the Barwon Aboriginal Corporation in the 1970s and 1980s, when Aboriginal legal and medical services were also founded for Walgett.

Criteria established for Aboriginal community governance bodies to be 'formally recognised' by state and federal governments included that:

- members are Aboriginal people who are part of their community and have been accepted as community members in accordance with local cultural protocols
  - demonstrating that its membership reflects the diversity of the community
  - showing that its delegates are chosen in a fair, equal and transparent manner
  - developing Terms of Reference
  - demonstrating how they will seek the views of the community on important issues
- (Audit Office of NSW 2011: 20)

### **Walgett's Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party refreshed for RSD**

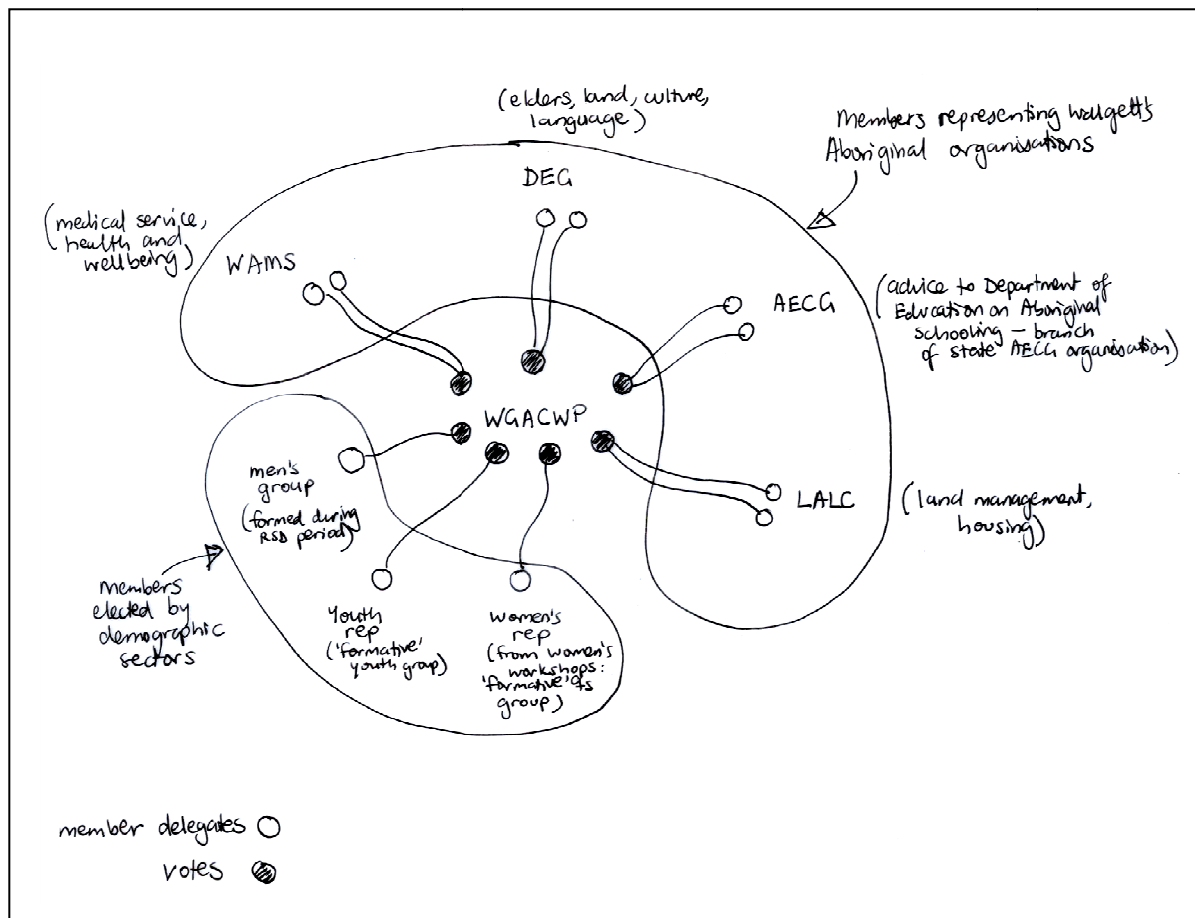
At the commencement of RSD, the two existing working parties in RSD communities Walgett and Wilcannia were 'refreshed' and recognised by government as the 'key interface or conduit' to each community (CGRIS 2010b: 23). Each CWP was assisted by the NSW RSD team to draft new terms of reference and protocols aimed at maximising accountable community and organisational representation. In his second report, the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services subsequently would describe the community working parties in NSW as 'well defined and recognised vehicles for engagement' (CGRIS 2010b: 23).

### **Membership of the WGACWP**

The WGACWP's terms of reference stated that it would: 'ensure the cross section of community interests is represented' on the CWP, and that members would 'work hard to achieve balanced views on community needs and solutions' such as by holding a public forum to discuss priorities and agree on outcomes (WGACWP 2010: 4).

Sitting on the WGACWP would be two delegates from each of the active Aboriginal groups and community organisations. At the time of the RSD this included four local Aboriginal organisations, each with a particular interest in an area of service delivery: Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG), Walgett's Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) and a local branch of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), described in more detail below; in addition to members representing the interests of three demographic groups: Aboriginal youth, women and men. Whilst the organisations had two delegates they each only had one vote, as did demographic sector representatives (**Map 4**).

Non-voting associate members are also invited to attend 'open' meetings of the Working Party, including: representatives of Walgett Shire Council, Commonwealth and State Government organisations, whose role is to 'advise on matters within their area of professional expertise which will support the WGCWP to make informed decisions' (WGACWP 2010).



**Map 4: Walgett's Aboriginal community governance: constitution of the WGACWP**

Local Aboriginal organisations have two delegated members but only one vote. Representatives of Walgett's Aboriginal women, youth and men each have one vote.

## **Representation**

Expressed in the WGACWP's terms of reference was a desire to be representative of all Aboriginal community sectors, to draw on participation from the wider community toward accountable local decisions, and to continue a focus on the strengthening of identity and culture. The WGACWP's vision statement expressed that it wished to:

- Be acknowledged as representative of all Aboriginal people in Walgett;
- Engage and empower Aboriginal people of Walgett to provide input into addressing the needs and issues of the Walgett Community;
- Encourage transparency, consistency and accountability in all decisions that are made;
- Continue to strengthen identity and hand down our traditions to children and community (WGACWP 2010: 3)

One interviewee in the case study was highly critical of the WGACWP, describing members as 'out of touch' with the community. While she claimed the WGACWP was too dominated by Aboriginal organisations and not sufficiently representative of the broader Aboriginal community, this criticism seemed to stem at least in part from the person's perception that there had been few positive outcomes from the RSD engagement, for which the WGACWP was held accountable and blamed. This person would later be invited to join the WGACWP as a member, in a clear move by the Working Party to be as representative as possible; for as a new member she would be able to represent perspectives expressed to her by other community members with whom she has contact, including people with significant unmet service needs.

## **Vision, roles and responsibilities of the WGACWP**

In a 2010 letter to government, attaching its terms of reference and seeking recognition status as Walgett's community representative body for RSD, the WGACWP said it was 'committed to improving the life opportunities and freedom of all people in Walgett... particularly focused on improving the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal community and providing economic, social and cultural opportunities for our people'. The WGACWP described its purpose 'to endorse, support and advocate for projects and programs that work towards achieving' better outcomes for Aboriginal people in Walgett, and to 'provide direction to government and other service providers for the provision of services to the Aboriginal people of Walgett'.<sup>63</sup>

Key role responsibilities for the WGACWP, listed in its terms of reference, indicate an awareness of the need for Aboriginal service organisations to be aware of the need to avoid

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from WGACWP to NSW Government dated 30 June 2010.

tensions that come from competing with one another; they stipulate how various members of the CWP should engage with one another, with government agencies and the Aboriginal community, in relation to the RSD initiative. These included a commitment to:

- Coordinate representative organisations so there is no competition for resources, no duplication of services and each organisation or group actively demonstrates their support for each member organisation/group;
- To act as a mediator between the Aboriginal community and Government and Non-Government organisations to provide guidance, advice and decisions on behalf of the Walgett Aboriginal Community; and
- To communicate regularly with the wider community through a newsletter<sup>64</sup> (WGACWP 2010)

### **Aboriginal decision-making processes**

Terms of reference for the WGACWP clearly identify particular elements to its decision making style and processes, which it is important for other parties it deals with to be aware of:

(The WGACWP's) decision making process is based on consensus and respect for individual and family. As the Community Working Party this means ensuring that all sections of our community have a voice and that everyone knows what is going on, and has an opportunity for their voice to be heard. This can mean that some decisions take longer than in the western world. However, this process creates decisions that are more effective in the long term. Consultation and participant in all decision making is crucial to effective and long term community development (WGACWP 2010: 3).

It was however evident from comments included in the introductory text the WGACWP chair included in Walgett's LIP document, that sufficient time had not been allowed for decisions to be made according to the Aboriginal decision making processes described above. The introduction states that, the RSD and LIP development have thus far: 'all been on government timeframes, not on community time frames' (Walgett LIP 2010: 1). Further discussion of LIP development processes is included in the findings Chapter 6, pp231-235).

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<sup>64</sup> This did not eventuate as the WGACWP's communications strategy was not implemented.

### **Walgett's Aboriginal service sector and local governance**

The next section provides context about the four key Aboriginal organisations operating in Walgett which contribute variously to the local service system and were simultaneously critical components of Aboriginal community governance during the period of RSD.

Various in-kind support provided by these local Aboriginal organisations - which each delegate two officers as representative members on the WGACWP - is not to be underestimated. Support from the member organisations is critical, given the voluntary unincorporated nature of the governance body. It ranges from releasing workers to attending meetings, to providing administrative, catering and other supports (use of meeting rooms, computer systems and photocopiers) that would otherwise go unfunded.

#### WAMS

Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) is an Aboriginal community-controlled health service established in 1986 to provide a services to the Aboriginal community and general population of Walgett in response to health and social issues. These issues included: people being turned away from hospitals and experiencing difficulty accessing doctors due to financial barriers and the need for long distance travel to see health specialists; the organisation also aimed to meet local needs for health advocacy, referral and patient support (WAMS 2011: 4).

Employing over a hundred staff, WAMS is the largest employer of Aboriginal people in Walgett. The service provides culturally appropriate holistic care for the Aboriginal community through its GP clinic, dental, midwifery, mobile playgroup, ears, eyes, sexual health, social and emotional wellbeing services; it aims to ensure all staff are trained to meet the needs of the client population they serve, and to offer regular outreach services, including to Gingie and Namoi, as well as a home visiting service (WGACWP 2012a: 5).

WAMS is strongly networked in the Aboriginal health sector<sup>65</sup>, and has been particularly good at brokering a range of partnerships and MOUs locally and regionally to support its operations. However, according to its CEO, funding conditions play a large part in shaping the governance of WAMS and nature of its programs; and a particular identified difficulty is having to report to

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<sup>65</sup> Via Bila-Muuji, a regional grouping of Aboriginal Medical Services established 1995, the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC) which is the peak body for NSW's Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHO) and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).



different funding bodies, federal and state, for different elements of its programs (RSD Team 2009: 7). During her address to the very first RSD workshop in Walgett, WAMS' CEO explained the significant impact the loss of commercial air services to the town, since 2008, had had on the range of medical services able to be procured and on costs incurred by the health service to do so, emphasising a strong focus needs to be on 'bring(ing) services back to the community' (RSD Team 2009: 7).

WAMS' governance consists of a board of nine directors elected annually and membership of WAMS is open to all people over 18 years of age including non-Aboriginal people, however they are not eligible to sit on the board of directors (WAMS 2011). Participation by community representatives in bringing local health needs and issues to the attention of the health service was encouraged by a Walgett Health Council established by WAMS (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 145). The organisation is actively involved in community and cultural development, collaborating with other organisations where it can to improve the cultural and economic situation of the region, including via the WGACWP.

#### DEG

Walgett's local Aboriginal elders' organisation, the Dharriwaa Elders Group Incorporated (DEG), plays an important role in providing advocacy and support services for the town's senior Aboriginal people. Founded in 1999, it was auspiced by WAMS until mid-2005, when it became autonomous. Projects of the DEG aim to support local Aboriginal Elders to resume leadership roles in the community, while keeping active and healthy; promote local Aboriginal cultural knowledge and identity; and develop the Walgett Aboriginal community (WGACWP 2012a: 5). The organisation provides support and a range of welfare-related services for the elderly, including centre-based day care and social support, and making referrals to help Elders access services from other organisations.

The DEG has stated a core aspect of its purpose is to enable Walgett Elders to participate, including advising and influencing government agencies on matters important to the 'development of Walgett's Aboriginal community', including the 'cultural value for Walgett's Aboriginal community of native vegetation, significant places and local languages'; and to this end DEG members 'set up their association to provide members with advocacy and secretariat to advise government' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2008: 6). The DEG also provides a 'cultural learning hub for Walgett's Aboriginal community and visitors through its nationally significant

collection, exhibitions and keeping place, cultural tourism projects and activities led by Elders, to maintain Aboriginal cultural values' (WGACWP 2012a: 5).

A charitable organisation, the DEG also sources funding from various federal and state government agencies to further its projects to address Elders' needs, and to preserve and promote the culture and heritage of Walgett. The DEG is frequently consulted to provide expert cultural heritage advice and surveys for government departments in relation to water catchment, heritage and environment matters. During the course of RSD the DEG was twice commissioned to deliver a Local Community Awareness Program (LCAP) for public servants working in Walgett<sup>66</sup>.

On its website in late 2015, however, the DEG explained that it 'is currently not funded sustainably and relies heavily on volunteers and goodwill. The organisation is changing how it operates and will now invoice government and other agencies for advisory, cultural and other services the organisation has offered free-of-charge previously' (DEG: accessed October 2015).

#### AECG

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) is an incorporated not-for-profit advocacy group, which is independent of government and functions at local, regional and state levels. Walgett's local branch of the AECG meets monthly, and is strongly involved in advocating for measures to support Aboriginal education in the local schools. Under a formal partnership agreement, the NSW AECG is recognised as the peak advisory body to the Minister and Secretary of the NSW Department of Education regarding all matters to do with Aboriginal education in the state. A strength of the NSW AECG structure is its community base, via a network of local and regional AECGs, which are designed to enable Aboriginal people to have a voice in self-determining their educational future, which in turn has a direct impact on the future prosperity of Aboriginal communities. The AECG collaborates on the development of government policies and programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal students, their families and communities. Meanwhile agencies responsible for education and training are able to consult and negotiate with the AECG toward establishing common goals.

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<sup>66</sup> Whilst the DEG was funded to provide the first round of Walgett's LCAP, the WGACWP was affronted when government invited non-local organisations to tender for the second round presentation the program, in competition with the DEG. While this process apparently aligned with government's procurement policies, the WGACWP ultimately convinced government the program could not suitably be provided by any agency other than a locally-based cultural organisation, and endorsed DEG as the most suitable to do so.

The AECG says that it: 'promotes respect, empowerment and self-determination and believes the process of collaborative consultation is integral to achieving equity in education and is fundamental to the achievement of equality'; in addition, the AECG advocates 'cultural affirmation, integrity and the pursuit of equality to ensure that the unique and diverse identity of Aboriginal people and students is recognised and valued' (WGACWP 2012a: 5).

### LALC

The Walgett's Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) is guided by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, which has a legislative function to: provide land rights for Aboriginal people in NSW; provide representative Aboriginal Land Councils across the state; vest lands in those Councils; provide for acquisition of land, and the management of land and other assets and investments, by or for those Councils and the allocation of funds to and by those Councils; pursue cultural, social and economic independence for Aboriginal people; and provide advocacy and support in attaining and upholding fundamental human rights for Aboriginal people' (WGACWP 2012a: 4).

The Walgett LALC has described its vision and a commitment to 'ensure Walgett LALC works with all relevant stakeholders to improve the safety, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Walgett' (WGACWP 2012a: 4). The LALC has responsibility for management of the Aboriginal reserve lands, including almost half of Walgett's housing assets and tenancies rented to Aboriginal people (at Gingie, Namoi and Dewhurst (town)). All tenants are members of the LALC, which therefore represents them on the WGACWP.

Walgett LALC, like other LALCs across the state, faces significant financial and logistical challenges to adequately maintain its assets and service community needs. While the LALC holds considerably dilapidated assets, it has reduced ability to draw income from rental paid by its tenants, who are frequently impoverished. It is increasingly recognised that high costs and complexity involved in remote provision of municipal services like roads, power and sewerage - without access to the expertise, plant and equipment and additional federal funding that is typically vested in local councils - are beyond the capacity of the LALCs, to whom these responsibilities typically fall for the 61 discrete Aboriginal communities in NSW. As LALC lands are deemed private property, local governments subsequently charge rates on LALC land, without providing the variety of basic municipal amenities provided to other local residents.

## Walgett's complex service environment

Service delivery for Walgett is carried out by a combination of direct service delivery by local government (roads, rubbish collection, water and sewerage), state government agencies (school education, public hospital, community services), Aboriginal-controlled organisations in receipt of state and/or federal funding, and an array of other government-funded NGOs delivering programs into the town, frequently via drive-in drive-out arrangements<sup>67</sup>.

The complexity of service environments pertaining to remote Aboriginal communities like Walgett has been widely acknowledged, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Remote Focus 2012; Sullivan 2011b). Complexity is created by complicated governance and funding arrangements between the three tiers of Australian government, local Aboriginal organisations and governance bodies, and other non-government organisations operating services and programs remotely into relatively tiny localities. State and federal governments are acutely aware of their own lack of clear oversight of service landscapes and the reliable outcome data needed to understand exactly which services and programs are funded to be delivered into remote Aboriginal communities, and whether they are delivering effective outcomes within any particular locality. Indeed, overcoming inefficiencies and poor coordination of service delivery systems to remote communities has been one important driver of the implementation of RSD, with its focus on improving coordination and oversight, efficiency and accountability in relation to investments and outcomes for Aboriginal people living in remote communities (COAG 2009b).

An inkling of the complexity of Walgett's particular service environment can be gleaned by tallying the numbers of government and non-government agencies and organisations intended to interact with the community to achieve the 200-plus items included in Walgett's Local Implementation Plan for RSD. A helicopter view of agency responsibilities for either directly delivering or funding services to Walgett's Aboriginal community was gained by analysing the number of agencies from each level of government identified as either leading, contributing or delivering particular items or activities in Walgett's LIP, which included:

- 15 state government agencies, including Health, Education and Training, Police, Community Services, Aging, Disability and Homecare, Environment, Conservation, Climate Change and Water

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<sup>67</sup> Whilst he admitted that even Council is unsure the exact number, a senior local government officer indicated there may be in excess of 30 external NGOs operating in Walgett, a town of less than 2000 people.

- 7 federal government agencies, including the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and
- 1 local government organisation, the Walgett Shire Council (Walgett LIP 2010)

In addition, the LIP mentioned:

- 7 local Aboriginal organisations, many of which are involved in both service delivery as well as cultural initiatives, advocacy and community governance, as already noted: WAMS, DEG, LALC, AECG, Thiyamali family violence legal service, Namoi House Inc which runs Barwon Cottage (safe house for women) and Namoi House (crisis intervention for men), Walgett Men's Group and Koolyangara pre-school
- 7 Aboriginal regional or state level organisations either receiving or providing funding and services into Walgett, including Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Aboriginal Affairs, Aboriginal Housing Office, Indigenous Business Australia, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation, the Aboriginal Legal Service, Healing Foundation and the Dhiyaan Centre, and
- at least 4 large non-Indigenous NGOs, which typically already deliver drive-in drive out programs to Walgett, including Mission Australia and Youth Off the Streets, and Mackillop Rural Services<sup>68</sup>

This extraordinary number of agencies and organisations involved in Walgett's service system indicates a level of complexity that has, to date, confounded efficiency and coordination in local service delivery.

### **Drive-in drive out service delivery**

A range of welfare programs, family and child-centred services are offered in Walgett, funded partly by NSW and partly by the Federal Government. Many of the services and programs for Walgett are brought in on an outreach basis, via so called 'drive-in drive-out' service teams, frequently delivered by NGOs funded for delivery of services across the region or state-wide.

Walgett's RSD baseline mapping report noted 'anecdotal evidence (that) some community members are resentful of the remote service delivery model and that this can be a barrier to people utilising the services' (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 188). A number of external NGOs delivering services into Walgett identified that they proactively recruit local Aboriginal

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<sup>68</sup> Note that one-off and short term healing, youth, artistic and other programs less frequently delivered by external NGOs into Aboriginal communities, and not captured by the LIP, are not counted in this tally of services and programs, and may therefore account for what would otherwise be wildly exaggerated estimates by some Walgett interviewees about the numbers of NGOs servicing the town.

staff to deliver programs wherever possible, providing part time local employment and enabling better local engagement for programs. However some case study interviewees were dubious about the short term nature of such arrangements providing insecure short term contracts for local people, for the end of funding for a program typically also ceases the employment of locals. In addition, Walgett's baseline report identified a significant shortage of local people with relevant training and skills to provide a wide range of relevant welfare services (Commonwealth of Australia 2010).

### **Resource challenges**

There are many challenges that face services operating in such remote settings, but the most critical service delivery challenges relate to securing funding and staffing. As the research findings will show, local Aboriginal organisations particularly struggle to ensure ongoing funding, and they encounter difficulties attracting or training sufficiently skilled staff to carry out professional service work. The latter has been exacerbated by both the retraction of other types of rural services, and by sensationalist, negative media attention on social problems that acts as a deterrent to employment applicants. That Walgett's regular air service was discontinued in 2008, was clearly identified by research participants as exacerbating the town's remoteness, making specialist visits more complex and costly, and further frustrating the ability of local services to recruit and retain the skilled personnel they need.

### **Key recommendation of Walgett's baseline mapping report**

Particular recommendations identified in Walgett's RSD baseline report included the need for secure funding for various programs and services, including for homelessness services, youth crisis and elder accommodation, and for increased access to drug and alcohol services (Commonwealth of Australia 2010). Importantly the report identified a lack of coordination and short-term funding that 'does not allow adequate evaluation nor community capacity building'; that the current situation of multiple funding sources to many small service providers carries risk of 'inefficiencies and burdensome reporting requirements'; and the potential for 'service duplication and unhealthy competition for limited resources between non-government organisations' (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 188).

Walgett's baseline report recommended:

- government agencies consider longer-term, streamlined funding and reporting requirements;

- NSW and Australian governments provide training and mentoring to new and existing services, including to elders, to ensure good governance and organisational sustainability and community capacity; and
- strategies to build local welfare workforce capacity to respond to current needs by supporting educational attainment, flexible training pathways and mechanisms for mentoring and support (2010: 189).

### **'The worst school in New South Wales'**

Significant media attention was drawn to critical infrastructure and resourcing needs of Walgett's Community College in September 2013, when the high school was identified by the State Education Minister in parliament as the worst school in New South Wales. Whilst Walgett's Aboriginal community have grave concerns about the quality of education offered by the school, they expressed hurt and dismay that the Minister for Education would speak so derisively of their local school, exacerbating rather than alleviating the town's concerns and the impacts that negative media images have on its ability to attract and recruit service workers, including teachers. The Minister later clarified that his comments had meant to indicate that the Walgett school buildings were dilapidated, making it the 'worst school physically' he had seen (Ferrari 2013). The school was built for 500 students, with only about 100 now enrolled, and reported to have only between 30 and 50 students turning up on any given day.

The quality of high school education is an ongoing area of concern for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in the Walgett community, with strong perceptions expressed by research interviewees that the quality of high school education and results attained have worsened over past decades. Evidence from the RSD baseline mapping report for Walgett supports the perception of poor educational performance. Issues relating to 'disengaged youth' cited in the report include poor school attendance (67% at Walgett Community College) and year 12 equivalent attainment levels well below national Indigenous attainment rates (38% compared with 47%). Very low levels of engagement of Indigenous 15 to 24-year-olds in full-time employment or study were also reported, at a rate of just 27% compared to the low Indigenous state-wide rate of 47% (Senate Estimates 2009: ii).

A particular concern expressed by community members in the Walgett LIP was that increasing numbers of students being educated at distant boarding schools was 'not good for the community' (Walgett LIP 2010: 31). The creaming off of promising students to attend city

boarding schools may well have impacted the standard and level of attainment for those remaining at the local school, however there are clear incentives for parents and students to take offered opportunities for education outside the community, given the acknowledged poor standard of local facilities and offerings made available by the State's Education Department.

Meanwhile the NSW government's Connected Communities program began to be implemented in Walgett during the period of RSD case study research. Connected Communities is a strategy that aims to develop schools into community hubs that integrate education, health and community services, attracting experienced people to the pivotal roles of executive principals, able to build community relationships and implement innovative reform. However, the mode of introduction of the new initiative in Walgett was reported by community members to be extremely poor and disappointing. Numerous research participants expressed their dismay that government was once again introducing a state-wide policy initiative locally - which though designed to improve community relations - was scorching extant goodwill and destroying what were already low levels of trust between government and the community, because little or no effort had been made to engage the parents and grandparents of the community as key participants in the new school initiative.

### **Funded services do not always provide what is needed**

The existence of a government funded service or program within a community does not guarantee Aboriginal access to the service, as illustrated in **Table 2**. Service offerings and their mode of operation may not be well suited to community needs; there may be particular cultural or social barriers preventing people accessing the funded service; and desired or identified outcomes may not be being met by the program or service.

A significant problem is that beyond contract reporting, very limited evaluation of the outcomes of programs and services delivered into remote Aboriginal communities takes place. Mechanisms for the evaluation of services delivered to remote communities have been identified as grossly inadequate in most states and territories, including NSW, with services and programs typically continuing to be funded despite poor, limited or unknown outcomes (OEA 2009; NSW Ombudsman 2010, 2011). Stronger leadership and governance, combined with strong accountability mechanisms for monitoring service outcomes, have been identified consistently by NSW Ombudsman as imperative to achieve real improvement in services delivered to Aboriginal communities (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 4).



**Table 2: Map of service gaps between identified Walgett needs and services locally available.** The table identifies that services and programs provided do not always match what is needed, nor do they reach those most vulnerable in the community<sup>69</sup>

Area of service need	Services available in Walgett	Service shortfall or problem	Initiatives identified as needed to address shortfalls	Blue sky thinking for Walgett
<b>Access to legal advice and representation; births deaths and marriages documentation</b>	Aboriginal Legal Service (office in town); NSW Legal Aid outreach solicitor services (drive-in drive-out); Thiyamali Family Violence Service (based in Walgett); local Courthouse and large quotient of officers based at Walgett Police station	A significant gap between very high levels of legal 'events' experienced by members of the Aboriginal community in Walgett (criminal, civil and family law matters) and the proportion of people seeking and gaining access to legal advice (Iriana et al. 2008). Lack of birth certificate documentation is a common problem that hinders school enrolment & driver licensing, often leading to driving without a license charges (there is no public transport other than a school bus for residents of the outlying villages)	Community education & promotion of how legal services can assist; referrals to legal services via trusted local Aboriginal workers to break down access barriers. Since 2015, NSW Community Legal services have run annual legal outreach visits to improve local access to a range of key legal services. Specially designed driver licensing programs targeting people with low literacy, to head off charges and entry to criminal justice system.	A new youth centre and organisation to focus on supporting needs of Aboriginal young people in Walgett (WGACWP community priority no.1; see <b>Appendix E</b> ).  In 2015 the WGACWP started to advocate for a Social and Emotional Wellbeing plan that would redirect funds currently spent on incarcerating people to services and programs needed in Walgett (eg: healing, drug and alcohol, mental health & community strengthening) to increase wellbeing and keep people out of the criminal justice system.
<b>Employment services</b>	5 Commonwealth government funded employment agencies in a small community with limited job opportunities	Over-servicing and competition within a small community; perverse incentives to service unemployed, eg: services funded per client to assist writing CVs and job readiness,	Local economic development initiatives needed to enhance local job creation.  Boosting support for local Aboriginal service organisations to	A housing maintenance and repair business as a local enterprise to create local jobs and meet demand (WGACWP community priority no.2).  WGACWP community priorities no.4,

<sup>69</sup> Other than sources identified, the information in this table is drawn from Walgett's baseline mapping report 2010 and information provided by interview participants. The table provides an indicative, rather than exhaustive, mapping of Walgett service gaps.

		<p>regardless of outcomes (ie: whether applicants actually get jobs).</p> <p>Aboriginal population has low school participation, affected by crowded living conditions, high disability and custody rates, and a low propensity to migrate for employment - all detract from capacity to engage in the workforce (Taylor 2006: 68)</p>	<p>be sustainable and expand service delivery both secures existing and creates new local jobs.</p> <p>Need to address poor education and post-school outcomes.</p> <p>Need for better local access to targeted training required to apply for available jobs (childcare, trades).</p>	<p>5 and 8 aim to boost resources, training and support for local Aboriginal organisations to enable sustainable operations.</p> <p>Explore partnerships with private enterprise and/or NGOs and training / university sector to foster growth of innovative local enterprise ideas , eg: a renewable energy project, with a university partner, might harness abundant sunshine, create jobs and reduce local power bills.</p>
<p><b>Parenting support &amp; early childhood</b></p>	<p>Several NGOs funded to run supported playgroups; WAMS providing health checks and access to specialist services, also running supported pre-school play group; 3 local pre-schools in Walgett under-utilised</p>	<p>During the time of RSD additional new playgroups would be funded, however these duplicated existing service offerings, forcing existing services to have to change what they were offering. Lack of place-based focus and local coordination undermines effectiveness of service systems to address need.</p> <p>Places in pre-school unfilled due to staff shortages. Identified need for long day care service, to assist women hoping to work full time.</p>	<p>Better coordination of local offerings to remove duplication and target resources where they are most needed, ideally via a place-based approach to local decision making.</p> <p>Need for better referral support to help people access available services.</p> <p>Need for increased access to local training in childcare to enable full staffing and utilisation of local childcare facilities.</p>	<p>WGACWP community priority no.10 proposes an on-country facility, which could provide opportunities for language and culture experiences for families, elders and young children.</p> <p>Training and targeted employment initiatives to draw in families still not accessing childcare services (eg: recruiting staff from particular local families).</p> <p>Partnership with university sector to provide access to quality resources and the latest knowledge about improving early childhood education.</p>

<p><b>Drug and alcohol rehabilitation &amp; mental health services</b></p>	<p>No local services for D&amp;A or mental health; patients must leave town to access rehab; and mentally ill people are either dealt with by Police and the hospital emergency department, transferred to Dubbo three hours drive away. Young people may be sent even further away to Orange facility (over 4.5 hours drive).</p> <p>Large new Police facility erected in Walgett (opened Sept 2015) to accommodate 70 officers, who are the de facto frontline mental health team in town - though most are insufficiently trained to perform this challenging role.</p>	<p>WAMS has long advocated for the funding to provide programs and improved access to mental health services. During the period of RSD the Working Party was shocked to learn that two external NGOs were to be funded for regional programs that included delivery of drive-in drive-out programs for Walgett, without WAMS as a local Aboriginal health service being consulted or able to bid for this funding.</p>	<p>Strong need for greater access to local facilities and programs to address drug and alcohol problems in the local setting, as well as mental health issues.</p> <p>Healing and wellbeing programs to focus on the underlying causes of emotional problems and ill health (including addictions).</p> <p>In 2015 WGACWP starting to advocate for a Just Reinvest program in Walgett to address serious social problems and issues.</p>	<p>Establish an alcohol and gambling-free social venue to provide alternative leisure opportunities (WGACWP community priority no.6 ).</p> <p>Remedies to address the scourge of social gambling affecting many Aboriginal families in Walgett.</p>
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## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the policy context of RSD, and the underpinnings of the CTG framework that structure it. Particular issues and demographic forces impacting the area of remote service delivery in Australia were also considered. Finally the chapter outlined Walgett's historical, geographic, community governance and service system features and challenges that are important to interpretation of the case study.

Chapter 5a, which follows, takes a different approach to conceptualising social policy needs and problems in the town of Walgett. For the way that problems are identified and framed affects the way policies are shaped and where resources are applied. Whether a deficit or strengths approach is applied to analysing the challenges that face a disadvantaged community has a profound effect on the types of policy initiatives proposed and implemented. In Chapter 5a, two scenarios highlight the potential for very different outcomes resulting from the application of alternate policy perspectives. Imagining the trajectory of two Aboriginal children's lives as they grow, a different lens is applied to each child's future: firstly a focus on disadvantage, and secondly a focus on strengths. While the former describes challenges typically facing a baby born in Walgett today, the latter imagines what might come about if resources and support were directed to help grow Walgett's identified community strengths over the next decade.

## Chapter 5a: The future for two babies born in Walgett today

### (disadvantage focus)

An Aboriginal baby boy conceived in Walgett today has a one in eight chance of being born with a low birth weight.<sup>70</sup> At birth this boy – let's call him Josh – has a life expectancy that is at least 10 years shorter than if he were born into a non-Indigenous Australian family living in the same district.

Josh's mother will make a three and a half hour journey by road to the regional city of Dubbo to give birth, outside of her Gamilaraay country, as there is no birthing facility in the Walgett local area. If she is still a teenager<sup>71</sup>, she may find it difficult to complete her secondary education, joining the ranks of what one elder described as 'babies pushing strollers'<sup>72</sup>. Josh may be raised in an overcrowded home<sup>73</sup>, where social benefits of living with extended family can be outweighed at times by risks of exposure to conflict and family violence.

Josh's family may live in the Aboriginal village that lies beyond the town's flood levy bank. Here, life is disrupted from time to time by floods that cause power blackouts and force evacuations. Ongoing health risks associated with poor sanitation and water supply will also impact the family negatively.

Starting school, Josh is an enthusiastic learner, and despite a number of factors that go against his success (no internet connection, computer access or quiet space at home to complete homework, sleep disturbance and other preventable health impacts of overcrowded housing), he may still be doing ok. By now, Josh is likely to have a number of younger siblings, and many cousins attending the same primary school.

By the time he reaches high school, Josh will almost certainly have witnessed a number of physical assaults and alcohol-fuelled conflicts in his neighbourhood.<sup>74</sup> Exposure to adult violence inevitably affects his social and emotional wellbeing, and at times he may feel

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<sup>70</sup> This is two and a half times the national average. Senate Estimates 2009, Walgett and Wilcannia key points from baseline mapping, Australian Government.

<sup>71</sup> The Indigenous teen fertility rate for this locality is 8 times the national average, *ibid*.

<sup>72</sup> *SMH* 17 May 2008.

<sup>73</sup> One in five Indigenous homes in Walgett are overcrowded. Senate Estimates 2009 *op cit*.

<sup>74</sup> The locality has the 2nd highest rate of domestic violence assault in NSW; the hospital sees 16 times as many assaults as the national average; *ibid*.

overwhelmingly anxious about his own safety or that of family members. This affects his concentration, behaviour and attendance at school.

Critical to the next stage of the Josh's life is whether he goes away to boarding school or remains in Walgett for high school<sup>75</sup>. If Josh's parents have had poor schooling experiences of their own and have struggled to find meaningful post-school employment<sup>76</sup>, it may be hard for them to appreciate or value the benefits of education for Josh. His grandmother, who was taken from her family under NSW Aboriginal child removal policies and spent her teen years apprenticed as a servant in Sydney, is opposed to the family sending her grandson away to school, as she fears the loss of connection he may feel to family, community and country.

Nevertheless, when an opportunity to apply for boarding school arises for Josh, encouragement from a supportive teacher or mentor may be sufficient to help the family complete necessary paperwork and jump through financial eligibility hoops, making boarding school placement a possibility. If he can handle the significant cultural and personal challenges that distant schooling will pose for him, Josh's education and life chances will now diverge significantly from that of his cousins back in Walgett, who may literally be left behind educationally.<sup>77</sup> The town offers few recreational activities for young people, who are also at considerable risk of substance abuse and juvenile offending.

This scenario about Josh and his life chances highlights some of the areas of significant disadvantage and risk that face Indigenous young people growing up in remote communities. It reveals that a young Indigenous person's life opportunities can be impacted negatively by intergenerational effects, such as the circumstances of his parents' and grandparents' lives, as well as by structural factors such as a shortage of housing and overcrowded homes, lack of employment opportunities, barriers to engaging in local employment or education.

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<sup>75</sup> 2009 NAPLAN results for Walgett primary schools were largely above statistically similar schools, but high school results drop well below, *ibid*.

<sup>76</sup> Less than 1 in 3 Indigenous 15 to 24 year olds in this locality are engaged in full time work or study, *ibid*.

<sup>77</sup> Local attainment rates for Year 12 and equivalent are well below national Indigenous rates, *ibid*. The Minister for Education dubbed Walgett Community School the 'worst school in NSW' (Ferrari 2013).

## **(strengths focus)**

Another scenario might focus on strengths of culture and identity for young people growing up. A baby girl - let's call her Sharni - conceived in Walgett a decade on from 2014, is born with a healthy birth weight. Her Aboriginal mother will have been supported throughout pregnancy by the Aboriginal Medical Service home nurse visiting program, which has assisted her to eat well, be aware of pre-natal risks and take good care of herself, giving baby Sharni the best possible start in life.

Along with a number of her cousins, Sharni will attend a local pre-school that has a strong emphasis on child development as well as celebrating local cultures and country. Several staff members are trained Gamilaraay speakers, able to provide language and culture play sessions. The preschool also offers weekly outdoor playgroups for pre-schoolers at the local on-country facility. Indigenous children are encouraged to be proud of the community's Aboriginal heritage, with non-Indigenous children also sharing in Aboriginal storytelling, music and cultural programming offered.

Sharni's grandmother was a member of the Stolen Generation, and her life-long social and emotional wellbeing have been profoundly affected by the experiences of her early life. However, since joining up to the strong elders program run by the Dharriwaa Elders Organisation, her granddaughters say that she has really 'come out of herself', enjoying the company of peers, attending special events organized at the community's on-country cultural facility, and participates in the organisation's various weekly activities.

A highlight for now teen-aged Sharni, has been to see her gran give the Welcome to Country at a local cultural festival in town. Inspired by her grandmother, and encouraged by her mother and aunts, all strong women who've worked or been involved in community services and health roles in local organisations, Sharni decides to sign on for a young leaders course organised by the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

At the start of high school, Sharni had been offered the chance to go away to boarding school to complete her education. While this could have been a good option for her, significant changes to education offerings available in Walgett mean that Sharni and her parents feel ok about opting for her stay in town and attend the local high school<sup>78</sup>. Improvements include the way the school supports students, provides technologies to support learning and integrates

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<sup>78</sup> Walgett Community School is subject to NSW's Connected Communities program; in addition it may become a language 'nest' for Gamilaraay language teaching under the OCHRE policy from 2015.

with the local community. The school now actively invites elders and parents to visit and take part in activities: movies are shown regularly in the school hall, as are dances, festivals and yarn ups, with the effect that community members increasingly feel comfortable and welcome on school grounds. Health checks, parenting and other courses also take place on school grounds. This has had a huge impact on school attendance and parental engagement.

In year 9, Sharni and a group of friends from her class have taken the opportunity to join a ten week-long program providing opportunities to learn about family, community and country in Walgett. The course culminates in a weekend camping at Walgett's Gamilaraay on-country cultural facility with elders, yarning, fishing, cooking curries and baking Johnnie cakes in the fire. At the end of the camp the girls are blessed via a smoking ceremony. The course and this special weekend have a profound effect on teenage Sharni, who will always remember it.

Sharni's mother has kidney disease; however her treatment can now take place in the local renal unit, enabling her to avoid the onerous travel or relocation to Dubbo for dialysis, which renal patients from Walgett had endured ten years ago. Remaining in Walgett allows Sharni's mum to stay involved with family and community activities, including her volunteer role at the Aboriginal cultural centre. Here she volunteers as a tour guide, informing visiting grey nomads who pass through daily<sup>79</sup> about the town's history, including uglier aspects like racial discrimination and segregation that visiting Freedom Riders protested in Walgett back in 1965. The Shire, originally reluctant to support exposure of the town's past, now see the economic benefits in attracting the ever flowing stream of 'nomads' to stop or stay in Walgett, the town where two rivers meet.

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<sup>79</sup> Older retiree travellers, known as 'grey nomads', are frequently 'advised to put their foot down' and drive fast through Walgett, so negative is the town's image as a dangerous and disadvantaged Aboriginal community, and so few are available cultural offerings supported or resourced within the Shire. Dharriwaa Elders Organisation (DEG) has been striving to change this, installing interpretive signage along riverside walks and in the town to help highlight the town's Aboriginal cultural significance as well as revealing some of the darker aspects of its race-relations history. The DEG has also recently sourced funding for a program where elders runs a ten week course with year 10 girls from the high school. As yet, the community's goal of having an on-country cultural facility remains an aspiration.





## Chapter 6: Participation and the Community Working Party

Originally we thought our role would be there for the whole process. Any decisions made would come through the Working Party and we'd be the voice for the community.

(Dani, WGACWP member)

I mean I think we thought anything was possible. Because if there was going to be a *real* engagement with community, then all sorts of things would happen.

(Stella, WGACWP member)

This chapter presents key findings of the case study from the point of view of the community. It considers how participation in policy planning and decision-making was desired and pursued by Aboriginal people in Walgett during the period of the RSD initiative. It analyses the particular dimensions of the role played by members of WGACWP, as representatives of the local Aboriginal community. As Walgett's key Aboriginal community governance body the WGACWP would be the 'interface or conduit' for communication and working relations between governments and the community on implementation of RSD in Walgett (CGRIS 2010a).

The various strategies WGACWP members pursued in striving for a significant role in participation as local decision-makers are considered, including the challenges and complexities members encountered in trying to carve out and fulfil their desired role. Four examples of participatory processes that took place in the case study are analysed, highlighting: *who* initiated each form of participation; varying *modes* or forms of participation that occurred; levels of decision-making *power* each enabled or achieved; and levels of satisfaction community informants expressed about their involvement in each process. The four key processes analysed are:

1. Weekly working sessions between the WGACWP and Walgett's local RSD Coordinator on the RSD and Closing the Gap framework, instigated by the WGACWP;
2. Processes for development of Walgett's RSD Local Implementation Plan (LIP), via workshops structured, invited and facilitated by government ;
3. A series of four Walgett Aboriginal women's workshops run by a local Aboriginal-organisation with facilitation assistance by the RSD Coordinator; and
4. Processes implemented by the WGACWP as their response to government's LIP Refresh process at the half way mark of RSD.

A number of community representatives spoke of their keen desire initially to work together with government on the RSD, envisaging that the WGACWP would be drawn in as expert local advisers, to provide intelligence, insight and advice about where to target efforts and the best approaches to planning RSD implementation. WGACWP members conveyed that they saw themselves as the community leaders, and therefore assumed they would take a lead role in both development and approval of proposals that came up through the RSD. The Service Delivery Principles established for CTG and implementing the RSD National Partnership Agreement were described by several informants as excellent, and this had led them to anticipate good and respectful engagement and valuing of the community's role as key participants in the implementation of RSD. First meetings with the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services were regarded as high points of community optimism about the processes to come, as was a flying visit from the new Prime Minister:

I mean Kevin Rudd flew in here to Walgett, shook hands with a few people: 'It's a new way of working with government'. And everyone thought 'This is gonna be good. We're going to be able to make some decisions here. And hopefully we can get some stuff done.'

(Bob, community representative)

While there was early enthusiasm about the RSD from some community representatives, others were more cautious, and it soon became apparent that a number of issues and stumbling blocks lay in the way of WGACWP members being able to achieve the level of participation in RSD processes that they desired, including: that government and the community had different *ontological* approaches to Walgett's problems and desired outcomes; an identified need for assistance and resourcing of *healing* within the community, as an essential pre-requisite to enable community members and representatives to work together and with government on the RSD; and a lack of secretariat and other types of *support* for the unpaid work of WGACWP members, many of whom were already overburdened with existing commitments.

### **Fundamental differences in desired outcomes and approaches**

From the outset it was clear that government and the WGACWP had different ontological approaches to the problems facing Walgett, as will be discussed further in Chapter 7 (p290). They also had fundamental differences in desired outcomes and understandings of what might be achieved via the RSD. Government was focused on reducing deficits in identified closing the gap target areas, and community representatives agreed that Aboriginal people should not be disadvantaged. However, WGACWP members felt that the focus should not *just* be on

deficiencies but also on improving local lives, livelihoods and wellbeing by identifying and building on existing community strengths. Government was squarely focused on making advances toward closing the gap targets via improving its own processes of coordination in delivering services to remote communities, while WGACWP members saw RSD as an opportunity to become involved in devising and driving more holistic strategies to address local problems with the support and resourcing of government, including via improvements in local service systems, as well as via other initiatives to fulfil important community-driven priorities and aspirations.

Government was focused on improvements in their area of remit, coordinating service delivery to Aboriginal people, while WGACWP members Kathleen and Stella saw RSD as an opportunity to work *with* government and be involved as local leaders in both improving local service systems<sup>80</sup> and devising initiatives that might provide a long lasting legacy of social benefit for the community. The latter may be seen as a type of community development approach. WGACWP members did not limit their planning ideas to better coordination of government-funded services and programs, but considered infrastructure, social and economic development ideas at the same time as prioritising the maintenance of local culture and heritage (eg: programs that might provide on-country healing experiences or training opportunities for local people). This approach aspired to improve community life and wellbeing at the same time as addressing the dedicated CTG targets for reducing Indigenous disadvantage.

### **Getting down to business: proactive community-level participation in Walgett**

Closing the Gap provided a framework of building blocks that RSD local implementation plans (LIPs) were to be drafted against, and there was significant pressure on all parties from the outset to draft and sign a LIP quickly, then get down to the business of Closing the Gap in Walgett (government officer Brooke and WGACWP member Stella both described this pressure). The WGACWP wasted no time in endeavouring to get across the various aspects of the policy framework, seeking opportunities to work with government's newly appointed locally-based officer, the RSD Coordinator (RSDC), on a weekly basis to better understand the many schedules and building block areas of CTG. The group was proactive, proposing that reference groups be set up to deal with each of the specific Building Block areas. Locals and key service workers with expertise, experience, interest and knowledge in each building block

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<sup>80</sup> For example by advising governments on how best to resource local services, which services are needed and how to maximize local uptake of services and outcomes from resources invested in Walgett.

area would be invited to join particular reference groups to help guide the drafting of LIP priorities and to oversee planning, implementation, and evaluation of progress of identified strategies.

These weekly working sessions, established as a community-driven initiative of participation between the local RSDC and WGACWP members, are the first of four types of participatory processes featured for comparison within this chapter. They represented a 'claimed space' for participation created by the WGACWP. The sessions involved learning and action processes similar to cycles of Participatory Action Research (described in Chapter 1, p46), providing space for attendees to come together to study and start to understand the content of the various policy documents supporting the CTG and RSD framework, with guidance and help from the RSDC, before analysing their relevance to local circumstances and issues, and strategising processes to come up with local proposals and programs against each building block area. The process was pro-active as WGACWP members decided that instead of waiting until government eventually came to consult them, they would act early to engage processes to enable identification of opportunities that might become available through the RSD.

Members of the WGACWP set aside time to meet and work with the RSDC for several hours each Friday afternoon, a time when other responsibilities for the week had been taken care of, and which should not have conflicted with the RSDC's other assigned tasks and responsibilities. Some members of the WGACWP expressed their disbelief and bitter disappointment when, after a number of weeks, the RSDC was instructed by superiors to cease the Friday afternoon working sessions with the WGACWP. It appeared to the WGACWP that governments didn't want them to be too involved, informed or across the policy framework for Closing the Gap and RSD. The WGACWP had seen a role for themselves as leaders and drivers, participating and working with governments on the roll out of the RSD in Walgett. Several interviewees explained they felt affronted when the WGACWP's role appeared to be challenged and undermined by the withdrawal of opportunities to meet regularly with the local RSDC.

Stella, a WGACWP member and local Aboriginal service worker who had been taking part in the Friday sessions, expressed her sheer exasperation about the lost opportunities for governments implementing the RSD, that resulted from their failure to value, harness and take advantage of the local expertise on offer:

I mean they don't realise the value of the WGACWP and how they can use it! And the WGACWP's offering themselves as the sort of first port of call to give information about Walgett, so the Working Party can focus what (governments) offer to Walgett in

an effective way. But most (government officers) don't seem to use it, let alone value it. It's amazing really because you'd think that was the first thing they'd want to do before they even design programs to be delivered in Walgett. You know, they'd need to actually find out what the needs are and how best to deliver services into Walgett. But you know they're not even having those first yarns. (Stella, WGACWP member)

Early excitement and hopes that local community representatives and service workers had felt for the RSD quickly began to dissipate when the dedicated Friday afternoon sessions were cancelled. As this research did not hear from participants at the Regional Office of Coordination (ROC) level, it is difficult to discern why this direction to cease working with the WGACWP on Friday afternoons occurred. Were government officers concerned about empowering local Aboriginal representatives and organisation heads with too much information and knowledge about the RSD? Were they concerned this would set up unrealistic expectations of outcomes RSD might deliver or the level of participation in processes local people would be allocated or permitted (invited to have) during the roll out of RSD? Was the proactive stance and behaviour of WGACWP representatives, in demanding a strong role as drivers of local planning processes, somehow threatening to ROC staff who considered themselves to be 'leading' the RSD process in Walgett?

Whatever the motivation behind the cancellation of the Friday afternoon sessions, the effect on WGACWP morale was great, damaging already shaky trust between government and the community and significantly dampening the local enthusiasm that had been rising about what opportunities for Walgett (for the community as well as its Aboriginal-controlled organisations) might be driven via the RSD process.

### **Community critique of the CTG framework: plans for an 8th building block**

Whilst the Friday afternoon sessions did not continue, the process of initial meetings to study the CTG framework and deliberate over its meanings provided enough opportunity and impetus for WGACWP members to make their own critique of the policy framework. From these group sessions, a growing concern emerged among them that there was insufficient recognition within the building blocks of the CTG framework about the importance of land and culture to the Aboriginal community. These elements were considered to be essential underlying and strengthening elements that could determine or enhance success in other building block areas. Many WGACWP members came to think of this omission as a significant problem, and they proposed to amend the CTG framework by adding another 8th building

block for Walgett to be called 'Land and Culture'. Interestingly, Walgett was not the only RSD community to identify this type of problem with the CTG framework. The Aboriginal community in Beagle Bay, Western Australia, also decided to introduce an additional building block for their RSD LIP called 'Land, Culture and Language' (Beagle Bay LIP 2010).<sup>81</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 5 (p168), many commentators have criticised Government policies founded on measuring relative socio-economic indicators and closing gaps between population groups as implicitly downplaying the significance of unique Indigenous priorities, worldviews and factors that are not measurable against indicators for the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous-specific values, aspirations and priorities important to Aboriginal people are therefore excluded from the framing of both policy problems and solutions. This was found to be the case when WGACWP members analysed the building block structure of the CTG framework.

The WGACWP hoped to develop an 8th building block by running processes of staged community consultation. Their proposal was for these participatory processes to be designed to include the different community sectors of Walgett, via separate consultations or workshops facilitated with elders, women, the men's group, young people and Aboriginal service workers, enabling voices from the wider community to contribute to ground-up policy making processes. These participatory processes were intended to shape the proposed additional building block and begin to devise suitable locally important proposals and plans for land and culture-related initiatives. Ultimately, the WGACWP found it lacked the administrative and other resources needed to manage its workload related to the RSD engagement in addition to facilitating the proposed 8th building block consultations within the timeframe allowed for RSD planning and LIP development. The proposed consultations were not run.<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, the WGACWP's deliberations during Friday afternoon sessions had enabled those who took part to formulate an important critique of the CTG framework and articulate to government their belief that neglecting to include culture and land, as fundamental factors

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<sup>81</sup> Later, after a 2011 visit to Walgett by the federal Attorney General and the launch of a report on Aboriginal youth in the juvenile justice system (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 2011), the WGACWP would consider the need for another additional building block to address law and justice in the Walgett LIP, recognising that this was a critical area for Walgett.

<sup>82</sup> As my research engagement with Walgett began, plans for these participatory workshops were afoot and the WGACWP originally expressed an intention to invite me to help facilitate the series of community consultations, as part of my pro bono work in Walgett. Over time the WGACWP realised it had other pressing needs for assistance however.

underlying the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Walgett, would be a glaring deficiency for the LIP that could limit progress in other building block areas. Government officers interviewed for this research, including several at the highest levels of seniority, said that the Walgett community's perspective on this had been well noted. Nevertheless, the time pressure regional government officers were under to draft and sign off the LIPs for the two NSW priority communities, apparently left no available resources to be dedicated towards helping the WGACWP and Walgett community develop its desired additional building block.

### **Why the inclusion of land and culture was deemed important**

As noted in Chapter 4 (p138), remote-living Aboriginal Australians are frequently faced with a difficult dilemma that: that choosing to focus on maintaining culture and staying on country often involves forgoing opportunities for socio-economic advancement.<sup>83</sup> Alternately, those who choose to strive for better socio-economic opportunities may be forced to leave country and culture behind and move somewhere else. Altman and Rowse identify that 'certain economic adaptations' by Indigenous Australians involve 'complex trade-offs between people's desires for cultural continuity and material prosperity' (2005: 176). For example, Aboriginal men who take up opportunities to work in the lucrative mining industry as fly-in-fly-out workers may gain economic advancement, however living away from their families and communities for extended periods may significantly reduce personal, family and community wellbeing, through reduced interaction with kin, culture and country (Taylor 2008).

In the face of this either-or dilemma, Aboriginal community members often still prioritise maintenance of cultural identity and connection to country as strong imperatives for wellbeing, while also looking for innovative ways to overcome the crippling socio-economic disadvantages that affect their lives, especially in remote places. To this end, Aboriginal communities have been willing to work collaboratively with governments and others to seek innovative ways to both strengthen culture *and* improve livelihoods (Yotti' Kingsley et al. 2009).

In Walgett, the proposed adaptation of the building block framework for community's LIP, to include land and culture-related items, was a clear example of this desire to ensure that efforts to improve socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal people were not divorced or separated

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<sup>83</sup> The force and impact of this dilemma on Aboriginal choices is becoming increasingly pressured as the Australian federal government and some state governments are revealing plans, as of late 2014, for basic services such as power and water soon to be cut off from some very remote communities, as a cost saving measure, potentially closing down more than 100 communities (Kagi 2014).



from culture and heritage which, with the right emphasis, might be simultaneously addressed while offering job opportunities and improved health and wellbeing for local people.

### **Need for healing processes**

A number of research participants said they had conveyed to government early on the need for healing processes as fundamental prerequisite to enable optimal participation between Walgett community members and with government in RSD negotiations.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Walgett's Aboriginal community, like many Aboriginal communities, is affected by a range of social problems attributable to both historical and ongoing impacts of trauma resulting from colonisation, dispossession, structural and everyday racism and discrimination. In this context tensions are frequently expressed via lateral and family violence, substance abuse and intergenerational conflict.

Community research participants in the case study highlighted significant difficulties arising from such factors, which can undermine the effectiveness of community governance. Stella emphasised that she felt resources and support should have been applied to enable healing processes between Aboriginal community members that were, in her view, essential to improve local community governance and provide an enabling environment for community members and representatives to work well together and in negotiation with government on the RSD. Despite this need for healing having been clearly articulated however, Walgett community members expressed their disappointment that healing was not specifically addressed nor resourced during the set up phase of RSD for this locality.

Stella explained how the need for healing, and its lack of provision or resourcing, had impacted on one Aboriginal organisation's decision-making about whether and how they might join in with the WGACWP and governments and help to plan the RSD implementation:

There were personalities who over the years had intimidated (us)... bringing personal stuff and inappropriate behaviours into representative settings. So there were a few different issues that caused or made it difficult for (people) to feel safe in meetings.

There was, I remember, a lot of talk about the need for healing and (Elders) would go along to different community meetings and say there needed to be a big community healing process, where (people) could sort of get together and thrash out community issues and in some cases have some mediation and just come together in a trusting environment, and safe environment I suppose, (in order) to be able to engage with

government... (We were) saying, 'You know we really need some healing projects', but of course that seemed to be entirely ignored by everyone.

I remember two board meetings, at least two, where they'd be thrashing out whether or not to send a delegate (to the WGACWP to help work on the RSD). And by the end of that process they ended up saying we need to be in there and give it our best shot.

(Stella, WGACWP member)

As previously noted (Chapter 5, p165) significant governance issues arose in both Walgett and Wilcannia during the MP COAG Trial, as a result of long standing community tensions. Evaluators identified a critical lack of engagement from government partners in any 'significant conversations with Indigenous partners about how to manage these tensions', reporting that several Indigenous leaders had expressed a view that 'they needed government leaders to understand and respect both the history and reasons for these tensions and to find ways to support the sorting out of these tensions in Indigenous ways, rather than criticising and labelling them as 'family feuds' or 'infighting'' (Morgan & Disney 2006, p28).

While this is clearly a difficult area for governments to negotiate, the findings in relation to the COAG Trial evaluation reflect what was also expressed by participants in Walgett, that more effort could have usefully been applied to assist communities to access support for healing, as this need was identified as a critical issue undermining local governance processes and the capacity of community members and their representatives to participate in the RSD.

### **Role and challenges faced by the WGACWP**

As the RSD was rolled out in Walgett, the WGACWP played an important role in meeting and negotiating with governments and other agencies. As many members also hold senior roles in local Aboriginal-run organisations, the group saw themselves as able to represent both the interests of local Aboriginal families and community members, and, from a service-delivery point of view, to represent the needs and interests of their constituents, clients and members too.

As outlined in Chapter 5, members of the WGACWP are unpaid for their roles as elected representatives. The members interviewed explained they are also frequently extremely stretched and time-poor as they hold numerous other roles and responsibilities within the community, including sitting on the boards of organisations, working as employees and taking part in other committees. Most members were also playing an active role in supporting the

needs of extended family and friends. A number of WGACWP members spoke of the frustrations of their Community Working Party role and the burden it placed on them as volunteer members with so many other responsibilities.

Eve, an active and engaged older member of the community who wears multiple hats on committees and boards in addition to her role as a WGACWP member, explained the impact that under-resourcing of the WGACWP's work often had on the other commitments and organisational responsibilities of members:

When we sit there (on the WGACWP) voluntarily and we've got day time jobs and we're involved in other community organisations as well... you know like it became quite onerous and tedious to actually get the work done and I think like individual organisations - because we didn't really have the man power to (backfill our roles) - really we had to shut the doors. It's just one meeting after another, (in particular when there were) visiting government bodies and things like that. (Eve, WGACWP member)

#### **Inadequate resourcing and support for the WGACWP**

WGACWP members took their commitment and involvement with the RSD commitment very seriously and at times felt overwhelmed by a lack of resources and support they felt they needed to adequately keep track of minutes, organise correspondence, carry out additional research, and to plan, organise and keep abreast of all that was happening in relation to the RSD. A lack of resourcing for secretarial duties to assist the Working Party do its work was a critical issue for the WGACWP, raised from the outset of the RSD and one that would take years to be resolved. While governments worked out how to employ someone formally in a support role for the WGACWP, the group decided to appoint someone as an 'interim secretariat', initially unpaid. Ultimately, the drawn out issue of the employment of a paid secretariat role was to become a significant point of contention which was indicative of the high level of tension between the parties, supposed to be working together on the RSD.

Particular burdens on WGACWP members due to inadequate administrative support were clearly articulated by Kaylee, who spoke with admiration about the part played by her fellow WGACWP members:

To be able to do all this without any administration - the government has these high expectations about what the WGACWP are about and yet they don't provide the infrastructure to be able to support this while RSD is in town. And you know, because the WGACWP are the only people in town who are willing to step up and advocate for

their community, they're very inspirational people. There's not many people in the community that will do that. And at the same time they're already advocating for everything in the community - they already have multiple hats in the community... So to have all these expectations and pressure on community members who already have so many other commitments, I just don't know how they do it.

(Kaylee, WGACWP member)

The WGACWP was resourceful in its efforts to overcome resource shortfalls, seeking support and resourcing for its work directly from government via proposals for a secretariat position and communications strategy to be funded from the RSD budget. In addition the WGACWP strategically drew on support from those who offered pro bono support, including the author of this thesis.

### **Invited participation**

International literature on participation emphasises a need for clarity around levels of involvement in participation, who, how, and for what purpose it will take place, as well as whether the space for participation has been offered, claimed or created (Cornwall 2008; Cohen and Uphoff 1980). The notion of invited participation and how it structures relationships between communities and governments, contrasts with other types of enabling spaces, and is useful for thinking through the issues that faced government and the Walgett community in the RSD case study.

It was clear from the outset that government and the community had quite different intentions and understandings about what the role of Walgett's Community Working Party in decision-making processes for the RSD should and would be. In particular, government and the community seemed to have different ideas about the level of participation WGACWP members would have, at what stage of the RSD rollout they would participate, and to what ends their participation would be directed.

If government acknowledged a need to consult the community for particular purposes at various stages of RSD implementation, in particular during the LIP development stage and as the LIPs were being 'refreshed' at the half way mark, WGACWP members considered themselves leaders, advocates and local experts, who ought to be 'involved' and influential at every stage of decision-making processes associated with RSD (WGACWP members Kathleen, Gordon and Dani each strongly emphasised this view).

Cornwall relies on Cohen and Uphoff's notion of 'clarity through specificity' to emphasize a need to be very specific about what, who, how and why participation is taking place, because consultation is widely used 'the world over... as a means of legitimating already-taken decisions, providing a thin veneer of participation to lend the process moral authority' (Cornwall 2008: 270; Cohen and Uphoff 1980). Cornwall advocates a need for transparency over rhetoric in the context of participation, identifying that involvement presented as citizen participation in decision-making will frequently 'boil down to engaging (people) in marginal choices when the real decisions are clearly being made elsewhere' (Cornwall 2008: 279). She advocates for more clarity of purpose in participation processes, which ought to be specific about exactly *which* decisions the public have an opportunity to participate in, which members of the public *can* participate at different times, which *stages* of processes participation can and will occur in, and what areas are beyond the bounds of public participation.

Invited spaces for participation have a very different character to spaces people create for themselves, for invited spaces - no matter how participatory they aim to be - are 'structured and owned by those who provide them' (Cornwell 2008, p275). In the case study, it was possible to trace a change in the level of invited participation WGACWP gained as a result of sustained pressure and agitation applied via its advocacy and correspondence with government. As will be discussed further in the following chapter (p292) this ultimately had an impact on the processes of participation that were offered, or rather perhaps conceded, when government eventually invited Working Party chairs to attend SMC meetings.

Cornwall points out that while spaces for 'invited participation' have opened up opportunities for popular engagement in development processes, poverty and exclusion will not be tackled simply by enlisting participants in projects programs or processes, nor uncritically celebrating 'people's organisations' as the new intermediaries, but rather:

... greater attention needs to be paid both to enabling people to make and shape their own spaces for engagement and to processes to enhance the accountability of local and global institutions that affect people's lives. With this, participation comes to mean more than taking up invitations extended by others (Cornwall 2000: 13).

At various times WGACWP members conveyed that they felt the Community Working Party was treated as a 'tick a box' consultation body for government, providing a forum where new proposals, policies or programs could be announced as they were about to be rolled out, or even sometimes described after the fact of their rollout, however in this context members felt they were effectively powerless to have any real impact on the form or shape of program and

service delivery decisions being made. According to WGACWP members, sometimes the very act of tabling program or service delivery plans, by governments or agency representatives, appeared to be considered sufficient endorsement for proposals and plans to proceed to local implementation:

The Working Party – we thought, or presumed that everything would come to the Working Party to make a decision: ‘Yes. No. That’s not what we agreed to.’ That’s how we thought, how it started out. We were going to be the decision makers and this is how it will be. At the end of the day, it’s totally opposite, other way around. Government agencies, they and service providers went ahead and did stuff, brought things along to the meeting for us to then endorse - which they’d already been funded for and it was up and running. It’s frustrating. (Bob, WGACWP member)

Kaylee also described her sense that the WGACWP was being treated as a legitimising community contact point for governments, over program and service planning decisions that had clearly already been made elsewhere:

I get the sense that this initial push for a Community Working Party and a consultative group – that *they* see the WGACWP as a consultative group *for them*. So they can tick the box and say ‘Yep we’ve consulted with the Aboriginal community.. and we’ve got endorsement off the Working Party, so our job’s done’. They’re just ticking off the things that they want – and so they’re putting it in a different way and they’re influencing people in different ways to get what they think would be good. And they try and put it in a way that seems that they’ve listened – but they’ve never really truly listened to what community are asking for or want.

Whilst the WGACWP felt it had very little control or decision-making power over what would be rolled out, how and by whom, on the other hand, they also reported being held responsible, by community members, for a lack of visible progress and improvements being made in the community resulting from the RSD, as discussed below.

### **Accountability of WGACWP representatives to the community**

The Working Party is there for the community, we’re the *Community* Working Party, and so it’d be great if we’re aware of all that so we can feed back to the community, and let the community know that we’re being proactive in a sense.

(Dani, WGACWP member)

WGACWP members explained an unenviable position they often found themselves in, being caught between the demands and understandably pressing needs of disadvantaged

community members, and being identified as 'difficult' when standing up strongly for community needs in negotiations with governments. It was clear that WGACWP members were held accountable and responsible by community members for what they perceived as a lack of action in improving local conditions and services provided, yet Working Party members felt they lacked the power to effect decisions or actions on local priorities and needs they had identified. In addition they were hampered by the fact that they lacked access to vital information they needed to be able to communicate adequately and transparently to the wider Aboriginal community about what was being done or planned in Walgett, any progress achieved or blockages that might be getting in the way of service improvements. Brooke, a senior government officer interviewed for the research, agreed that poor communication between governments and communities negotiating the RSD had the effect of hampering relationships of trust: community representatives were unlikely to feel trust in their relations with government, whilst lack of information prevented them from being accountable in turn to the Aboriginal community members they were representing.

WGACWP members reported that despite the time and energy they had devoted to their representative role, striving to be a voice for the community and to advocate for community needs, they found themselves criticized by government and other agency partners involved in RSD as being 'too difficult' and demanding, meanwhile being personally blamed and criticised by community members for a lack of visible progress and detectable improvements to local conditions resulting from the RSD (Bob, WGACWP member). For the Working Party was effectively held responsible by the community for perceived failures of RSD to make a difference (community member Geraldine strongly enforced this point). Bob explained the pressures on the WGACWP, of being caught between the demands of both community and government:

Most of the people (in the community) sit back and say 'Well we've got all these big heads sitting over here – which is the Community Working Party'- who gets the *blame* all the time, because this hasn't happened or that hasn't happened. Now that sort of blame comes from the government side (too) - all the service agencies and that, they say: 'They're too hard to work with'. And then you'll have the community people saying: 'Well they don't know nothing, they're just sitting round the table on their arses and we're not *going* nowhere'. So you know you sit on these things and you just cop shit from both sides.

(Bob, WGACWP member)

Dani, who is a mother, local service manager and part time student, in addition to her role as a WGACWP member, described the frustration of feeling that, as a member of the WGACWP, she was donating her scarce time and energy, drawn from her own busy family and work schedule, to participate in Working Party business, yet she felt the WGACWP was unable to get results to show for their investment of time and energy, due to 'blockages':

We do as much as we can on the Working Party. We all have our own jobs, and so the Working Party takes a lot of our time as well. And we're representatives of the community on the Working Party, but it's so hard when there's blockages in place. So you're bringing concerns, issues, ideas for programs and stuff to the Working Party but then it doesn't go any further. Or it does, (but) it just takes so long in the process and so you're trying to be in the middle, it can be hard.

Here Dani also evokes the idea of being caught 'in the middle' between demands of the community and the power of governments to have the final say – between what is perceived as needed by the local community and what government decision-makers are willing or able to act upon to try to bring about change.

Jarvie and Stewart point out that cultures of government may clash with cultures of communities, that while public servants may want certainty, with clear outputs and line-items to action, communities appear to want 'talk', involving processes of participation and deliberation that take time (Jarvie and Stewart 2011). Public servants are ascribed a tendency to be risk averse, focused on public and financial accountability, confidentiality and professional detachment (ie: to avoid perceived or real conflict of interest), attuned to the fallout that mistakes may have for their personal career paths (Karvelas 2013; Martin 2013; Havnen 2013).

On the other hand, Aboriginal community representatives importantly have accountability obligations to family, kin and community, to achieve effective outcomes for the community and communicate well about what is happening (Reconciliation Australia 2014; Martin and Finlayson 1996). Pressure on Aboriginal leaders to be representative, beyond what might be expected of non-Indigenous leaders - with frequent complaint that 'that person does not represent me' or questioning the right of a person to 'speak for me'. Consultation or 'yarning' (an Aboriginal term used locally to refer to deliberation processes), may be critical within Aboriginal communities to allow problems and solutions to be appropriately socially constructed or framed (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010), and to allow consensus-driven processes



to bring legitimacy to representation and garner local buy-in for whatever decisions, proposals and plans community representatives are to take forward.

### **Challenges to good working relationships**

Meanwhile a number of other problems beset the community's ability to work well with government in the case study. Firstly, a high turnover of government staff within what were already lean coordination teams appeared to severely impact the ability of officers to forge trusting, respectful and well-informed relationships with the community. The speed at which staff appeared to 'burn out' or require rotation may be an indication of the challenges involved in such roles, but it may also be an indication of under-resourcing and therefore poor processes of support for officers in certain roles. A number of people spoke of the particular challenges inherent in embedded community coordination roles and the pressures for officers caught between responding to needs and requests from the local community and pressing reporting demands from superior officers further afield.

Coupled with apparent difficulties in recruiting or attracting suitable candidates for community level roles, high turnover of government staff in the mid-range coordination and community-embedded roles resulted in very inconsistent staffing, with community engagement-level roles remaining unfilled for extended periods across the five year duration of RSD. There would be three different officers in Walgett's RSDC role over the five year period of RSD, with two periods of five month gaps when there was nobody in the role. There was no one in the IEO role for most of the 5 year period of RSD in Walgett, so the locally embedded government team for RSD was thin on the ground compared with the intended structure and it was late to be formed in the timeline allowed for the LIP to be developed.<sup>84</sup>

Difficulties caused by high staff turnover in government roles were described as affecting relationships and negotiations between the WGACWP and governments working on the RSD. A number of research participants described this effect, including Kaylee:

I couldn't *remember* all the people but there's been a huge amount of government officials coming in and out of the community. And so many of them have changed their roles or gone into different government positions. So you never really know who's who in the zoo, or what's happening because you always have different government representatives.

(Kaylee, WGACWP member)

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<sup>84</sup> The reason for this was unclear, however it appears that recruitment processes were only implemented once, and the person selected was only in the role for about a month at the outset of RSD.

Morgan & Disney's evaluation of the COAG Trials found that one of the key elements required for successful partnership building between governments and communities was 'consistency of membership and engagement of government members and staff to build relationships and trust over time' (Morgan & Disney 2006: 27). This was clearly lacking in the current case study, and the impacts of high staff turnover were reported by a number of informants as being significant, including the frustrations of having to start all over again getting to know, and to catch up to speed, a succession of officers assigned to work with the community:

Well it's just the next person's agenda, what they want to happen, what they see as good for the community. And it's basically starting all over again. So they don't have that history of what's happened, and so the WGACWP has to basically repeat themselves – go through the whole process again... (Barry, WGACWP member)

A second problem mentioned by a number of community representatives, was tension and difficult relationships between government officers from different jurisdictions who were supposed to be working together on RSD:

There was a lot of tension – you noticed it – between (federal and state government) workers as well. And of course behind the scenes there was a lot of bitching and bickering. So you know the two governments weren't actually aligned with each other in the first place –the state and federal. (And) the local government they were never really on board, they didn't want anything to do with it. Which is a real shame as they're a key stakeholder in the whole thing, and it says a lot about what they want for community as well, and how they see community. (Kaylee, WGACWP member)

It was identified as highly problematic for the community that different tiers of government appeared to be so discordant and poorly coordinated. This was a major barrier to the WGACWP being able to feel confident in their own role and relationships working with governments.

A third issue that arose from the case study was a lack of capacity in government officers to understand and work well with Indigenous communities and to cope with the particular challenges and demands of working in remote cross-cultural environments. Challenges typically facing non-Indigenous workers embedded in remote cross-cultural contexts are well described in the article *Kartiyia are like Toyotas* (Mahood 2012). High burn out, and turnover of people in remote government roles is both a symptom of the isolation and particular demands of the role and the fact that the expectations of distant supervisors are completely out of touch with local realities and challenges (Mahood 2012). Sanders too identifies a type of

'isolated managerialism' affecting embedded government workers in remote communities, who are both under considerable pressure to allocate resources and yet isolated from peer support and supervision (Sanders 2008).

Moreover, in her report as Coordinator General for RSD in the Northern Territory, Olga Havnen identified that people responsible for implementing government policy and program delivery in Aboriginal towns 'often have a very limited understanding of Indigenous people and their cultures' leading to what she describes as:

generations of interaction and intervention based on the perceptions of the non-Indigenous world on what constitutes success, and has continued to fail to support Aboriginal people in determining and meeting their own aspirations. (Havnen 2012: 3)

In his six monthly progress reports on the RSD, the CGRIS argued a need for fundamental changes to the culture of public service agencies and how they do business with Aboriginal communities, including the need of development of new skills and competencies as facilitators essential to enable meaningful participation (CGRIS 2010b).

The CGRIS emphasised recruitment and training of officers as vital and called for more attention to this aspect of government activity in the Indigenous sphere (CGRIS 2012). This reinforces what others have identified as need for capacity building within government in order to improve engagement with Indigenous communities (Hunt 2007; Hunt and Smith 2006; ANAO 2012a; Tsey et al. 2012). Building capacity may include changes to recruitment criteria as well as more professional training for government officers in cultural awareness, cultural competency and a range of other critical skills and abilities required by people posted to carry out remote cross-cultural work. COAG Trial evaluators reported a common set of skills and behaviours exhibited by government officers who engaged well, as identified by community members, including: 'good listening, acting in good faith, high levels of good will, willingness to share power, recognising and acknowledging intra-community and familial relationships and how these impact on leaders, understanding the pressures on communities, being honest and open, and being human' (Morgan & Disney 2006: 27). This list of optimal qualities and capabilities may provide an important guide for public service recruitment and capacity training.

## **Developing the Walgett LIP**

This section discusses the second key type of participation process identified for close analysis within this chapter, established to enable development of Walgett's Local Implementation Plan for RSD.

In each of the RSD communities an important early task that required community participation was the development of a Local Implementation Plan (LIP). This was done slightly differently in each community, but in Walgett processes were enacted to workshop, with community and service representatives, the specific needs of the locality matched against seven building block areas identified by Closing the Gap, before shaping the outcomes of this engagement into a coherent plan of action to guide or set goals for cross-agency and inter-jurisdictional work by governments. This research heard various perspectives on the processes involved in developing the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) for Walgett.

Two workshops were held in Walgett towards developing the community's LIP. Evidence provided by case study interviewees indicates that issues associated with timing and structure of the LIP development workshops detracted from the quality of Aboriginal participation they enabled. It appears that organisers underestimated the significant level of planning needed to begin new processes in an environment where there is a history of distrust, and given the mix of hope and distrust community members brought to the process.

### **Timing and planning of the workshops**

Walgett's LIP development workshops were held in August and December of 2009. My timeline for Walgett RSD (**Appendix D**) reveals that both workshops therefore took place before the WGACWP had been formally recognised by government as the local Aboriginal governance body for RSD engagement (June 2010), and before the baseline mapping report had been provided to the community (early 2010). The RSD team did however report meeting with the WGACWP on the morning of the first workshop, to introduce RSD and key issues to be raised later in the day, and it also met separately with Walgett's men's group in advance of the workshop (RSD Team 2009).

The late release of baseline reports for each of the 29 RSD communities was criticised in the second report of the CGRIS, given that baseline reports were designed to inform local planning and LIP development, providing important data and analysis of existing service systems and program investments by governments (CGRIS 2010b). It is rare for such comprehensive service

mapping of local communities to be carried out, and access to the baseline report would have provided valuable insights for service representatives, community members and government officers to draw upon, had it been available by the time of the workshops.<sup>85</sup>

In addition, the first appointee to Walgett's RSDC role did not start until December 2009, the same month as the second workshop. The timing of this appointment left no time for the RSDC to get to know and work with community leaders and members in advance to assist their engagement with the process.

That the second LIP development workshop was held so close to the end of the year, and invitations were reportedly issued short notice, also meant that a number of vital players - including members of the Elders group and representatives of WAMS - were unable to attend the second workshop. The non-participation of these key Aboriginal organisations, who are vital players in Walgett and on the WGACWP, would ultimately be highly problematic, as we shall see.

### **Facilitation and structure of the LIP development workshops**

If the first of the two LIP development workshops was described as having a good facilitator, the format of the workshop was not ideal as a big town-hall style meeting held at a local facility in town, with 120 people in attendance and people calling out from the floor as items were added to a whiteboard. This format was described by several interviewees as uncondusive to participation by all sections of an Aboriginal community, as it did not enable the 'quality group work' that they would have preferred.

A number of interviewees attested they had been unaware of the purpose of the first workshop in advance and therefore had not come prepared with ideas or information to contribute. Confusion over the purpose of the gathering is corroborated by the fact that most interviewees described the event as a community meeting to 'announce the RSD', rather than as a workshop or planning event. When government released its report on the event it described this as Walgett's the 'first RSD workshop' (Walgett RSD Team 2009). Representatives of Aboriginal organisations said they were also unaware they would be asked to stand up and give an account of their organisations as they were during the workshop<sup>86</sup>. Nevertheless,

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<sup>85</sup> Walgett's LIP document would ultimately include points drawn from the baseline mapping report, however by the time of the workshops the baseline report was not yet available to inform participants.

<sup>86</sup> WAMS and other organisations did make off the cuff presentations, however the DEG declined to do so, offering to present at a later date or to make a written submission; ultimately DEG representatives would unfortunately be unable to attend the second workshop in December 2009, so the valuable

despite these issues with format and structure of the event, WGACWP interviewees said it left them feeling optimistic about RSD and pleased that the CGRIS had been in attendance.

While no written report was produced from the second workshop, interviewees who attended described group work using butcher's paper, and people seated at tables according to their particular interests and knowledge of building block areas. This process seems likely to have been more conducive to participation than the first workshop's open forum format, however WGACWP interviewees reported this still allowed insufficient opportunity for ordinary community members to have their say, as discussed further below.

### **Outcomes of the LIP development process**

Once government's RSD officers assigned the task had gone away and drafted up the LIP document, it was presented back to the community for signing by the WGACWP, an official ceremony was planned to mark the occasion. At the time, WGACWP members said they indicated that they were very unhappy with the LIP document as it stood, asking for more time for revision and changes to be made. However, 'under pressure to sign' WGACWP members agreed to do so, on the understanding, from what they were told by ROC officers, that it would be a living document and changes could be made later (Stella, Kathleen and Bob all mentioned this). A commitment to ongoing review was explicitly included in the plan itself:

The Implementation Plan will be reviewed and updated on a six monthly basis for the first 18 months to ensure its continuing relevance to the service delivery needs of Aboriginal people in Walgett and the requirements of the Agreement. (Walgett LIP 2010: 16)

Nevertheless, Walgett's LIP would remain unchanged from this point until the LIP refresh process two years later, despite WGACWP making numerous requests for particular modifications to be made.

As recounted by research participants, the processes implemented toward LIP development for Walgett had been largely described by research informants as inadequate, with limited time and opportunity for broad or deeply engaged consultations, nor to include the voices of ordinary citizens, in particular the members of Walgett's most marginalised population groups: Aboriginal families and individuals in high need of the types of services being planned.

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insights of the Elders Group were not contributed during the two LIP development workshops (see Appendix D for more detail of the 2 workshops).

In February of 2010 the DEG's newsletter *Yundiboo* described this second workshop as a 'hurried attempt made to start Walgett's Local Implementation Plan... after completely inadequate consultation'. It went on to describe anticipation that future processes to progress the LIP would be forthcoming, and that DEG members had seen a first draft of the Walgett LIP:

All realised the draft (LIP) was inadequate, but so far, no further work has been done to even agree on a process for developing the final Plan. We are impatiently awaiting signs of organising this process which will be complex and time consuming so that we get it right.' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2010: 7)

DEG members would be disappointed that no further workshops or formal opportunities to contribute would be afforded by the RSD Team, for their input to Walgett's LIP, after December 2009.

### **Participation in the LIP development workshops**

Whilst a number of Aboriginal service representatives, including WGACWP members, attended the workshops, a number of these people stressed in the research interviews that there needed to be more 'direct community input' and participation than was possible in the two big workshops, to truly draw on local knowledge about social problems, service needs and shortfalls in services on offer. Issues of accessibility, cultural fit and appropriateness might have been canvassed with service users in smaller group consultations for example, to better understand barriers to service access and plan ways to reduce these going forward.

Kaylee and Bob explained that attendees at both LIP development workshops were mainly representatives of services, who therefore had more opportunity to contribute their ideas to discussions than individual community members or those WGACWP representatives who were not service-aligned. Whilst both Indigenous and non-Indigenous service representatives were reportedly present, it appears that the status of these people and their relative power may have overwhelmed the ability of ordinary community members to participate and contribute their ideas at the workshops. It is perhaps inevitable that in such a forum, service workers and managers, whose roles give them both professional power and insights into how service systems work in Walgett, would have a tendency to dominate group discussions about service planning. Whilst the knowledge such people can share is extremely valuable, given they are Walgett's 'street-level bureaucrats', their experiences of challenge within existing remote service systems may also make these people more 'jaded' and less innovative when it comes to planning reform of service delivery (Lipsky 1980).

According to Bob, service representatives spoke from perspectives informed by their knowledge of existing service resourcing, processes and limitations, and were therefore constrained by 'bureaucratic thinking'. They tended to 'drown out' the voices of those community members who had made the effort to attend. What happened in this process may be compared with what international participation literature describes as 'elite capture', whereby the voices of 'ordinary citizens' who are service users and those most marginalised from decision-making, remain so within the participation processes that are offered (Fung 2004: 5).

The shyness many Aboriginal people in Walgett experience in conversing with outsiders - non-Aboriginal people, non-locals, or government employees for example - is not to be underestimated, according to one interviewee. In addition, many local people lack experience in participating in consultations or workshops of the kind being staged for RSD. However this doesn't mean they don't want to contribute, or that they don't have ideas of value to contribute to service planning that affects their own lives. Without skilful staging and facilitation to enable the broader community, including Aboriginal service users, to participate - such as via separate supported group-work or additional, separate consultations - the benefits to be gained from hearing from local Aboriginal people are lost.

Ensuring cultural safety and empowering people from all sections of an Aboriginal community requires doing more than hosting a single town hall meeting. Awareness of divisions and community tensions, typical of many Aboriginal communities, is crucial and may necessitate careful staging of separate meetings in order to canvas involvement and enable participation. It does not appear that these considerations were sufficiently addressed in planning for Walgett's two LIP development workshops.

### **Different perspectives of the Walgett LIP: whose document was it?**

Government and community participants conveyed quite different views about both the document's purpose and its value to the RSD roll out in this locality. Some government policy officers considered the LIP to have given them a 'clear road map', providing mandated responsibilities and accountabilities (as described by policy officer Adam). While WGACWP members spoke about the document as a 'bewilderingly long list' of items (Dani), growing 'bigger than the bible' (Bob), and that they felt unable to recognise it as their own, despite reassurances that this was a community document. A number of community representatives described the LIP as a 'government' rather than 'community document', reporting that whilst



they had attended workshops held to inform its drafting, much of their input appeared to have been 'lost in translation' (Stella, Dani and others described this). Others felt the LIP included a large number of items that they did not recall having been brought up or discussed at the workshops. This reinforced for many Aboriginal community members an impression that the LIP was in fact more reflective of government's pre-determined agenda, than being the community plan they had been led to believe it would be.

Both community representatives and some policy officers interviewed for the case study agreed Walgett's LIP was a problematic, 'poor quality' document, when compared with some of the other RSD communities' LIPs. For example the LIP developed for Mornington Island, where the local community was able to involve consultant facilitators to assist them, was profiled as best practice by the CGRIS (CGRIS 2010b: 28-29; Australian Government 2011a).

Local critics of the Walgett LIP argued it should have been drafted in a more collaborative way, with more inclusive community processes; that time pressure limited any redrafting opportunities; and that the very structure of the document was problematic. Indeed, the LIP lists approximately 210 individual action items, however wording is on the whole brief, vague and lacks sufficient detail to explain what a particular action is intended to entail. There are no specific timeframes given for actions to be completed, nor benchmarks to measure outcomes against (Walgett LIP 2010).

The relative outcomes of LIP development process in Walgett and Mornington Island, as mentioned above, suggest strong benefits may accrue to planning processes when communities are resourced to employ independent skilled facilitators to assist them achieve their participatory goals for local planning. Had Walgett's consultation sessions been differently coordinated, perhaps including more extensive, though time-consuming, community consultation sessions in advance, the Aboriginal community and the WGACWP may have achieved a greater level of ownership over the final product.

The participation literature has advice which sheds light on some of the problems that occurred in processes of developing the Walgett LIP. The Canadian Institute of Governance establishes key principles of public participation, including the need for 'relaxed time-frame(s) for deliberation' and 'shared agenda-setting', recommending that voluntary or non-government organisations can be valuable agents for informing participants and facilitating dialogue between government and citizens (Canadian Institute on Governance 1998). The International Association of Public Participation (on whose recommendations the Australian

Public Service has fashioned its suite of engagement principles *Engaging today, Building Tomorrow*, 2011) includes in its core values for public participation that 'public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision' (International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) 2011).

Clearly promises of participation need to match participation efforts committed by communities, recognising and valuing the insights they have contributed. Where the promise of participation raises citizen or community expectations of involvement, but governments fail to take recommendations from participatory processes on board in planning and decision making, and to communicate clearly the nature of participatory impact, there is a danger of creating deepening dissatisfaction among citizens. Of course governments may initiate participatory processes with the best intentions of involving citizens in decision making, being transparent and clear about how citizens voices are making an impact; such intentions may however be impacted by changing circumstances such as flagging political or institutional will, changes in political environments, funding or administrative arrangements.

If Walgett's LIP was to reflect community identified needs, as government had promised, significantly more time needed to be allowed for wider consultations with various groups in the community, involving independent facilitators (a point stressed by Bob), and for various drafts of the plan to go back to the community and WGACWP for review and revision before a final version was developed. In addition, the inability or unwillingness of government to amend or add to the LIP once it was signed further signalled to the community that their input was not valued, and that the document was a 'government' rather than 'community' plan. This is highly problematic, given that 'ownership' of the reform process by Indigenous communities was identified from the start of the RSD as an important success factor (COAG 2009a).

WGACWP member Bob felt strongly that the LIP was too complex, broad and ambitious, and that more straightforward step-by-step local planning processes might have achieved more satisfaction and positive outcomes for the community:

RSD probably would have worked if they would have done it differently. You know, listened to what community wanted and then instead of having the LIP... It was too huge, too big. If they would have picked a couple of things and worked on that - 6 months, 12 months, concentrated their efforts and say 'Well look we're getting somewhere with this now, making some inroads', and then 'Ok let's have a look at this other problem'. But you've *got* to work with community, you've got to keep people informed about what's happening.

(Bob, WGACWP member)

## Walgett Aboriginal women's workshops

By contrast to the Walgett LIP development process, a much more fruitful community participation process was completed three months after the Walgett LIP signing. This represents the third of four processes identified for close analysis in this chapter. Walgett's Aboriginal women's workshops were described by interviewees as significant because they were the only exercise during the RSD period to encourage broader community participation<sup>87</sup>, and they were driven by a local Aboriginal community organisation, with assistance from the RSDC and with advice from key local organisations delivering women's services and programs.

A series of four three-hour-long in-depth themed workshops were run with Aboriginal women in the community, coordinated by the local Aboriginal Elders organisation. For two years prior, the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) had been in receipt of small federal grant to run a women's program.<sup>88</sup> Once the implementation of RSD was underway the Elders were looking for ways to make a stronger contribution to the process. DEG members felt it would be valuable to develop processes to facilitate broader community participation and input into the RSD in Walgett. One way to do so would be to run a series of community consultation workshops; however the organisation needed the funding and resources to do so. The DEG agreed with its federal funder, which happened to be a key player in the RSD initiative, that the small grant allocated to its women's program should for 2010, be re-assigned to help resource the running of participatory workshops for local Aboriginal women, with two goals:

1. To produce a list of priorities from Walgett women to be included in the Walgett RSD LIP, and
2. To elect two representatives of Walgett Aboriginal women to attend the WGACWP and other representative fora (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 2)

New deliverables described by the funding body were: 4 workshops for Walgett Aboriginal women, to include Namoi and Gingie, and to 'target issues identified by the women as priorities in their communities' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 2). The funding would cover

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<sup>87</sup>In contrast, for example, to the LIP development workshops run by the RSD team which were technically open to all, but were described by interviewees as dominated by service delivery organisation representatives, rather than being inclusive of Aboriginal community members as the users (or potential users) of programs and services.

<sup>88</sup>The small grant covered employment of a local Aboriginal woman on a casual basis to help organise activities, support and transport the women as needed to carry out activities (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 2). Over a period of 3 years beginning in 2006, the grant amount varied considerably, and by the time of the women's workshops there was less than \$10,000 available to be allocated from the grant for the workshops. The following year, federal funding for the DEG women's program stopped altogether.

catering and venue hire, and some of the time committed by the DEG's project officer. Walgett's RSD Coordinator would also contribute by being involved in planning for the workshops and taking notes during some of the workshops.

### **Planning and preparation for running the women's workshops**

Extensive pre-workshop planning and consultations took place in the first quarter of 2010, in order to establish the subject areas for discussion, the format of the workshops and how to ensure inclusive participation. A reference committee was formed in the first instance, involving representatives of all the local providers of women's programs at the time as well as the RSD Coordinator, to help determine how the workshops should be run. Next DEG directors developed, together with local Aboriginal women who held expertise in relevant subject matter, priority themes for the four workshops.

No less than 10 face-to-face planning consultations and meetings were held with relevant local services and stakeholders in the lead up to the workshops, in addition to numerous phone and email consultations. Meeting notes and draft workshop questions were shared and discussed via email before a plan for each of the workshops gradually took shape. Finally the topics for the four workshops were decided to be:

1. A Safer Community for Women (law, justice, family violence)
2. Schooling, Jobs and Training (education, employment and training)
3. Health
4. Where to Now? (providing information to assist the follow through and implementation of strategies and programs to address issues identified in the first 3 workshops, particularly in relation to RSD (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 2-3).

Many local Aboriginal women would have had no prior experience taking part in such a forum. The venue and staging for each workshop were therefore thoughtfully planned, in order to be inclusive and to encourage participation. An accessible, affordable and neutral local venue was chosen; catering for the three hour sessions was supplied, and bead-making materials were available to offer a hands-on activity for the women and encourage more relaxed conversation. Fliers and personal invitations were produced for each workshop session, which were delivered by hand as well as being distributed and displayed in reception areas of local services. Between 14 and 32 women attended each of the workshops, a not insignificant

number considering 32 women represents 12% of those eligible to participate (ie: Aboriginal women resident in Walgett<sup>89</sup>).

During the workshops sheets of butchers' paper were used to record ideas, with pages projected onto a larger screen so everyone could see what was being written. Notes were later transcribed, checked and added to during the final workshop, before being appended to the final report of the workshops. The women decided to organise the first part of the report according to Building Block areas used in the Walgett LIP, in order to 'facilitate ease of transfer into the LIP at a later date' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 3). That such careful planning took place, about how the women's ideas and workshop outputs would be recorded and presented in the report, confirms there was a clear desire and intention by the women that their contributions via the workshops be incorporated in the community's RSD plan. Their faith that this would happen, in due course, would ultimately be dashed however.

### **Key outcomes of the women's workshops**

The workshops were unique within the period of the RSD in Walgett, in that they managed to facilitate participatory processes to involve 'ordinary' Aboriginal community members, as opposed to representatives on the WGACWP or service provider staff. The length and number of sessions conducted, and their location in accessible community venues close to where people live, enabled the women's workshops to produce a rather outstanding document that draws on and enhances local knowledge about local problems and provides an important background and backdrop to many identified social problems affecting Walgett.

The outcomes of the workshops, highlighted in the report, provide valuable insights towards understanding many of the complex social problems experienced by Aboriginal women, men and children in Walgett, seen through the eyes of those with lived experience of the problems. Local place-based solutions were posed taking account of multiple factors, including aspects that, if overlooked by service deliverers, might otherwise preclude the success of social programs and policies.

Particular barriers to women's economic and educational participation and safety in Walgett were thoughtfully and clearly described by workshop participants, and these are recorded in the workshop report, along with suggestions about how these issues might be addressed. Issues of particular concern included the lack of a local birthing centre allowing children to be

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<sup>89</sup> Calculated on the basis that Walgett LGA's Aboriginal population over 19 years of age represented 66% of the population at the 2011 Census (ABS 2011b).

born on-country and for mothers to be close to supportive family; overcrowded housing as a factor endangering the safety of women and children, due to increased conflict, lack of privacy and alternatives for people wishing to move out; that high incidences of family and sexual violence in Walgett are linked to the low resilience and self-esteem of Aboriginal men; that there needs to be more focus on parenting and support for the role of parents; that affordable long day care is needed to enable women's participation in work and education and public transport is needed to enable better access to employment, training and health services; and that safe drinking water and fluoridation are priorities to improve the health of Aboriginal residents (see full Women's Workshop Report at **Appendix F**).

Importantly the women taking part in the workshops advocated a need and desire for ongoing participation, for opportunities to be made available for the 'women to actively progress these recommendations with government'; they wanted 'to be informed as to whether government listened to (their) recommendations, and receive from and give feedback on a regular basis to government about these important matters' (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 14). In addition, the women proposed a new women's organisation be established in Walgett<sup>90</sup>, both to advocate for the needs of local women, and to deliver some of the strategies discussed during the workshops, including to working with girls to build self esteem, confidence and respect, providing healing for women, especially in light of high incidence of trauma caused by domestic violence, and to assist women to succeed in education (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 14-15).

In addition, the workshop process enabled the women an opportunity to consider legal advice obtained especially for them regarding the type of organisation they might want to form and to nominate two women who would be delegated to attend the WGACWP, carrying forward concerns and returning communication to community members, as the representative of Aboriginal women in Walgett from that time on.

### **Government response to the women's workshops**

During the women's workshops it had been agreed that a findings report and recommendations from the workshops should go to the RSD team for inclusion in the Walgett LIP document, once these had been endorsed by the WGACWP. Within the workshop report, it was pointed out that given the workshops were limited to 12 hours of discussion, and hence priority topics were the focus, the report itself should 'not be seen as a definitive list of

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<sup>90</sup> Note that this recommendation would later be carried over to become one of the 12 community priorities for Walgett defined by the WGACWP during the LIP Refresh.

recommendations by Walgett Aboriginal women for the Walgett LIP, but rather as a 'substantial contribution' to be built upon by the RSD team and the community in future (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 3).

The stated commitment in Walgett's LIP document (quoted p233), that the document would be reviewed and updated six monthly, had signalled to the WGACWP and those associated with the women's workshops that there would be scope for the contributions of their workshop participation to be included. However the women would be sorely disappointed with the government's lack of response nor action to carry out any of the inclusions or amendments to the LIP they had hoped for and expected to see as a result of their efforts. While the Women's Workshop Report was endorsed by the WGACWP by February 2011 and hopefully provided to the ROC, there did not appear to be any process in place to enable the Walgett LIP to be amended in response to important new contributions by Walgett's Aboriginal women.

Timing was perhaps a key problem for the women's workshops, given that the process of planning, running and reporting on workshop outcomes took almost a year, between March 2010 and February 2011; however the LIP had already been signed off by August 2010<sup>91</sup>. Despite government's commitment to 6 monthly reviews of the LIP, there is no evidence that any revision or review of the document took place within the first 18 months. Given that the key federal agency involved in the RSD had authorised the re-direction of DEG women's group funds toward holding the workshops, it was particularly disappointing that a stronger effort was not made to circulate the workshop outcomes report and ensure at least some of its findings and insights were integrated into and clearly signalled within the Walgett LIP.

Ultimately WGACWP members interviewed said they had 'no way to know the impact' of the women's workshops on the RSD process and on decisions made by government agencies, as no specific formal feedback or response was ever provided to those involved. This was disappointing, given that one of the key outcomes the women at the final workshop said they hoped for was a response from government about how their efforts had impacted the RSD (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 14).

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<sup>91</sup> As already noted, there was significant pressure from government for the LIP to be signed off by the WGACWP at that time, despite the concerns of Working Party members that the document was not ready; and reassurances were reportedly made, that the LIP would be a 'living document' able to be amended.

Organisers of the women's workshops did however eventually receive what they described as 'glowing feedback' from individual government officers attending the Local Community Awareness Program (LCAP) 'Walgett Winangay'<sup>92</sup> run by the organisation in June 2012 to inform RSD workers about Walgett, as the DEG provided copies of the document to them as part of the program. While the WGACWP assumed the ROC would have distributed the women's report to agencies involved in the RSD, most LCAP participants said they had not previously known of Walgett's women's workshops and that it would have been good, to inform their work, to have received the report earlier. These officers emphasised how important the report's insights were. At any rate, officers attending the LCAP were lower level agency staff, rather than more senior officers likely to wield decision-making influence.

For government and the RSD process, the women's workshop report offered ground-up insights, local knowledge and important perspectives on important social issues from the point of view of Walgett's Aboriginal women. So it seems a great shame that it wasn't taken up nor considered to the extent it might have been. Given the amount of effort and planning this participatory process clearly involved, it is understandable that community members felt disappointed when their considerable efforts in talking back to policy were not valued nor incorporated into the RSD plan.

### **Governments 'engaging' from afar**

This next section goes beyond focussed consideration of the women's workshops to reflect more broadly on engagement processes overall in the case study. An area of need identified by WGACWP members was increased cultural and local awareness and training for public servants and other non-locals coming to Walgett to work with the Aboriginal community, including for those making decisions about Walgett from afar. This was seen as essential to improve the way government officers were able to understand and work with the community and the WGACWP as its representative body. WGACP member Stella said:

I guess we realise what the challenges are when we have these constant waves of people coming here who work for government or non-government organisations and they don't understand the community. There must be a big gulf, which is from remoteness or it's a cultural thing as well I guess... They don't seem to understand Aboriginal organisations and what they do. They don't seem to know anything about the local history and the sorts of lives Aboriginal people have had here... And I guess

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<sup>92</sup> Meaning 'understand Walgett'.



understanding poverty too, that's remote for a lot of people employed by agencies and NGOs. That's remote to their own lives, remoteness in that sense.

This notion of the physical and cultural remoteness of decision-makers from Aboriginal lives, and the lives of those living in poverty, as a barrier to public servants' understandings and abilities to make informed and suitable Indigenous policy decisions, resonates with the arguments of Chambers (1999). He identified distance as one of the most significant barriers to professional learning and effective decision-making for central planners of international aid projects, typically located a great distance from the everyday lives and local conditions of the people they are planning for. Chambers argued that 'distance blocks, blurs and distorts vision', for:

The more powerful (decision-makers) are, so too the more centrally located they are, the further from the real experience of poor people, and the more vulnerable to delusion. Power, distance, isolation and ignorance correlate (Chambers 1999: 80).

Analysing instances of misdirected and wasteful aid investments emerging from misunderstandings of local conditions and realities, Chambers found 'central planners, cut off from local conditions... uncritical of bad data and ignorant of how people live, are prone to construct for themselves and their colleagues costly worlds of fantasy...prescribing massive programmes which are neither needed nor feasible' (Chambers 1999: 23). In addition, Chambers emphasised a view that 'the realities of life and conditions are elusive: they are local, complex, diverse, dynamic and unpredictable' (Chambers 1999: 32). These words ring true to the experience of many people in Walgett, where community representatives revealed their exasperation about how little governments seemed to know about their lives, and therefore how inappropriate, unfeasible and even wasteful certain initiatives or programs rolled out in the community often are. Stella explained how the WGACWP had anticipated a role in advising governments how to invest much needed, if limited, resources in Walgett more wisely:

Like first off, before they design a project, for the project to be effective they need to come here and get advice. And save a whole lot of time and failure by designing a program that's going to work or have a good chance of working. Then, if they don't have loads of money, they're going to need a local service provider who's already on the ground rather than bring a new worker in with a new car and new housing and all of that sort of thing. So they're probably going to need a local service to deliver the project. Then they're also going to need to know whether the project addresses local

needs, and how the service fits with what other services are doing, and how they can work in a coordinated way. And they can do all that with an effective strong community advocacy body and community that's engaged and knows what it needs and knows how to talk to government about how to address those needs.

(Stella, WGACWP member)

With the RSD engagement, the WGACWP realised that increasing ranks of government officers would be focused on making decisions about Walgett lives, whether or not they had ever visited the community or were making decisions from a vast distance away. WGACWP members identified that it would be important for these officers to know more about Walgett's people, their culture and history, challenges and everyday realities. In addition it was considered important to make sure that local cultural protocols and Aboriginal ways of working were respected by officers assigned to work with the community. The WGACWP hoped to be proactive about ensuring their rights to participate in the RSD implementation, as set out in government's own Indigenous Engagement Principles established for the NIRA (and therefore the RSD), were acknowledged and understood; this required making sure that suitable mechanisms for participation were established and maintained, and that the WGACWP's involvement was valued, duly acknowledged and respected:

For a long time the Working Party had been saying that we need to help government understand those Principles of Service Delivery that are in the RSD Agreement and what it really means when they do come to Walgett, what it really means about negotiating with community, not just consulting, and you know partnerships with community, and all those sort of lovely words that are in those service delivery principles. And at one stage we'd asked to produce a handbook for Walgett to go alongside the LIP, to help them understand how to implement in Walgett... we'd offered to do that for them and they thought that was an interesting idea, but that never happened.

(Stella, WGACWP member)

Later funding was provided for a Local Community Awareness Program (LCAP) to be run to provide a community familiarisation and induction program for officers from various agencies working on the RSD commitment. Members of the WGACWP would take part in formal initiatives to help introduce and inform government officers and external workers about Walgett's Aboriginal community, culture and heritage to help improve relationships with government officers working in or with the local community. Ironically the process of scheduling and coordinating the LCAP session in Walgett was affected by interactions with

government officers that were described by one community representative as 'demanding, really, really demanding', and that community members felt 'bullied' into agreeing to carry out the program on dates suitable for government, but which didn't suit a number of important Aboriginal leaders whose contributions would therefore be lost from the presentation. Ironically a process designed to improve the quality of 'engagement' between government and community members working together, became a point of sore contention between them.

### **Resources and support needed to enable optimal participation**

WGACWP members felt they received insufficient support and resourcing to enable them as community representatives and/or other community members to participate in the RSD implementation:

They keep saying 'Well we've given communities opportunities to do this and that'. Well they give them opportunities but they don't give them the resources and the support that has to go with that, to make that decision. (Bob, WGACWP member)

After significant lobbying and pressure applied from the WGACWP for support, agreement was reached for the creation of a secretariat position to support their work on RSD. However, in a sign of how tense things often became between the parties, negotiations between government and the WGACWP over the creation of this role were conflicted and drawn out, derailing good will and seriously threatening the ongoing viability of the WGACWP's involvement. In addition, a communications strategy devised by WGACWP to promote the RSD more broadly to Aboriginal community members was never fully implemented nor supported.

Kaylee, a dynamic young local service manager and WGACWP member, highlighted another type of support missing from Walgett's RSD engagement that might have made a big difference to the quality and type of participatory contribution WGACWP members might have offered. She identifies that a range of expert advice and information would have greatly assisted local decision-making. In Kaylee's view, this was an important missing component needed to allow optimal participation by the members of the WGACWP in decision-making processes:

They expect the community to have all these answers and yet there's no professional guidance in a sense. So you know they're expecting us to answer to building blocks on economic development, for example, yet there's been no informed decisions because we're not all experts in economic development. We don't *know* what's best really. And so it'd be good to be able to have a professional come in and say 'Well these are the things you should be looking at, these are your options', and then based on that, the

Community Working Party can choose an appropriate way to go. But there was never anything like that.

### **High quality participation demands flexible agendas**

Optimal participation requires policy and planning agendas to be genuinely flexible. Community representatives in the case study expressed their sense that when government officers and agencies came to the table to meet with them, they did so with agency plans and agendas that appeared to be already well mapped out. Whilst the RSD and CTG defined particular targets for improvement and building block action areas to guide activity and planning, WGACWP members felt frustrated by a sense that their input was not really able to drive nor influence the direction of planning processes as they would have liked.

Kathleen, a highly experienced, senior service sector professional and active WGACWP member, explained her frustration with this situation:

I just think that people who are members of the Working Party haven't been recognised for their corporate knowledge, professional and cultural contribution, and the Commonwealth or whoever - be it the partnership between (Federal and State Government Departments)... have their own agenda, and that's it. And their agenda is not our agenda. In two years, it's never been our agenda.

For the community to genuinely feel empowered by participation, that they have some decision-making power and control as local leaders forging solutions to local problems, the promise of participation needs to be delivered and followed through via realisation of plans and actions that can directly respond to what the community comes up with and identifies as priorities. A number of other research participants expressed strong cynicism about the way that governments operate when consulting with Aboriginal communities, that they effectively only offer what White has termed 'nominal' participation for the purposes of display (White 1996), when the real agenda-setting decisions are being made elsewhere, without strong regard for or inclusion of the community's wishes:

Being consulted doesn't really mean your ideas about what you see as a priority in Walgett is going to get funded, or considered... The way governments work they have to consult, then once they consult, then they come up with their list of priorities. And if what you've said doesn't come up on their list of priorities it seems to get left out altogether.

(Gary, WGACWP member)

A keen suspicion was expressed by community representatives that government officers approach consultations and meetings in Aboriginal communities with pre-set agendas, that

consultation with community is often akin to 'lip service' or 'tick-a-box' expediency, carried out so that public officers can justify decisions and processes as community-sanctioned or legitimised, when in fact pre-ordained decisions and plans have already been put in place or been mapped out in advance. In Arnstein's typology, discussed in Chapter 1 (p38), such processes are described as tokenism (Arnstein 1969), for the true purpose of these types of consultations is to inform and placate local people, rather than to allow participants any real power over decision-making.

Gary explained his sense that the WGACWP was in fact reasonably powerless to influence outcomes, other than via putting forward suggestions and then hoping that government might pick up or support one or two of their suggestions:

Sometimes they listen, sometimes they don't. The concept behind it is a great idea, but the Working Party hasn't got that much pull in what's going to happen in Walgett. It all comes down to the governments and the funding available and what do the community see as their main priorities. And if we can get a couple of the priorities achieved through this RSD, then Walgett will have got something out of it. But it's not really set up so the Working Party can say 'Well we want this, we think this is the number one thing that needs to happen here in Walgett'.

In the participation literature processes of consultation are criticised as being 'extractive' forms of participation where they are simply designed to obtain consent and legitimacy (Gaventa and Cornwall 2001), or where they simply aim to draw on local knowledge and the support they need to enable or embed existing plans and strategies. This extractive type of consultation is distinguished from processes that involve local people in processes that actually allow them to have a real voice and to influence over the content and direction of local plans, and the outcomes of decision-making that inform goals and strategies.

Describing local powerlessness in decision-making, Gary expressed a sense of resignation about the fact that governments at different levels often do hold ultimate power over a range of decisions that affect people's lives. For in spite of the desires and efforts of local Aboriginal peoples who may be striving to be able to take control their own lives and destinies, power often resides elsewhere. According to Gary:

That's just the way life is – the powerful rule –and the powerful is the governments – the NSW and the Commonwealth government and in little small towns like Walgett it's the local government, the Shire Council, they sort of control it.

Gary identified his feeling that input from the WGACWP and the local community were not taken seriously by governments, who might make gestures at consultation in order to appease local communities or fulfil expectations that they will carry out local consultation processes, but that there was usually little satisfaction to be had from being involved in such processes, as locals did not feel they were listened to nor their advice incorporated into future plans and decision-making:

They just don't think you have the knowledge to work it out for yourself. I mean we've been consulted that much over the last hundred years. It's about time that governments especially should start listening to the Aboriginal community people that can actually make a change in their own community.

An additional element Gary refers to here is that local people, and in particular local leaders, may well possess the vital social capital and capability needed to enable changes within a community that are identified by governments as desirable, provided they are equipped with the right levels of resourcing and support. Critically, it may not even be possible for governments or external service providers to achieve desired improvements and behaviour changes, without the support of local partners and leaders to help embed programs and services and encourage community members to engage with them.

In their analysis Campbell et al (2005) recognised 'deeply embedded power inequalities' that exist between health experts and local Aboriginal people, with experts reluctant to make genuine efforts to share their power. Indeed, there appeared to be no real mechanism or process built into the RSD policy architecture whereby senior government decision-makers – the officers who ultimately hold decision-making powers over service-delivery initiatives in communities like Walgett – would come into contact with local people, let alone share decision making power with them.

It was clear in the case study that Aboriginal people in Walgett consider themselves the local experts in their own lives, and they feel frustrated about their lack of power to influence decisions that will affect their lives and livelihoods. At one point in his interview Gary used the words 'crying out' to describe the intense desire of local people to be able to obtain and fulfil roles associated with power and decision-making influence, that might empower and enable Aboriginal people to be recognised as decision-makers in their own communities, lives and livelihoods.

### **Power resides and decisions are being made elsewhere**

The knowledge that important decisions about Walgett were being made remotely, more than 600km away in Sydney or Canberra, without direct community input or representation did not sit well with WGACWP members. Bob, who is both a WGACWP member and a highly experienced public servant, expressed his dismay that processes for decision-making under the RSD became more removed from the local community than ever, slowing down decisions and frustrating would-be local decision-making participants:

My first thoughts... with the announcement that Walgett was to become an RSD site, was that ... the only way for this to work would be to have (public servants) here working on the ground, people who could make decisions, and have local budgets to be able to do that, and work with community to look at what priorities were and make some decisions around that. And it obviously didn't work out that way. Though we had public service people based in Walgett, they were positions more about working with community, but not to the extent to make the decisions and actually approve stuff – that sort of went to another level.

If anything, it got slower than what used to happen in the past, where an organisation would put something forward and it got approved. This way, everyone had a finger in the pie and you know, going back and forth – what department's responsible for this – who's gonna fund this and always waiting for their different ministers to sign off on stuff. And it was slow... People were frustrated. I mean we're still frustrated. The life of the Working Party – it's been going for 3 years or more – and we really haven't achieved anything. There's nothing new to what we've already had anyway.

(Bob, WGACWP member)

Considerable frustration was also expressed that though the community had originally believed the officers who were (perhaps clumsily) called the 'Senior Responsible Owners' - senior government agency heads with ultimate decision-making powers and responsibility for carrying out particular LIP actions in the RSD communities - would come to the community and sit down to 'yarn with' the Working Party, this had not taken place as anticipated.

At times when the WGACWP perceived consultation processes had been bypassed, this brought a particular sting of insult for members, given the WGACWP saw itself as the key consultation or 'buffering' body for new program and service delivery proposals (on behalf of the broader community), and governments had formally recognized the WGACWP as their

main community engagement and consultation body for RSD. The shock impact on Indigenous community representatives from rushed or poorly implemented 'engagement' processes could be profound, when unexpected revelations were made about programs already in train. This left WGACWP members feeling stunned and disrespected, undermining both the partnering approach with government and the WGACWP's role in community governance.

Bob spoke of the WGACWP being responsible to community members and of coping flack from them about perceptions that things weren't getting done. This responsibility of WGACWP representatives to the community, to be accountable for outcomes, was compromised when the Working Party was left out of information and decision-making loops by government.

### **Need for better support for the Aboriginal-controlled service sector in Walgett**

During the period of RSD the WGACWP urged government to realise the benefits to be gained via reallocation of resources currently invested in drive-in drive-out service provision for Walgett, toward investment in service delivery by local Aboriginal organisations. The WGACWP argued that local organisations would be significantly strengthened if funding to Walgett was 'rationalised to reduce duplication from services delivered by (drive-in drive-out) agencies', and which could 'be better delivered by the Walgett Aboriginal community sector'; and if reporting systems and locally available administrative supports were improved to free up the Aboriginal service sector to concentrate on its service delivery (WGACWP 2012b: 2).

A related message, that more needed to be done to ensure sustainability of local Aboriginal organisations, was also repeatedly expressed to government by the WGACWP during RSD. Issues that affected two key organisations in the case study were illustrative of both the assets they offer and shortfalls they experience in achieving the desired sustainability. The large, professionally run organisation WAMS and the relatively tiny DEG share certain features: each has been tenacious and inventive in endeavours to source funds and drive local Aboriginal employment and service delivery, while continuing to keep sight of core operational goals (such as health, healing, culture, caring for country and supporting elders); yet research participants emphasised that both organisations also lack sustainable, secure long-term funding to enable them to plan and optimally achieve their program goals while strengthening or at least maintaining capacity. An urgent need for professional training and assistance



toward succession planning for local Aboriginal organisations would be identified in as a community priority in the LIP Refresh (see no.8, **Appendix E**).<sup>93</sup>

### **New RSD commitments should support, not undermine, local Aboriginal organisations**

According to WGACWP members, a critical way RSD might have made a difference in Walgett, would have been to support and strengthen the local Aboriginal-controlled agencies already delivering services locally. These organisations suffer significant shortfalls in the resourcing and professional development needed to achieve all the things they would like to do, and which they know are needed in Walgett. As Aboriginal service organisations are local and Indigenous, the WGACWP argued they were both better-placed to deliver services to Walgett's Aboriginal community, and to employ local people in the process, than drive-in drive-out services and programs operated by external NGOs. Some WGACWP members described their role in RSD as being a 'buffer' against drive-in drive-out short term, projects and services provided by external NGOs, which were seen as competing with Aboriginal organisations for scarce resourcing and local service clients - without contributing to the long-term sustainability of local jobs, local organisations and Aboriginal community governance - all of which would be provided by better resourcing Walgett's Aboriginal service organisations.

It appeared that many government agencies involved in RSD tended to increase their focus on implementing new and/or improved service delivery to RSD communities via their *existing* programs and processes, albeit with additional attention to regions that included the 29 priority RSD communities. To this end, new or ramped-up regional service contracts were awarded to external NGO players, angering local Aboriginal organisations in Walgett who felt they were missing out on additional resources for service delivery they felt they would have been better placed to provide. Most of the smaller local Aboriginal organisations were simply not set up to compete for larger regional contracts against external NGOs.<sup>94</sup>

### **Undervaluing of Walgett's Aboriginal sector**

During the time of RSD the WGACWP made a submission to a public inquiry which described both Walgett's Aboriginal community and its Aboriginal community-controlled organisations as 'undervalued assets of the economy and social fabric of Walgett Shire'. The submission

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<sup>93</sup> The stripping back of funding to Aboriginal organisations under the federal government's new Indigenous Advancement Strategy since 2014 has been a particular concern for Walgett's Aboriginal sector, which has already long operated within an environment of insecure, lean funding (Cox 2014b).

<sup>94</sup> While WAMS has some regional service delivery focus, other local organisations were precluded as they were in no way set up nor focused to provide region-wide service delivery.

asserted that the Aboriginal community-controlled sector in western NSW ought be recognised as an 'important stakeholder in communities', pointing out that in Walgett the sector routinely 'deliver(s) services to the community when the Council and other governments have failed to' (WGACWP 2012b: 1).

The WGACWP submission emphasised the vital part played by local Aboriginal organisations in towns like Walgett, which 'know their community best and are committed to remain after 'fly in, fly out' agencies are long gone'. Aboriginal sector organisations are 'a source of pride and identity for communities' according to the WGACWP, and in Walgett local Aboriginal organisations have been 'established by local Aboriginal community leaders at great personal cost' (WGACWP 2012b: 1). In addition, as described in Chapter 4, these organisations form the backbone of the WGACWP and community governance. Interviewees described the 'steady withdrawal of investment' in their organisations after the abolition of ATSIC, through the COAG Trial period and during RSD.<sup>95</sup> Diminishing support for member organisations of the WGACWP has, according to informants, significantly undermined the ability of already stretched organisations to contribute voluntarily to local governance processes.

The urgency with which COAG and governments set about the task of striving toward gains in CTG targets during the period of RSD, appeared to leave little time for government agencies to dedicate to supporting growth in capacity of local Aboriginal organisations to take on additional or larger contracts. Instead large NGOs with greater extant resources and capacity were frequently awarded new service delivery contracts to cover RSD Aboriginal communities, whether or not they had existing local connections, cultural competency and capacity for local engagement (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 42). As noted in Chapter 2, there is significant potential for large NGOs to contribute positively to local Aboriginal organisations, via partnerships that aim to build capacity and support Aboriginal control over service delivery, while reflecting local priorities (see for example Hunt 2010). However, such processes and partnerships take time, trust and long-term commitment, all elements in short supply for governments when policies like CTG set agencies on a path to aim for demonstrable short term improvements in target areas within political cycles.

### **Grenades: insults to authority and role of the WGACWP**

Community representatives discussed the impact of finding out about new programs imminently in place or being implemented in the community without prior consultation or

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<sup>95</sup> Which has continued under the most recent Federal Government initiative, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

information being shared with the Working Party. Several people described such announcements as bombs or grenades being dropped, for the sense of affront they produce for community representatives:

I mean an example of one of the frustrations that I've had being on the Working Party is programs being bought into town or delivered and Working Party not being aware of them, or not being aware until the last minute when they've actually been implemented here... It's a shock. When somebody comes along and announces something that you don't know about and then it's already happening, it's a shock. Why weren't we aware of it? (Dani, WGACWP member)

Kathleen suggested poor facilitation of both meetings and negotiations was at least in part to blame for unexpected 'grenades' being dropped on the WGACWP in meetings. One instance she described clearly highlighted both a lack of shared information and consultation with the local community and local service providers, and difficulties of communication between governments at different jurisdictional levels:

I recall one time there was an announcement at one of the open sessions... that there was going to be this new mental health service. And me with my health hat on ... there was this new program and our organisation didn't *know* about it. And we said 'Well where was the process of consultation?' and they said 'Well this is consultation now. The program's here, and here it is - take it!'

I knew the local (federal government) reps were opposite us at the table and I said 'Did you guys know about that?' and they said 'Oh well that's national office'. And we said 'Well doesn't national office tell you what's happening in your RSD sites? There's only two RSD sites in NSW, it wouldn't be a big ask to know what's happening in your two RSD sites.' And I said 'Well if you fellas don't know, what chance have we got?'

(Kathleen, WGACWP member)

A strong thread that came through in discussions with community informants was the haste with which new programs and services were introduced without proper consultation or information being provided, and which denied the WGACWP the opportunity to participate in decision-making around the types and suitability of services needed and how these ought to be introduced. This was said to lead frequently to examples where new services or programs overlapped, clashed with or undermined existing services offered by local Aboriginal organisations:

That's the thing you don't want overlapping of the programs that's already here. Because there's heaps of great services in the community that already do great work, so we don't want to bring anything into the community that would duplicate their work. Especially if the local services are already getting funding to provide that service or program. (Kathleen, WGACWP member)

### **Demanding access to senior government decision-makers**

The Working Party strongly demanded to be included in the loop of government communications and reporting about their community. They consistently argued that they ought to be provided with more information about what was being reported about the community to the senior agency heads at SMC meetings in far flung capital cities, as will be discussed further in the next chapter. In what would be a major challenge to usual government bureaucratic procedures, WGACWP members insisted it was their right as community leaders to have an opportunity to confirm, deny or add to interpretations found in such reports.

So what we said as the Community Working Party is that well we'd like to know the papers that go to the SMC so we have the time to contribute and say what's right, what's wrong and whatever. 'Oh you can't do that' and we said 'Why not? We'd like to know what you're saying about us.' (Kathleen, WGACWP member)

In addition, the Working Party advocated to be given direct access to the 'Senior Responsible Owners'. Part of the reason for this demand appeared to be the perception that with long chains of command and agency heads far from the locus of action, there was little hope that government decision-makers were getting a true picture of either local need or the effectiveness of their agencies' responses (Chambers 1999). Senior policy officer Adam also spoke of the benefit of 'unfiltered' information being received once Community Working Party chairs from the two NSW priority RSD communities were eventually invited to attend SMC meetings. Liza, a government officer working with RSD communities, confirmed the strong drive expressed to her by that Aboriginal people that they be given the right to speak directly to those with power:

People on the ground actually like talking to the decision makers. They're sick and tired of the in-betweeners 'cause they don't know where the information has gone – whether it's been chopped to pieces, sanitized to the point where it's ineffective. So when people actually get to meet and greet with high level decision makers they are very happy. You get a more positive response. (Liza, government officer)

### **Withdrawing participation**

A number of times the WGACWP members threatened to resign en masse, and on one occasion actually did resign in protest at what they perceived as poor communication from government, a lack of information sharing and respect for the WGACWP's role as local advisers and decision-makers. The CGRIS would be called upon at this time, to intervene and negotiate improved relations between government and the WGACWP, managing to broker arrangements that allowed WGACWP members to agree to come back on board and re-commit their involvement.

In the literature, Cornwall has identified that people may self-exclude from processes of participation as a pragmatic choice to avoid wasting time: 'where they have been consulted umpteen times and seen nothing happen as a result' - an experience described as 'participation fatigue' (Cornwall 2008: 280). Participants may also withdraw from participation if they perceive processes are manipulative or instrumental (for display) rather than genuinely participatory. Individuals may detect that they have no real power to influence or disagree with decisions other than to publicly withdraw or resign from participation.

When participation does not lead to any real level of power sharing or satisfaction for those taking part that their voices and concerns are being heard, participants may face the dilemma of whether to stay on and keep trying to have an impact, or withdrawing from involvement which will otherwise provide tacit support for initiatives that they do not wholly support nor approve of. White describes the following scenario which neatly illustrates this dilemma:

The Bangladeshi NGO leaders are in a dilemma. They are unhappy with the official agencies' new plan. Neither social nor environmental questions have been given the consideration they deserve. As happens more and more often, they have been invited to attend a meeting to discuss the plan. Flattered at first by official recognition, they are now uneasy. If they do not go, they have no grounds to complain that the interests of the poor have been ignored. But if they go, what guarantee do they have that their concerns will really be heard? Too many times they have seen their discussions drain away into the sand. The plans are left untouched; but their names remain, like a residue, in the list of 'experts' whose opinions the scheme reflects. (White 1996: 6)

For WGACWP members, their role as the key point of contact between governments and the community over RSD, was fraught by similar risks as affected the Bangladeshi NGO leaders above. WGACWP members expressed feeling disenchanted and frustrated when they were

unable to access the information, expert advice and secretarial support they needed to be able to make informed decisions.

Unable to participate as fully in decision-making as they desired, some members expressed their suspicion that government was using them as a point of communication and approval for measures already pre-planned and ready to be rolled out. While feeling powerless to affect many local decisions, the WGACWP also felt under pressure from community members who typically held them accountable and responsible for driving change and making a difference. Withdrawing participation was, in the case of the WGACWP, an assertion of the limited power they did have - for government officers were required to 'engage with' the community governance body in each RSD location. The WGACWP's resignation drew the CGRIS to Walgett for negotiations, and his high level intervention did help - at least in the short term - to reset relations between key RSD stakeholders: the WGACWP, ROC and Shire Council.

### **Participation in LIP Refresh processes**

The fourth and final participation process to be highlighted in this chapter was driven by the WGACWP itself, as part of a response to government's announced formal 'LIP Refresh' process. It provides an example of the community claiming the space needed for its participation, rather than waiting for government to invite or enable this in ways that suited government processes and timeframes.

Three and a half years into the five year RSD National Partnership Agreement, and two years after the signing of Walgett's LIP, at the end of 2012 a milestone was set for governments to review progress on each item of the 29 RSD communities' plans. The LIP Refresh saw a formal review process established in each jurisdiction for the purpose of 'updating' each RSD community's plan to 'reflect current government and community priorities' (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 74). The LIP Refresh provided an opportunity for government agencies to take stock of progress on the items they were responsible for and to make suggestions about how plans might be adjusted and reset for the duration of the NPA. From governments' point of view, the LIP Refresh offered a chance for some clearer prioritising of what would realistically be possible in the time remaining, and for agencies to readjust their commitments to each of the LIPs in light of contextual local changes or changes to broader political and fiscal environments.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> LIP Refresh was described by a senior government officer interviewed as an opportunity to be 'more realistic' and for 'much more of a focus on deadlines and outcomes and achieving key actions rather

Common stakeholders' criticisms of the LIPs, as they were originally drafted, included that the community plans were unwieldy, with hundreds of action items; that they included unrealistic timeframes; and that they lacked clarity, such as including broad or generalised statements about 'things that government should have been doing anyway' (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 139). With only 18 months to go until RSD would finish, the LIP Refresh also provided a chance for the ROCs to tighten up anomalies in LIP documents, deleting duplicate or unclear LIP action items, reducing slightly the overall number of items in scope.

Importantly, the LIP Refresh process also involved governments consulting the relevant local Aboriginal governance body in each RSD location to seek their comments and requests for any changes they would like to make towards refreshing the plan for the final period of the RSD. The LIP Refresh process was conducted in different ways in different communities. For example, in both Beagle Bay and Dampier Peninsula, dedicated LIP Refresh 'roundtable events' were run as facilitated workshops for community members, with a particular focus on identifying existing job and economic development opportunities and on brainstorming potential business ideas for the community (Australian Government 2012b: 12). In Halls Creek, a series of LIP Refresh community consultations culminated in roundtable events including government agencies, community members and service providers; there, the LIP Refresh process resulted in identification of strong need for a new Youth Services Coordinator Role, and the position would subsequently be funded from the IRSD (Australian Government 2012a: 19).

In Walgett, the WGACWP had long been advocating with its ROC that LIP amendments and changes needed to be made, including the incorporation of valuable outcomes from the Women's Workshops. This process had continued from the day the LIP was signed, however the WGACWP's advocacy was to no avail, as no changes were made to the Walgett LIP prior to the Refresh. By late 2012 Walgett's LIP Refresh process was not shaping up to be any more collaborative or satisfactory a process for the WGACWP. It appeared that neither the Working Party nor broader community members would be invited by the ROC to be involved in the kind of inclusive, more collaborative consultation processes staged in some other RSD communities such as those described above. Rather, the NSW ROC determined that it would provide a report card with its own recommendations for changes along with a timeframe for the

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than hundreds of little ones. Trying to be a bit more strategic about what we can do, especially when there's such limited resources – and the fiscal environment is tightening for state and federal governments, so it's really about where can we put money that's going to be most effective in closing the gap and improving outcomes' (Interview with senior government officer, November 2012).

WGACWP to consider the report, before planning a meeting with the Working Party to get members' signoff on suggested changes. It seemed the ROC may have been trying to keep control of the process, perhaps justifiably concerned that if given too much opportunity to participate in LIP Refresh processes, the WGACWP would express its intent to effect a major overhaul of Walgett's LIP, rather than assenting to the ROC's relatively minor amendments, and thereby cause a major headache for the ROC.

### **Deciphering Walgett's LIP report card**

Given the significant numbers of government and external agencies involved in addressing LIP items for each of the RSD communities, it was no doubt a considerable exercise for the ROCs to pull together report cards which would enable governments to report back to communities about progress on achieving their plans. Though NSW government officials did not participate in the research for this PhD and hence did not comment directly on RSD processes, it is understood that a digital portal called the 'LIPtracker' was used by RSD coordination teams to keep track of the input from various agencies and departments about their actions and initiatives towards addressing LIP items. The LIP report card presented to the WGACWP about Walgett as part of the LIP Refresh process appeared to have been generated (as a report) directly out of the LIPtracker program.

Walgett's LIP report card ran to 30 pages with approximately seven items listed on each page. The document was formatted as a table that listed the name and description of each item and a lead agency tasked with addressing it. Confusingly items were not ordered as per the LIP, nor grouped into building blocks, rather items were organised under 16 project codes established by government agencies, which were previously unknown to the WGACWP. Whilst each item on the report card had a code number next to it, these took some deciphering to figure out how they matched back to the originally numbered LIP items, which were organised differently and used different number and letter sequences<sup>97</sup>. Only one column labelled 'Status in LIPtracker' provided information about the progress or status of each LIP item, usually provided as a one or two word response, such as 'not started' 'in progress' or 'complete'. A further column labelled 'Follow-up?' was either left blank or provided a brief note indicating something further would be done.

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<sup>97</sup> The items in the report card were not arranged in the same order nor building block groups as the LIP, and used different numbering and lettering sequences. For example, 'WALEP4.1.1' under Project Code 4. Community Workforce Strategy, matched back within the LIP to Economic Participation building block item 4.1a.



It is curious that this report card was presented as one of the only real sources of information made available by the ROC to inform the Community Working Party about what was being achieved for their community, and on the basis of this uninformative table they were expected to assess progress and advise on adjustments and priorities for the final stage of RSD in Walgett. It is concerning that there appears to have been no real effort made to provide more easily understood and useful information to the community to enable them to understand where efforts had been applied by government agencies, what had been achieved and what was in train as part of the RSD initiative.

Given the important stakes for the WGACWP and its critical role in the RSD as the recognised local governance body, it is difficult to understand how the ROC could consider this report card sufficient feedback on government efforts to carry out the LIP. A more detailed report containing specific highlights and achievements should have been provided to WGACWP to enable its members to understand and assess progress, before feeding back to the community about what was underway and what various agencies were doing or progressing via the RSD in Walgett. In addition, the ROC refused to provide the report card document to the WGACWP in any form other than hard copy<sup>98</sup>, reducing WGACWP members' opportunity to thoroughly analyse and understand the information it contained.

In each RSD location, an outcome of the LIP Refresh process was to come up with a 'Refreshed LIP' to guide and concentrate activities for the final 1.5 years of RSD. In Walgett, the WGACWP was asked in a formal letter, received three days ahead of its planned LIP Refresh workshop, to review the 30 page Report Card and provide a formal written response within 10 days. Once the workshop had been run, this would leave the WGACWP just 7 days to prepare and refine its response. This was a tall order and a short timeframe indeed.

Nevertheless, by drawing on the resources available to the WGACWP, including my own pro bono services<sup>99</sup>, assistance from the RSDC, interim secretariat and with commitment from WGACWP members in their own time, the deadline for the requested response to government was ultimately met. Meanwhile, during the course of the day-long workshop, a much more

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<sup>98</sup> When requested the ROC sent an officer with digital version of the report card on a memory stick, driving a 5.5 hour round trip from Dubbo to Walgett to sit and work with the WGACWP's interim secretary for a day, typing notes into an added column, before taking it away again without leaving a digital copy for the Working Party to refer to.

<sup>99</sup> Whilst my pro bono role was governed by an intellectual property (IP) agreement with the WGACWP that prevented me from discussing the contents and outcomes of the work on the LIP Refresh without written permission, I have since received permission to describe in my PhD the LIP Refresh process and initiatives undertaken by the WGACWP in developing its 12 community priorities.

radical overhaul than the envisaged 'refresh' of the Walgett LIP would be devised by the WGACWP.

#### **Claiming space for participation: WGACWP's approach to the LIP Refresh workshop**

In the lead up to the LIP Refresh, some change-over in the government team addressing RSD had taken place, including a new RSDC based in the community and a senior experienced officer overseeing the NSW RSD community programs who assured the communities she intended to get results for them in the final 1.5 years of the RSD. Buoyed by their conversations with the new members of government's partially refreshed and seemingly newly committed team, members of the WGACWP said they felt some optimism that their views would be taken into account at this final stage of the game.

A notice put out by the WGACWP secretariat to members inviting them to attend the LIP Refresh Workshop was an indication of the direction the process was heading. It instructed members to: 'Bring your ideas for 3 - 10 year priorities (programs and capital spending) needed for a better future for the Walgett Aboriginal community in the short term (1 year), medium term (3 years) and long term (10 years)'. Clearly the invitation indicated an intention that the agenda for the day-long workshop would go beyond investigation of the ROC's long and confusing report card. It was apparent the WGACWP was now starting to set its own agenda discussing goals for local service delivery and initiatives to improve lives for the Aboriginal community. These were to stretch well beyond the 18 months left for the RSD. The intention was to consider objectives for the next 3 to 10 years.<sup>100</sup>

During the period of planning for the workshop, WGACWP members report being repeatedly pressured by the ROC manager, to be allowed to take part in the workshop. Group members decided to resist this pressure and insist on a closed WGACWP session<sup>101</sup> as they wanted to carve out their own deliberation and planning space, for participation; and this needed to be a process that was done separately from the group's 'engagement' or negotiations with government.

#### **Kicking off the workshop with innovation - brainstorming new initiatives for each building block**

WGACWP members decided that rather than getting bogged down in reviewing the report

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<sup>100</sup> WGACWP invitation for members to attend LIP Refresh Workshop, Monday 17 September 2012

<sup>101</sup> Though the RSDC and myself would be welcome as support staff and facilitators, the workshop was effectively run as a WGACWP member initiative.

document, they preferred to start with brainstorming new initiatives, which, if achieved, would leave a lasting legacy of service delivery and social improvement for the Aboriginal community in Walgett. Members had come prepared with ideas and proposals that related to their areas of service delivery or representation and whilst many of the new items identified during the workshop did match building blocks and CTG targets, others did not fit neatly into existing categories, or they had outcomes that would positively impact multiple areas of the building block framework.

As the day progressed, it became clear that the group wanted to shift focus away from merely responding to the government's LIP report card, to providing a whole new scheme of 12 community priority items devised by the WGACWP for Walgett, and that these simplified goals should replace the existing Walgett LIP as the community's Refreshed LIP for the final period. This was a powerful move by the WGACWP, who felt they were taking back control over Walgett's RSD planning document.

During the course of deliberations in the workshop various members spoke passionately about the need to ensure Walgett's Aboriginal community and its service systems were sustainable well beyond the RSD engagement, and that an essential part of this was to strengthen the local Aboriginal organisations involved in service delivery and community governance:

We need to make it sustainable. If our organizations become stronger we will have that autonomy and self determination. (That won't happen) until we become stronger and deliver these programs ourselves. (WGACWP member at LIP Refresh workshop)

Workshop participants also felt a sense of urgency to achieve outcomes from the RSD before it was too late: 'We will miss the boat if we don't act now with five priorities', and that the priorities needed to be 'owned by' the local Aboriginal organisations.

The intensive work completed during the WGACWP's one day LIP Refresh workshop, and communication between the group in the following week, enabled the members to decide on a new simplified structure of 12 community priorities (rather than five) and these would become Walgett's Refreshed LIP. In the weeks and months that followed further processes would be carried out with individual members working to research, develop and shape more fully each of the proposals, which would be discussed by the group and referred to the ROC

and government agencies for consideration. The 12 community priorities devised for Walgett's LIP Refresh are listed below.<sup>102</sup>

**List of Community Priorities - LIP Refresh (devised September 2012)**

1. New youth Centre & youth organisation
2. Housing maintenance and repair business
3. FAHCSIA to fund and coordinate subdivision of Dewhurst, Namoi and Gingie Villages
4. Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) premises, upgrade vehicles and sustainable core operating funds
5. Two new buildings needed for Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative Ltd
6. Community hall and conference centre for 500
7. Foundation Hall project
8. Skills training and employment for local organizations
9. Partnership with Walgett Shire Council (WSC)
10. Cultural programs/Tirkandi-style facility on country: cultural camp/work farm model providing culture and skills training, healing and rehabilitation
11. Health coordination: Walgett's health, education and early childhood services
12. Establishment of incorporated Women's Group for Aboriginal women living in the Walgett community: to provide healing, support, information sharing, governance and leadership, self-esteem and confidence building; with a representative on WGACWP

**Participation in action - key outcomes of Walgett's LIP Refresh workshop**

Two key underlying principles link the 12 community priorities. Firstly, many of the priorities aim to strengthen local Aboriginal organisations and thereby build stronger foundations for Aboriginal community governance and service delivery to the people of Walgett. The WGACWP identified that succession planning and capacity building, via targeted training and skill building, combined with capital and other core investments were needed in Walgett to ensure sustained operations for the community's Aboriginal organisations, who are seen as the key to both local governance and sustainable delivery of accessible service delivery to meet the needs of the Aboriginal community. Secondly, a theme common to many of the priorities

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<sup>102</sup> See **Appendix E** for a more detailed more detail about each of the 12 community priorities, its key significance to servicing the needs of Walgett's Aboriginal community, and a summary of responses or commitments government agencies made against each of the priorities.

was the need to establish new community facilities or organisations to strengthen participation and improve wellbeing and quality of life in Walgett. The latter have the effect of enabling the Aboriginal community to more fully enjoy a range of cultural, social and sporting activities, that may contribute toward healing for Aboriginal families and community members and to improved social cohesion for the community as a whole.

### **Analysis of what the Community Priorities (LIP Refresh outcomes) mean**

If the original Walgett LIP and RSD coordination objectives were largely intangible and therefore difficult to report or show evidence of progress or achievement, the LIP Refresh now contained specific tangible goals, aspirations and projects to benefit and improve services and facilities for the Aboriginal community of Walgett. The identified Community Priorities were also relatively expensive, requiring financial investment of capital and the WGACWP would foreseeably require assistance from the ROC to source funding (whether government grant, private investment or philanthropic) .

The 12 Community Priorities aspired to build sustainable foundations by strengthening local Aboriginal organisations and the community sectors they each represent; to put community in the driver's seat, with local organisations carrying out accessible and culturally appropriate service delivery, and for these representative organisations to become more sustainable. Importantly, the priorities express a desire to move away from drive-in drive-out models of remote service delivery and/or the piecemeal funding of separate small programs (eg: playgroups or mental health programs that are not auspiced by a local agency nor integrated within the local service system). The priorities emphasise initiatives designed to encourage the Aboriginal community of Walgett to envision a brighter future. Several of the priorities include strong cultural components.

Through the Community Priorities WGACWP members acknowledge there is still much to be done. The proposals in the LIP Refresh express that the WGACWP wants government (including the local Shire) to commit to respecting the WGACWP's place and role in driving towards these expressed goals. The Community Priorities convey that - though local organisations have the drive and commitment to go the distance for their community - they frequently lack the level of skills, resources and capital needed to grasp opportunities and deliver services of the quality and capacity that they are striving for. Another important theme that underlies the LIP Refresh is that local organisations also support local employment.

The Community Priorities recognise a need for succession planning and professional skill training within the community to ensure sustainable organisations into the future, so that Aboriginal organisations are not solely dependent on current position holders moving forward. This is a clear area where bigger NGOs, local education providers and government agencies can support and mentor Aboriginal organisations to improve resources, skill base, capacity and facilities, as set out in the Community Priorities.

### **Talking back to government - WGACWP provides its response to government about the LIP Refresh**

In writing to the State Manager responsible for RSD and presenting the new set of 12 Community Priorities to government, the Working Party included a table to demonstrate how each of the 12 newly devised LIP Priorities matched against items from the existing LIP<sup>103</sup>. For example, the proposed new youth centre and youth organization, if achieved, would fulfil or cover off 10 items from the old LIP relating to social and emotional wellbeing, school education, business and economic development, youth services, vocational training and transitions. If achieved, the acquisition and establishment of an on-country cultural and skills training facility aligns with 21 items from the old Walgett LIP, relating to vocational training and transitions, social and emotional wellbeing, community healing, youth services, elders, business and economic development.

Providing this comparison table to government, matching the old LIP items with the new priorities, was a considerable amount of work (achieved with my pro bono assistance), however the Working Party felt it was important to demonstrate to government agencies that the new proposals were not entirely new - but rather represented more innovative, community driven and tangible options toward achieving a range of action items that were *already* listed in the RSD plan for Walgett, which might otherwise go unmet or be challenging to carry out. What's more, the new Walgett Refreshed LIP had honed a 210 item plan down to 12 clearly defined community priorities.

In addition, the WGACWP suggested a new project category be added (to the 16 project groups already created by government to manage coordination of RSD LIP actions) being to 'strengthen and support culture as a foundation of community wellbeing'. The latter resonated with the originally conceptualised 8th building block Land and Culture, that the WGACWP had hoped to be able to develop and add to the LIP framework, as discussed earlier.

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<sup>103</sup> Letter to NSW/ACT State Manager FaHCSIA dated 27 September 2012.

### **What else did the community 'talk back' to government about?**

The Working Party also spoke clearly to government in its letter about process issues associated with the RSD engagement - how to work together, and how to build government capacity to engage with the Aboriginal community in Walgett.

The WGACWP's letter to the State RSD manager also set out, in response to his question posed, a framework for future processes and ways for government agencies to work with the Community Working Party: that Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) and the ROC should continue to implement the Walgett LIP and 'be advised by the WGACWP regarding the most effective and prioritized ways of doing this'<sup>104</sup>. To achieve this SROs for each LIP Project should be invited to meet with the WGACWP on a 'regular rotational basis', the WGACWP Chair should be invited to attend SMC meetings, and the ROC should coordinate these meetings. The WGACWP also stipulated that government agencies and NGOs should be allocated resources to undertake 'cultural and community awareness training in Walgett, training in community development principles, lateral violence and how to understand how their own cultural attitudes impact on clients'.<sup>105</sup>

### **Outcomes of participation in the LIP Refresh: responses from government**

The WGACWP would ultimately be profoundly disappointed that government did not come on board to fulfil any of its community priorities in the time left to run on RSD.

Initially enthusiasm was expressed by two senior government officers responsible for RSD oversight when they received the LIP Refresh and Community Priorities from the WGACWP. In response to the LIP Refresh. One senior officer wrote to Working Party members to thank them for the 'valuable work undertaken by the WGACWP (which) will be held with very high regard in conducting discussions with a range of responsible departments and other potential partners'.<sup>106</sup>

Another senior officer requested that more detailed briefs be developed for each priority to enable each of the proposals to be canvassed in Canberra with decision-makers in the various government agencies involved with RSD. Each WGAWCP member worked hard to research and provide background, justification and details of costings involved in one or more of the

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<sup>104</sup> Letter to NSW/ACT State Manager FaHCSIA dated 27 September 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Letter to WGACWP dated 13 December 2012.

Community Priorities. They were assisted by the RSDC to do this as quickly as possible, for provision to government within 2 months of the LIP Refresh workshop.

The Community Priorities had been devised and provided to government as Walgett's Refreshed LIP in September 2012, and the fuller proposals were provided as requested by November of that year. However formal agency responses to the LIP Refresh would not be provided to the WGACWP until September 2013, after a change in the federal government. In the interim, the WGACWP reported that short summary responses were provided to members in a meeting by a senior government officer responsible for RSD. The delay in conveying a formal written response, until after the political cycle had been completed, seems indicative of the freeze on activity and decision-making that affects government agencies during periods leading up to elections, given the impacts changes of political leadership typically have on policy making, including (and perhaps especially) in the area of Indigenous policy - which is nominally bipartisan but effectively significantly impacted by shifts in political leadership.

Considerable work was committed to the LIP Refresh by the WGACWP and hence members' bitter disappointment with 'one-line' uninformative verbal responses to each proposal they said they initially received from government, followed many months later by the written document with slightly more detailed responses compiled from various agencies (see **Appendix E** for a summary of the specific responses provided to LIP Refresh items).

By this time a WGACWP member described the group feeling 'disgusted and fed up' and that they were 'at the peak of being gutted by government'. Whilst it was presumably not government agencies' intention to make the Working Party feel this way, this was nevertheless how they experienced it. Despite this, in the following weeks and months, members of the WGACWP somehow found the energy to keep going, and complete further research toward fleshing and refining proposals for the 12 community priority areas they had put forward. They did so with assistance from a trusted insider facilitator.

### **Progressing the WGACWP's community priority work: the role of facilitators**

If I had personally provided the WGACWP with assistance as a facilitator during its LIP Refresh workshop (operating as a 'trusted outsider' to the community), in the months that followed the LIP Refresh process, the WGACWP was again assisted in its work by a facilitator - this time by someone who was a 'trusted insider' (Martin 2008). This person had a stake in both community and government processes, as both a federal government employee and a person related into Walgett's families, who also happened to be widely known, respected and trusted



within the community. He was also very clear about his non-alliance with any particular community group, family or sector, making it possible for this facilitator to help inspire WGACWP members to continue their work in the best interests of the community, despite their disappointed hopes for the LIP Refresh.

The new facilitator urged the WGACWP to keep working on researching and developing the community priorities they had devised together, with longer goals in sight than the remaining timeframe of RSD. He visited the community roughly monthly, attending WGACWP meetings and helping the Working Party to target the work it wanted to do to stay on track with its own plans and governance. Government's commitment of this facilitator's time, as an additional human resource late in the piece, appeared to reflect an awareness on the part of some senior government officers that while RSD was coming to a close, it might still be possible to try to leave the community with a sense of optimism for its own plans and aspirations going forward, once the RSD team had pulled out.

By late 2015, sometime after the RSD was quietly wound up in mid-2014, Walgett's Community Priorities are described as still relevant and central to WGACWP's planning for the Aboriginal community going forward. At the time of writing, the priorities were being reviewed and refreshed as the community plan for the OCHRE Local Decision Making process that Walgett is now part of, via the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. The participatory work achieved by the WGACWP in devising the Community Priorities for RSD was not therefore wasted, but enabled the community to have a list of items ready to progress during its next round of participation and engagement with government.

### **Impacts from claimed participation in the LIP Refresh process**

It was notable that in order to take back control over Walgett's RSD planning document, the WGACWP had to 'claim' the space they needed for deliberation and consensus decision-making, rather than continuing to inhabit the 'invited' space provided by government for WGACWP input within the architecture and processes of the RSD. Whilst the WGACWP's decision to make this change to the Walgett LIP was perhaps too late in the piece for slow-moving bureaucracies and agencies of government to shift course and support, a clear view was expressed by several members of the WGACWP, that participation in devising, developing and researching the Community Priorities, first during the workshop and later during follow-on cycles of investigating and drafting the proposals, was a highpoint of local participation. These processes had enabled strong collaborative work between WGACWP members of a kind that

had previously been curtailed by the types of long-standing community tensions described earlier, as well as lacking the time and other resources required to do so.

## **Conclusion**

One objective of the case study was to observe and analyse outcomes reported by community members and representatives, resulting from their participation in local policymaking processes. Whilst the majority of WGACWP informants felt frustrated and dissatisfied with poor levels of participation they were accorded and the absence of real power over decision-making transferred or offered to them by government, when it came to the processes the WGACWP either created or claimed for themselves - the Friday afternoon working sessions in the early stages of RSD, and later LIP Refresh sessions - participants identified these as providing rare opportunities to pull together and work on creating their own suite of priorities and proposals.

As we shall see in the next chapter, one senior government officer expressed deep concerns about how to 'engender optimism' in Aboriginal communities. Clearly the WGACWP's response to unsatisfactory participatory processes offered by government within RSD negotiations, pushed the group to claim and create its own spaces for participatory planning, enabling it to focus on identifying the twelve community priorities for Walgett. This process of collaboration between members of the WGACWP was described as new and a positive contribution or step towards community healing, achieved via participatory processes.

This chapter has revealed that, for community participants in the case study, *invited* participation processes offered by government were sometimes experienced as insulting, frustrating and disempowering. By contrast, spaces the WGACWP *claimed* or created for itself and other community members to participate, resulted in greater satisfaction for those involved and ultimately, it was hoped by some research participants, might have helped to advance over the longer-term, much needed healing processes within the community.

Amid otherwise disappointing processes, several clear windows of promise within the case study have been highlighted in this chapter. The Walgett women's workshops and the LIP Refresh process offered hope for what might be achievable, and the benefits that might flow to policy making and service delivery, from drawing more effectively on local knowledge, social capital and other resources and strengths available within Aboriginal communities. In addition the case study suggests potential benefits for Aboriginal people from the process of participation itself (as will be discussed further in Chapter 8). The high quality output of the

women's workshops, evident in the workshop report (Appendix D), also reveals the strength of insights policy makers in the Indigenous sphere could gain by tapping the experiences, local knowledge and ideas of Aboriginal community members, however it is also clear that local participation needs to be enabled via skilled staging and facilitation, ensuring people are supported and confident to have their say. Also, governments need to be willing to listen, to receive and utilise valuable local advice.

## Chapter 7: Governments and participation

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery has been established to improve access to government services for Aboriginal Australians living in selected remote locations. Through this Agreement, the Governments will *work together with* local Aboriginal people to close the gap on Aboriginal disadvantage in these places.

... The implementation of the Agreement will involve the following essential elements: *engagement with communities*; baseline mapping and service audits; establish integrated planning, coordination, and service reporting mechanisms; develop local implementation plans to improve service design and delivery; reporting and sharing best practice; and risk management.

...As in all government activities that bear on Aboriginal communities, the Governments recognise that Aboriginal communities are *key partners in implementing* this Plan.

(RSD Bilateral Implementation Plan between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of New South Wales, p1; emphases added)

Whilst Indigenous participation is not specifically identified in these passages from the RSD Bilateral Implementation Plan, the phrases in italics do reveal a strong and clear intention that governments will interact with Aboriginal people in certain ways during the implementation of RSD. 'Engagement with communities' is identified as the first of six essential elements at the core of RSD, so it is important to analyse what engagement might signify in this context.

This chapter considers participation from the perspective of governments. It analyses the case study to identify whether and how Indigenous participation was valued or enabled by governments and their officers charged with rolling out the RSD. Firstly the chapter expands on initial exploration made in Chapter 1 of the language used in various policy contexts to describe governments' interactions with Indigenous people in Australia as engagement rather than participation, and considers the implications use of these different terms may have in relation to the commitments governments make and the way they subsequently behave. Next it considers particular directives toward Indigenous 'engagement' embedded in the NIRA and RSD Bilateral Plan for NSW, to see whether and how these relate to concepts of Indigenous participation as both a right and demand expressed by Aboriginal people in Australia. Finally,

the chapter explores the particular challenges and issues identified by government officers interviewed in the case study, which in their view affected the negotiation space between governments and the Aboriginal community in Walgett.

### **Analysing policy language: engagement**

In order to try to analyse what is understood by government officers in regard to their obligations to interact and work with Indigenous communities, I first consider the preferred terminology used in Australia today, with 'engagement' identified as the buzz word. Engagement is clearly related to, but not necessarily the same as, participation.

The language used by governments within agreements and plans to describe their intentions and commitments is important. In considering whether and how Indigenous participation was valued or enabled in the case study, it is vital be cognizant of the types of language governments use to describe the various forms of involvement Aboriginal people might have in interactive processes and relationships with government. The word 'engagement' is most commonly used in this context in Australian policymaking today rather than 'participation', and while some assert that these terms are identical and interchangeable<sup>107</sup>, it is argued in this thesis that this is not necessarily the case. It is important to note that much analysis in this space has also elided the terms engagement and participation as meaning the same thing (Holmes 2011; Hunt 2013b, 2013a).

There are at least three main ways in which the term engagement is being used in relation to Indigenous Australians today, as depicted in the table below. The fact that the word engagement is able to be used in these very different ways within the context of Indigenous Affairs, clearly leaves the meaning of the word (and therefore what is done by governments to achieve it) open to slippage: from being a process of involvement in framing policies and making decisions that Aboriginal communities may demand or want (akin to participation), through to other types of processes applied to get Aboriginal people to engage as service recipients or as a population subgroup whose behaviour is targeted for modification or regulation.

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<sup>107</sup> IAP2 trainer, telephone conversation 6 September 2013.

**Table 3: Comparison of three common meanings and usages of the term 'engagement'**

Engagement as...	Engaged in...	How this is manifested? What does it mean?
<p><b>1. Engagement as stakeholders</b></p> <p>From Aboriginal people as the objects of policy actions (policy enacted upon / for / about) who receive information from government about what will be enacted to affect them...</p> <p>to Aboriginal people as policy actors with agency, including at the higher end of the spectrum, being decision-makers</p>	<p><b>Engaged in policymaking</b></p> <p>(This meaning is closest to Indigenous participation)</p>	<p>On a spectrum from <b>informing</b> Aboriginal people as the objects of policymaking about policies that are to be enacted; or <b>consulting</b> them for feedback on policies to be enacted; through to governments <b>involving</b>, or <b>collaborating</b> with Aboriginal people as stakeholders during the policymaking process; or <b>empowering</b> them as decision-makers who participate in shaping and implementing policies</p>
<p><b>2. Engagement as service recipients</b></p>	<p><b>Engaged in receiving service delivery</b></p>	<p>Aboriginal people need to be attracted / enticed to engage in services</p> <p><b>Community/Indigenous engagement</b> in this context, is what service deliverers need to achieve in order to be locally accepted, suitable and culturally relevant to an Aboriginal community, so that locals feel comfortable using it and they do use it</p>
<p><b>3. Engagement as governed citizens</b></p>	<p><b>Engaged via control, regulation or levers</b></p>	<p>Levers and coercion may be used to get people to join in / cooperate or change behaviours (eg: Shared Responsibility Agreements were used to try to engage people in certain behaviours; welfare management and conditionality)</p>

The first of the three meanings of engagement listed in **Table 3**, 'Engagement as stakeholders' is closest to the meaning of participation. Both processes are described in various resources as including a range of activities on a spectrum from low engagement/participation, such as one way communication to provide information or consulting people for their feedback on policies or programs designed by government for them, through to higher levels of involvement by Indigenous communities as stakeholders to be involved, collaborated with or even 'empowered' as decision-makers.

The second meaning of engagement in **Table 3**, is not aligned to participation. It refers to a process of engaging as raising the attention, involvement or enthusiasm of individuals, principally as service users or service recipients. It also involves individuals being encouraged to join in or take part in activities, which are valued by mainstream society, such as engaging with mainstream education or market economy employment. Socio-economically disadvantaged people are frequently described as being 'disengaged' from mainstream society and its norms, from jobs and education for example. Australian governments are expressing an imperative to engage Indigenous people who fall into categories of disadvantage in order to achieve progress on various Closing the Gap targets. Moreover, the continuing existence of a disengaged 'underclass' of disadvantaged people, is generally seen by governments as undesirable and possibly even threatening to mainstream society; moreover they are bad for Australia's international reputation; and such people, with their disengaged status, are frequently seen as placing a 'welfare burden' on the state.

In so far as Indigenous people are service recipients, service outcomes cannot be improved if locals don't use them, so there is a need for Aboriginal people to *engage* with the services offered in order for government's initiatives to work. Indigenous people need to be engaged in paid jobs, schools, medical interventions and the like as service recipients and users. This type of engagement is very different to *participation* in the shaping of those services. It is even further from the notion of Indigenous people participating 'upstream' in policymaking processes, such as identifying social or policy problems and playing an active part in designing programs and services to address them. Participation may indeed help to increase the likelihood of Indigenous service engagement where services are able to be better targeted or fit to cultural and local needs, however engagement of Indigenous people as service recipients is not the same as Indigenous participation in deciding *which* services will be delivered and how.

The third meaning of engagement described in the table above may be seen as the most coercive type of engagement, and is quite different again to participation. Here governments actively use methods of engagement to try to get communities, families and individuals to 'toe the line', to come on board and cooperate with behaviour changes identified by governments or policymakers as necessary. Here Indigenous people are the objects of policy to be acted upon and encouraged toward behaviour change, whether via welfare conditionality or other levers or regulation mechanisms applied by governments.

Given that the term engagement has these significant other connotations in the policy environment, beyond the first meaning identified above (which most closely aligns to participation), implications of the preferred use of engagement in the Australian Indigenous policymaking context deserve careful consideration. As already suggested in Chapter 1, talk of a need for Indigenous engagement may implicitly assign responsibility or blame to people considered by mainstream society to be *disengaged*, as if disadvantage and poverty come about as a result of personal/community failure and lack of effort. In an ahistorical formulation of policy problems, Indigenous people's disadvantage and disengagement may be identified as the problems to be solved, and solutions will involve getting individuals *to* engage or re-engage with activities endorsed or acceptable to mainstream society. This formulation ignores the enduring and ongoing impacts of colonisation, which have, in reality, been the cause of Indigenous dispossession from land, culture and participation as citizens.

#### **Alternate terminology: partnership**

Another term that appears in Indigenous policy documents - albeit less frequently than engagement - to describe relationships and interactive roles in the context of agreements and policy directives, is 'partnership' and other variations of the word 'partner'. The Bilateral Commonwealth NSW Government Plan for Closing the Gap stipulates government efforts to close the gap must be 'in partnership with' Indigenous communities (COAG 2009c); the Indigenous Engagement principle for Closing the Gap describes 'strong relationships / partnerships between' government and Aboriginal peoples (COAG 2008: D68), and the RSD Bilateral Implementation Plan describes Aboriginal people as 'an active partner' in development and implementation of the LIPs and as 'key partners' in implementing the Plan (COAG 2009d: 1). As discussed in Chapter 4 (p140), the term partnership is also used in the international sphere to describe location-based government/non-government/community collaborative ventures in disadvantaged communities, which are comparable in many ways with Australian WOG initiatives.



Like engagement, partnership bears a relationship to participation but is not necessarily the same. While use of this term appears to position Aboriginal people as partners alongside government in solving community problems, this by no means necessitates they will be equal partners. Use of the word partnership appears to recognise and emphasise that good will between parties is desirable, that effort should be made to move towards shared or agreed goals, even though the parties may have quite different motivations for seeking those goals. Partnership implies a need to ensure there is cooperation and collaboration along the way. As with engagement/participation, partnership is also affected by power: one partner can (and usually does) hold significantly more power and control over the processes and outcomes of decision-making.

A prominent Aboriginal educator and leader from far west NSW, Jack Beetson is sceptical about partnerships, for invariably one partner is handling and controlling the money. So, according to Beetson, it is 'misleading and deceptive to describe government-controlled initiatives as partnerships' (Beetson 2002: 100).

Reflecting further on policymaking processes, Beetson declares that for policies to be successful, they will 'of necessity ...come from the ground up, not imposed'; and that communities have the 'right to determine (their) own qualitative outcomes, along with the demands of bureaucracies for quantitative outcomes'. Beetson advocates that Aboriginal people need to be 'visible and heard' – that 'such liberating opportunities for real, true negotiations need not be terrifying; rather, (they) will be liberating – for through this process, we can overcome local and regional powerlessness'; but that Aboriginal people 'need to be considered active and equal in the process' (Beetson 2002: 100). Such policymaking processes as Beetson describes would be truly participatory, beyond what are frequently described in Australia as 'lip service' notions of partnership.

In February 2016, announcing the annual Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report and its disappointing outcomes, Malcolm Turnbull emphasised a need for redoubled efforts 'in partnership with' Aboriginal people, involving 'new relationships' and 'respectful engagement', however he failed to announce any new mechanisms by which these new relations might be realised (Turnbull 2016). In response Mick Gooda would remark that cynicism was inevitable for: 'we've heard these words before' (ABC News 2016).

### Engagement with community essential to RSD

As discussed in Chapter 1 (pp62-65), there are various imperatives or drivers that urge governments to facilitate or encourage Indigenous participation. It was clear in interviews with government officers for the case study that they were well aware of an obligation and commitment on the part of governments to 'engagement with' Aboriginal communities as part of implementing RSD. Specific directives on engagement are identified within both the Engagement Principles for the NIRA (COAG 2008: D-68) and in the NSW Bilateral RSD Implementation Plan (COAG 2009d). The contents of each document are analysed here according to the three different meanings or usages of the term engagement identified in Australian policy language, described above (**Table 3**).

The *Indigenous Engagement Principle*, established as part of the National Indigenous Reform Agenda (COAG 2008: D-68), was to guide government action on RSD and other National Partnership Agreements signed by COAG. The principle directs engagement with Indigenous people 'should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services'. Particular attention is drawn to 'engaging and empowering Indigenous people who use Government services and the broader Indigenous community in the design and delivery of programs and services *as appropriate*' (emphasis added) (COAG 2008: D-68). Here, the directive to involve Indigenous people in service design and delivery is related to their status as service recipients, however the meaning of engagement is broader, aligned to both first and second meanings identified above: Indigenous people should be *engaged* in shaping the design of services for their community, which will help these services to better *engage* with Indigenous service recipients.

The Indigenous Engagement Principle also highlights the importance of 'strong relationships/partnerships' amongst government, community and service providers to achieve outcomes, and that - though no particular or minimum level of engagement is established- governments must be 'transparent regarding the role and level of Indigenous engagement along a continuum from information sharing to decision-making'. This directive clearly leaves plenty of scope for discretion by government officers to decide the extent of 'engagement' with communities they will attempt or implement. Ultimately, it is not communities but government officers who still decide the purpose and level of engagement that will be offered, as officers deem 'appropriate' in the circumstances. No criteria are provided as to what will be appropriate. Hence the Indigenous Engagement Principle sets out processes for what Cornwall describes as 'invited participation', where spaces and opportunities to participate are

‘structured and owned’ by those that control them, and which will by no means be sufficient to deliver ‘effective participation’ (Cornwall 2008, p275) to the satisfaction of local people, or to the extent recognised by the UNDRIP.

In the RSD Bilateral Plan for NSW ‘engagement with communities’ is described as an ‘essential element’. It is the objective of the first Milestone/Output 1 for the plan, which outlines three purposes: engaging community members on implementation and development of LIPs; improving governance and leadership within communities and organisations; and working with Aboriginal people to ‘build personal responsibility that is the heart of family life and the foundation of strong communities’. The latter is qualified as ‘ie: parents taking responsibility for their family’s wellbeing and economic security and their children’s health, safety and education’, which aligns with the third identified meaning of ‘engagement’, where Aboriginal people are the objects of processes used to leverage or bring their behaviours into line with the expectations of mainstream Australia - it implies that what is needed to solve the problem of CTG is for Aboriginal people to try harder, to be encouraged to take ‘personal responsibility’ and to ‘engage’ with education, training and market economies ‘consistent with positive social norms and behaviours’ (COAG 2009d: 5).

Two performance benchmarks of the NSW RSD Bilateral Plan are: ‘High level of satisfaction in the Aboriginal Community with engagement by government’ and the ‘Aboriginal community has an understanding and awareness of RSD initiatives’. As we have seen in Chapter 6, government could not claim success on either of these counts. Meanwhile a third benchmark uses the language of partnership, stating that ‘local Aboriginal peoples are an active partner in the development and implementation of LIPs’, a benchmark that was perhaps partly met given WGACWP members and some community members were involved in development of the LIP, though not to an optimal or satisfactory level, as discussed in Chapter 6.

### **Responding to Indigenous community demands for participation**

Government officers who took part in the research spoke of another driver to facilitate Indigenous community involvement. This was the imperative to respond to Aboriginal peoples’ demands for participation and ‘give them the involvement that they’re seeking’ (Roland, senior government officer). Various informants identified reluctance on the part of governments to involve Aboriginal people as true participants in decision-making, however, explaining that such processes could be costly and time consuming, and that at the present time this was not necessarily something that was being achieved well by governments:

I think that this goes to government agencies having a whole culture - whether it's state or federal - of not involving communities in decision making - whether they're Indigenous or non-Indigenous. In my view it's a failure to deliver a citizen-centric type approach. I think our democracy's got some way to go to develop a citizen-centric approach - but it's vitally important in the context of Indigenous people, because they have a distinct culture and history, different perspectives from non-Indigenous...

(Roland, senior government officer)

The quote above reflects the officer's recognition that governments at the present time may not be delivering on demands for citizen participation in any arena, along with an indication of why he sees this as a *more* important issue for Indigenous people, because of distinctions in perspectives, culture and history, between Indigenous Australians and others.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous people provides a slightly different reason to distinguish the unique status of Indigenous Australians and therefore the impetus for Indigenous participation, compared with what might otherwise be desired by or offered to non-Indigenous citizens. He argues that governments' 'duty to consult with indigenous people', conferred by the UNDRIP, is 'premised on an understanding of indigenous peoples' relative marginalization and disadvantaged conditions in regard to normal democratic processes... (and) from the overarching right of indigenous peoples to self-determination' as also conferred within the Declaration (Anaya p21).

Regardless of how various advocates of Indigenous participation justified its importance, there was a clear and consistent demand from Aboriginal community representatives in the case study for participation, and for a deeper level of involvement and more say in decision-making processes. Government officers at the most senior levels appeared to have heard and acknowledged this, however, as we shall see, it remained difficult for them to offer or achieve this to the extent it was being demanded, given other competing priorities and outcomes their teams were attempting to deliver.

## **Processes for participation**

Thinking about participation it is necessary first to consider what processes and structures exist for Indigenous people to participate with governments in decision-making (shaping policies, implementation). At the highest levels of federal and state governments, where the framework for CTG policy was conceived, no high level Indigenous representative body existed

that was available<sup>108</sup> to represent Aboriginal people's interests and participate in decision-making towards formulation of the policy (Calma 2008). This has proven problematic with Aboriginal communities (including Walgett) identifying critical flaws in the building block framework developed and applied to implementation processes for the various COAG National Partnerships, including the RSD.

At the local level, flexibility to shape local solutions against the CTG framework was intended, but how well might this be achieved? According to the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services the quality of community participation enabled within LIP development processes was highly varied across the RSD sites (CGRIS 2010b).

As discussed in Chapter 6, two workshops were run in Walgett as a means to invite local service providers and community representatives to input to LIP development. An intention was for this process to enable the community to feel ownership of the document as a locally developed and shaped plan, according to government officers interviewed as part of this research. Brooke elaborated that the LIPs were also considered an important mechanism to enable governments to keep the community's 'priorities at the forefront' of their activities and decisions.

Nevertheless, another senior government officer conceded that this LIP development process did not achieve nor deliver the level of local participation the WGACWP had expected and sought:

I think that for (the NSW communities), there was ongoing concern that there wasn't sufficient involvement in the design and delivery of services... So I recall Walgett and the Working Party there and people complaining that governments were parachuting services in and not properly engaging with the Working Party beforehand about whether or not those services were required, or whether or not a provider who was being engaged by government whether they were the appropriate one, and what the consequences were for people on the ground.

So I think some of that was justified, in my view of it. And I felt that through the Local Implementation Plans we should have been able to find a way to significantly improve their involvement in that - in the design and delivery of services. And I would say my sense of all that was there was some effort being made but there was still a problem around decisions being made by ministers, by departments in Sydney or in Canberra,

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<sup>108</sup> The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples was not established until 2010, while the NIRA was formulated in early 2008.

without really finding a vehicle to bring people at a local level for them to start off by saying 'Do we need another playgroup?' for example, 'Do we need another childcare centre? Do we need this service or that service?' and 'If we do, who should deliver that service, and should it be an Aboriginal provider?' which I think communities feel strongly they prefer. (Roland, senior government officer)

Research participants affirmed that certain individuals involved in RSD at different levels tried hard to involve both particular community groups (at Gingie and Namoi villages) as well as WGACWP members more deeply in participatory processes at various times. These officers made efforts to explain policies and opportunities, and attempted to provide space for community deliberation. However these efforts were inconsistent, as officers were either moved on from their roles or were instructed not to or discouraged from doing so by their superiors.

The Friday afternoon sessions the WGACWP proactively sought to have with the RSDC, discussed in Chapter 6 (p215), were a significant foray on the part of community representatives into claiming or creating processes to enable their own participation in collaboration with government's representative. The local RSD officer did her best to accommodate the desires of the WGACWP to understand the various NIRA documents and to partake in a lead role as drivers of local planning. However, the cancellation of these sessions by more senior regional officers effectively severed this opportunity in terms of local processes that the community had been trying to establish to develop the WGACWP's capacity to participate in decision-making processes around the RSD roll out.

One community representative described her bewilderment at government's behaviour in this circumstance:

I think they didn't want the community to understand what the government was trying to achieve. I can't think of any other reason, because that's what we were trying to do with the workshops - we were trying to understand what government wanted to do with the RSD so that we could help government achieve those targets. And they wanted to stop it.

And since then we've heard things like, you know 'It's not for community to talk to us about what they might want for Walgett, we're telling them what's going to happen'. They have this attitude that despite those principles of engagement or service delivery in the agreements that they know best and they're making decisions somewhere else,

and they're just telling us what they're going to do in Walgett. And everything else must flow from that attitude I think. (Stella, WGACWP member)

### **Architecture to drive progress on RSD**

As already introduced in Chapter 5 (p159), the RSD established particular elements - roles, chains of command, staged meetings and processes - that would provide the architecture to drive progress on RSD. This section briefly recaps this architecture from the point of view of government and the intentions set out in the Commonwealth/New South Wales Bilateral Plan for RSD implementation (COAG 2009c).

Locally-based RSD officers were identified as linchpins of 'engagement'. These roles, embedded within communities consisted of an RSD Coordinator (RSDC) and an Indigenous Engagement Officer (IEO), described as crucial to 'address community issues' and as the 'conduit between government and community' (according to interviewee Brooke). As on-the-ground contact people, theirs was a huge job, and burnout was a high risk. Indeed significant turnover in the NSW roles occurred during the time of RSD. Though there were intended to be two embedded officers embedded per RSD priority community, as already noted (p232), there was usually only ever one position located in Walgett at any time. The RSD coordinators were described by Adam to be 'about providing that enabling role, you know, understanding the needs of the community, having that constant interaction with the Community Working Party, but also feeding information in and out'.

At the regional management level of the RSD, a Regional Office of Coordination (ROC) was established in Dubbo, where federal and state government officers would be co-located, and which was intended to provide a 'single government interface' for communication with both communities about the RSD. Responsibilities of the ROC were set out in the Bilateral Plan including: 'community engagement so that communities know what is happening and why' (COAG 2009c).

At SMC level, senior government officers were to meet to coordinate and make high level decisions, while no place at the table was initially given to Aboriginal community representatives, they would eventually be 'given access to the decision makers' at SMC, as described later in this chapter.

An important design element of RSD was the appointment of an independent statutory officer, the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services (CGRIS). The CGRIS would play an ombudsman-like checking role during rollout of RSD policy, providing iterative six-monthly

reports, that were influential due to his close scrutiny and powers to require information to be provided, and to publicly report on RSD, 'naming and shaming' government practices deemed inadequate or in need of improvement (CGRIS 2014). The CGRIS was intended to remain an 'independent representative that would help drive things forward where there has been a stalemate' according to Brooke. The CGRIS contributed strongly to the architecture enabling the RSD, playing a part of assessing processes and elevating issues as needed. In addition his reports supported the view put by WGACWP members in Walgett, that governments should be making efforts where possible to put communities 'in the driver's seat' rather than simply taking them along for a ride (CGRIS 2010a, 2010b, 2012, 2013).

Indeed the CGRIS played an important role in RSD processes, observing and critiquing the quality of RSD processes and phases as they unfolded for the 29 communities around the country. Importantly the CGRIS was also an accessible, independent and receptive ear for Aboriginal communities to speak to in order to help resolve difficulties in their RSD dealings with governments and to support their drive for more power to be devolved for local decisions to be made. However, the office of the CGRIS was abolished following the election of the new Abbott government and simultaneously many commitments made for spending of funds from the Indigenous Remote Service Delivery special account were rescinded (Australian Government 2011b).

### **Participation on whose terms?**

Interestingly improving governance and leadership capacity in Aboriginal communities is the second of three strategies and goals listed under the 'Engagement with Communities' Milestone in NSW Bilateral Implementation Plan. Its inclusion here infers the assumption of a need to build capacity in Aboriginal leadership to enable them *to engage*, an assumption that capacity is not there yet and that this is making it problematic for governments trying to interact with communities. However some analysts have identified that governments also need to build their own capacity to engage (Hunt, 2007: 169; CGRIS, 2010), and that arguably governments ought to be trying to meet communities on their terms, not always and only on government terms (Anaya 2009; Human Rights Council 2010).

As already discussed, the UNDRIP identifies that governments should respect and support the development of Indigenous decision-making processes and institutions, with representatives chosen by their own procedures (2007: [article 18](#)). On this point, one research participant pointed out that while governments may have made some attempt to change or improve their mechanisms for interacting with Aboriginal communities during the RSD, this was only ever



within the realms of government institutional processes and on terms established by government. There appeared little concern for supporting or strengthening the development of independent Aboriginal decision-making processes. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 6 (p207) the ROC appeared at times to be quite concerned about allowing Aboriginal people to have too much time, space or opportunity to meet independently to deliberate and discuss RSD-related matters.

There appears to be a fundamental assumption that communities need to learn to participate, or rather engage, on government's terms, via invited opportunities to get involved in processes established by government for them, and that the appropriateness of mainstream processes and institutions of government were not in question. It is arguable that the very processes and ways of working used by governments should be required to respond to accommodating Indigenous processes and ways of decision-making ie: for example, more consensus-driven, consultative processes that take time:

The principles of RSD, what we're aiming to do makes perfect sense to those who are used to working in the bureaucracy. And a very western Westminster style of government and of institutions, puts us in a place where to change our interactions and our engagement and partnership and relationship with community focuses back on what we do and how we do it - and not whether the institutions are actually the right institutions.

(Adam, senior government officer)

### **Lessons to be learned from international development: participation across cultures**

Interviewee Brooke emphasised her view that more needs to be done to prepare and equip government officers for their roles in initiatives like RSD where community engagement is involved. She highlighted the cross-cultural environment of Aboriginal/government relations and identified that much could be learned from the approaches taken and skill-training given to workers in international development contexts. Brooke described that in international development contexts, where community development approaches are taken, long periods of acculturation and relationship-building will typically (or perhaps ideally) take place before any development initiatives begin on the ground; and she argued that similar processes could be beneficial in Aboriginal initiatives like RSD, but that this would require much more time and a long term commitment from government beyond policy cycles that are typically established. In the second of his six monthly RSD reports, the CGRIS addressed a similar theme, identifying common skills needed by workers in the cross-cultural contexts of international development and Indigenous affairs: high level facilitation and negotiation skills, awareness of effective

community development practice and of the social, historical and cultural contexts of local environments.(CGRIS 2<sup>nd</sup> Report 2010, p66). The CGRIS advocated more attention be paid to the complex demands of engagement within a cross-cultural environment. This analysis about particular shortfalls of expertise and awareness within governments implementing the RSD, reinforces a similar finding of evaluations of the COAG Trials, that the significance of working across cultural difference was frequently overlooked in Australian Indigenous policy contexts (Morgan & Disney 2006).

Whilst the RSD experience in Walgett did not involve the significant language barriers other RSD communities contended with, there were clearly other types of cultural barriers in the way of effective participation between government officers and Aboriginal community representatives. In her analysis of the COAG Trial WOG experience, Hunt emphasised that both governments and Indigenous people have their own cultural values, institutions and systems, and that a great deal of sensitivity and knowledge is needed to bridge these types of differences in the intercultural space if 'networked partnerships' are to be attempted (ie: working to join up government jurisdictions and agencies at the same time as working in partnership with Indigenous people) (Hunt 2007: 165). Cultural differences can significantly impact Indigenous policy making, where ontological divides typically exist between the values, knowledge systems and priorities of remote Aboriginal communities and those of Australian bureaucracies, making both participatory relationships and the alignment of policy goals challenging, when there is a lack of shared knowledge, perspective and understanding. Ontological difference experienced in the case study is discussed in more detail later in this chapter (p290).

### **Government's approach to RSD and working with the Aboriginal community**

As described in Chapter 6, the Aboriginal community in Walgett clearly desired and expected a more significant role in identifying and framing local issues and priorities, and in devising plans and solutions to local problems, than it was accorded by government. WGACWP members had envisaged that processes would start from the ground up and that they would play a lead role as community representatives in setting the agenda for RSD in Walgett, following rounds of consultation with Aboriginal community members. Such processes would have been akin or closer to a community development approach; however, there were few signs that governments approached the RSD as any kind of community development project, but rather as a program to improve its own processes and, ultimately then, to improve the quality of services governments offer to remote communities.

As we shall see, there was tension between pressures on governments to drive toward tangible outcomes on CTG targets and the directive to achieve 'engagement' with communities along the way. Time pressures affected the quality of relationships that could be built with the community and it was clear that opportunities for Aboriginal participation were therefore also deliberately contained and limited by government to certain identified moments along the way. The architecture and implementation processes designed for RSD determined spaces for community involvement would be provided in structured ways via LIP development and LIP Refresh processes, where input was sought against the building blocks pre-defined by government.

It seems clear however, that the major planning and strategising of improved service delivery coordination, was from government's perspective, the job and remit of government agencies, to be carried out at the high levels of established responsibility, rather than via a collaborative process with the community. Indeed, RSD was no community development exercise, but rather an attempt by governments to do a better job in providing services to Aboriginal people, as direct means towards closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 1 (p65), new interpretations of certain policy problems as 'wicked' have impacted Australian public service thinking and culture, creating more impetus for governments and policymakers to work differently. These new methods can involve creating spaces for key stakeholders – those most affected by an issue – to be involved and participate in problem framing and solution finding.

### **Awareness that new ways of working are needed**

One interviewee in the case study expressed an awareness that the usual process of community consultation was for government agencies to ask community representatives to respond to particular requests for information. Each agency has strongly demarcated responsibilities, and is likely to already have fairly clearly defined target areas and agendas set in advance of any consultation process:

The questions that have been asked in the past will elicit the responses: 'What's the concern, what's the problem?' 'Housing'. 'Ok, let's talk about that'. And so there'll be a discussion and the take-away from that will be: 'Well, more housing's needed'. Most people will already *know* that, and most people in the community have been asked the same thing time and time before that, and have said 'housing' or whatever the issue is... The community is used to being asked by government what they need, and so they ask

'Where are you from? Oh you're from Housing, what we really need is 10 houses.' - instead of really getting to what does the community *really* need.

(Adam, senior government officer)

The fairly standard formulaic consultative processes described above leave little room for the expansive or creative thinking identified as needed to tackle complex social problems. Meanwhile these processes do not allow an opportunity for community members to be on the front foot, thinking more holistically about local issues, considering local strengths as well as weaknesses, and examining what the community really needs and wants, before coming to the table to work together with governments and other stakeholders to devise the means to achieve identified community priorities.

On the other hand, Adam expressed a strong interest in trialling new community participatory processes that might enable this, and described an investment his department was authorising, late in the piece (during the final 12 months of RSD), to offer a facilitative resource to Walgett, in order to support and assist the Working Party develop and research identified priorities and needs going forward:

And I truly believe that (taking this different approach) the response we would get is quite different and it's probably not going to result in lots of new resources coming to town. It'll be about how the community can be supported into playing a more bold role in doing things that build the pride in that community and build again that optimism. I just think optimism is so important for communities and their vision about where they want to be as a community.

(Adam, senior government officer)

Here, Adam is mindful of the fact that the outcomes of such a process may not necessarily match with government's agenda in terms of service delivery improvements. In addition, whilst he does not specifically use the language of community development, his description of what the community might stand to gain from such processes, in terms of what he calls pride, optimism and a 'more bold role', is akin to outcomes such as social capital gains that might be anticipated from community development initiatives, where strengthened communities are both means and ends of participation.

### **Top-heavy government processes of RSD: SMC meetings and the *burrul maadhas***

In order for the WOG approach to work, the architecture devised for the RSD National Partnership Agreement established a process whereby high level government officers from the

various state or federal agencies and departments involved in the RSD commitment were required to meet bimonthly as a State Management Committee (SMC). The process involved some twenty senior federal and state public sector managers, attending meetings that were to be jointly-chaired by federal and state counterparts. In New South Wales the focus was discussing service delivery coordination issues relating to the state's two priority Aboriginal communities Walgett and Wilcannia. Usually held in Canberra or Sydney, the CGRIS was also invited and almost always attended the meetings.

Gathering together officers with such high level decision-making power was intended to enable requisite high-level collaborations and for the mandate from these officers to be handed down to lower levels of their respective agencies and departments:

I think there's a strong sense of the SMC as a place for government officials to get very clear about what we've agreed to, how we're progressing those agreements through the Local Implementation Plans, any blockages but also any coordination issues. That's the basic brief of a SMC.

(Adam, senior government officer)

If the senior officers attending SMC meetings in NSW were identified by governments as the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs), they were known to Walgett's Aboriginal elders as the *burrul maadhas* (big bosses)<sup>109</sup>. Each of these officers was identified as taking the lead on particular building block areas and/or items identified in the LIP documents, and so held ultimate decision-making power and responsibility for achieving specified outcomes in that area.

In its initial set up the SMC excluded any direct input or representation from the two Aboriginal communities themselves. The WGACWP was extremely unhappy to learn of this arrangement, incredulous that such a top-heavy government management structure had been established without provision for local Indigenous representation, and that formal mechanisms to feedback information from these meetings to the community had not been established. Over the course of the RSD the WGACWP would repeatedly request and lobby for the opportunity to have a seat at the SMC table and access to its papers and minutes. Government would eventually respond with some concessions to both requests, as we shall see.

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<sup>109</sup> The term *burrul maadha* in Yuwaalaraay means boss. Literally translated as big master, the term was originally used to describe rural property managers, but now refers to the boss of anything (Ash, Giacon and Lissarrague 2003: 48). Locals in the case study referred laconically to senior government officers who flew in for a visit to Walgett as the *burrul maadhas*.

In the participation literature the notion of *hidden power* refers to the ways that powerful people and institutions maintain their power by controlling who gets to the decision-making table and what gets on the agenda (Veneklasen and Miller 2002). Difficulty gaining access to attend and information about the SMC meetings was cited by WGACWP members as an example of government's poor communication with Walgett's Aboriginal community. In effect government by establishing the SMC processes, governments intended to elevate the importance of Aboriginal service delivery concerns to a place where inter-agency collaboration might be forged. However, in doing so government removed all decisions about Walgett's service delivery from the locus of local decision-making, and pushed it to joint state / federal jurisdictional level. Governments may be described as exercising hidden power in this circumstance, as the processes and structures designed for RSD effectively excluded local representatives from the high-powered table, where important decisions about the lives and services of the priority RSD communities were being made.

Kathleen described the WGACWP's surprise to find out about the SMC and reports about Walgett service delivery that were going to it:

We found out, by some disclosure from one of the government employees, that the process of the SMC is they collate the information on the services that they supply to that community, (forward that) back to the SMC and say: 'What a good boy or girl are we'. However the process of the information (about service delivery being) collated excluded consultation with the agencies that receive the services in the first place.

(Kathleen, WGACWP member)

After considerable lobbying from the WGACWP, some concessions were eventually made by government: an invitation was extended to Community Working Party chairs from the two NSW RSD priority communities to attend SMC meetings and papers and reports being prepared about Walgett were provided by some, but not all, government agencies. This step, achieved three and a half years into the five year RSD program, was considered by government to be a considerable move toward better community 'engagement' (government officers Adam and Brooke both spoke of this).

Indeed what seems striking about the establishment of the SMC, which was deemed necessary to ensure WOG, cross-jurisdiction and cross-agency processes of collaboration, was its extraordinary top-heavy structure. It is difficult to imagine that the very senior managers involved, whose responsibilities span state and national-level commitments, would be enthusiastically 'on-board' with the level of commitment required of them in focusing on the

affairs of two relatively tiny, remote Aboriginal communities. This raises issues about levels of commitment and appropriate locations of decision-making power, particularly in light of enormous geographic and ontological gaps between high-level federal and state decision-makers based in capital cities and the remote area local outcomes and marginalised Aboriginal people they affected.

### **Ontological divide**

An ontological divide between urban policy makers and Aboriginal locals was repeatedly emphasised by Aboriginal participants in the case study, who expressed resentment that those making decisions about their lives seemed so ignorant of everyday lived realities for Aboriginal people in the remote town of Walgett. Community members wondered how senior government officials could understand the challenges they face - from racism and poverty to high costs of remote living, with minimal access to the opportunities and services city dwellers take for granted. Equally, how could the SROs hope to grasp the many positive aspects of life in an Aboriginal community - the resilience, cultural perspectives and values that matter to people in Walgett?

From WGACWP members' perspectives, another ontological conundrum (mentioned in Chapter 6, p214), was the strong orientation of government to focus policy solely on reducing or closing gaps, which turns attention to the particular deficiencies that define Aboriginal people's lives, without acknowledging the many positives. In a September 2012 letter to government to present its formal LIP Refresh response, the WGACWP sought to impress a need for government to acknowledge Aboriginal worldviews within policy making to improve Aboriginal people's lives. The letter emphasised the importance of including initiatives in Walgett's LIP that explicitly aim to 'strengthen and support culture as a foundation of community wellbeing'.<sup>110</sup> This letter also specifically requested that 'the ROC and all agencies ensure that measures to Close the Gap seek to understand and build upon the *strengths* of the Walgett community and do not solely focus on deficits', and that such measures should include 'developing talent and community capital through structured activities, fun and engagement'. The 12 Community Priorities of the new Walgett LIP would supply numerous proposals that fit this description.

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<sup>110</sup> Letter dated 27/9/2012 from WGACWP to State Manager for RSD.

### **Contrast with the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial experience**

Contrasting Walgett's RSD experience, Indigenous representatives were included in the leadership structure of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial from its outset, with MPRA represented on its high level Steering Committee (Morgan & Disney 2006: 25). Another important element of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial identified by MPRA was the existence of an Action Team made up of agency representatives. These team members became the 'faces of government' consistently available and in attendance' at monthly CWP meetings (MPRA and USYD 2015: 22). Action Team members were able to relay community feedback and concerns to various government agencies and coordinate WOG responses to priorities identified by CWPs (Urbis Keys Young 2006: 9). The Action Team was described by MPRA as key to building relationships and trust between Aboriginal representatives and government agencies involved in the Trial.<sup>111</sup> During RSD, local RSD team members<sup>112</sup> and the ROC - as the point of coordination between government agencies and the community - was in some ways the equivalent of an Action Team, however, relations between the WGACWP and the ROC were frequently tense and conflicted over matters such as information sharing, and the timing and staking of key processes.

As the SMC meetings lacked direct representation from the two NSW Aboriginal communities, SROs responsible for making decisions about the communities were rarely exposed to the local people or conditions in Walgett and Wilcannia. The WGACWP's engagement with government via its RSDC and the ROC were considered by the WGACWP to be an inadequate compensation for its lack of opportunity to participate in the key RSD decision-making forum, the SMC<sup>113</sup>. No process would be put in place to enable Aboriginal community representatives to meet with the SROs and participate at this level of decision-making until the final year and a half of the RSD initiative.

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<sup>111</sup> It is notable that the Murdi Paaki Trial was the only one of the eight COAG Trial sites to prioritise governance and capacity building support; it was also considered the most successful of the trial sites (Urbis Keys Young 2006). High level Indigenous participation on key decision-making bodies for the MP Trial from the outset may have contributed to this success.

<sup>112</sup> While good relations were, on the whole, reported between the RSDCs and WGACWP (there was no IEO role in the team), relations with the ROC were described as poor.

<sup>113</sup> Whilst officers from the ROC did not participate in this research, it appears from other evidence that the ROCs may have suffered similar deficiencies as the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs), first introduced as the new 'one-stop-shop' for Indigenous interaction with the Commonwealth government following ATSIC's demise. Identified deficiencies with the ICCs included that they were under-resourced and lacked the seniority and skills to provide the intended level of coordination and solution brokering (Hunt 2007: 158).



### **Impact of CWP chairs finally being invited to SMC meetings**

One consequence of government's chain of command for RSD and high level seniority of its officers at SMC meetings, was described as significant 'filtering' of information, inevitable when reports are collated and translated from local levels through regional up to senior levels of public sector management. Adam described how this effect can prevent high level decision makers from really understanding or learning about what is happening on the ground:

People working in the bureaucracy mostly have very good intentions and want to see success. Sometimes though the advice and information goes through those filters of 'I want success and I want to do good things' and while they're admirable characteristics, it sometimes prevents key decision makers from getting warts and all unfiltered advice and feedback about whether or not it's really making a difference. And for me that's the real test.

The invitation of the two NSW CWP chairs to the SMC meetings, that was eventually offered, was seen as one way to include Indigenous voices, as well as to provide SROs with better access to 'unfiltered' information. Government officers spoke of a change in the dynamics of SMC meetings with CWP Chairs in attendance, and that positives had come from the new arrangement:

So far we've had one meeting where the both Chairs attended and it's been a very worthwhile exercise to have an opportunity to have unfiltered reports and information to the state management committee... Some of that is a little uncomfortable but that's the reality of getting unfiltered advice which I think is really important to improving the process.

(Adam, government officer)

Another officer also described the impact inclusion of CWP chairs had on the processes and outcomes of SMC meetings:

...where communities were never part of those meetings, they will now be part of those and have an opportunity to talk directly to the people who are responsible... so they will have access (to those decision makers). And that can change the whole dynamic of a meeting and the outcomes from a meeting and that can be really powerful too.

(Brooke, government officer)

On the other hand, a level of expectation was placed on the CWP Chairs, for example, that they would provide verbal as well as written reports in advance of attending SMC meetings. This task created considerable additional work for the Chairs and other volunteer members assisting them, although by this stage Walgett's WGACWP was being assisted by a paid

secretariat officer. Reflecting on this process, one government officer made the point that at times governments have a tendency to overlook the voluntary status of community representative roles and this can lead to unfair expectations that they provide a high level of responsiveness. In addition, the responsibility to consult and confer with others in the community or the CWP, to ensure accountability outwards and downwards to the community, can complicate and delay responsiveness. The mutual pressures and demands each party placed on the other, evident in the case study, are depicted in **Figure 8** at p296. Nevertheless, the WGACWP was praised by policy officers for its professionalism and ability at 'holding governments to account' over commitments (Brooke, government officer). Attendance at SMC meetings was an important part of that process.

## **Challenges**

A number of challenges and stumbling blocks were identified by research participants as affecting governments in their efforts to facilitate participation with the WGACWP in the case study. This section considers the impact these challenges may have had on the quality of relationships, interactions, and indeed the level of participation that was possible or achievable.

Key difficulties for governments included: pressure to deliver results against Closing the Gap targets within timeframes; high staff turnover; and communication issues. It was evident that unless community representatives, WGACWP members and other local service providers operating in Walgett were able to be 'brought along' and kept informed about progress, the community was inclined to think that nothing was happening (as described by both government officer Brooke and by WGACWP member Stella).

The need for time to build relationships, trust, strengthen community awareness in government and other agency staff was also identified as vitally important. A Local Community Awareness Project (LCAP) sponsored by the federal government and coordinated by local organisations in Walgett was a process designed to enable the community to teach government and other parties coming in to work with and in the community more about the history and other features of the Aboriginal community, and in addition helped those other parties to understand 'how they want to be communicated with' according to Brooke.

Perhaps the most significant stumbling block was the urgency to Close the Gap and see visible outcomes from RSD. This detracted from time and resources that would need to have been dedicated to truly enable good quality 'engagement':

There was a tension in the NPA RSD model between addressing service issues and community engagement... Pressure was brought to finalise LIPS quickly. This pressure may have affected community engagement. Partly reflecting the tension between these goals, stakeholders who thought that the NPA RSD was mostly about service equalization were more positive about the NPA RSD than those that felt the NPA RSD was mostly about community development (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 7).

This problem goes to question of what participation is for: as a means to an end or a means in and of itself. For processes of participation have potential to build valuable relationships of trust between parties (both within the community and beyond, eg: between communities and governments or with other stakeholders, such as local service providers) and these are worthwhile and valid outcomes for the community; however, the pressure for timely tangible outcomes and results goes against fostering and enabling such processes.

This tension between building community capacity and striving to achieve policy outcomes has been identified in earlier evaluations of WOG approaches in Australia, including the COAG Trials that preceded RSD (Hunt 2007; Urbis Keys Young 2006), so this case study finding reinforces knowledge of these problems.

In their analysis of major obstacles and impediments to community participation in international development, Bote and Van Rensburg also identify 'a tension between the imperatives of delivery (product) and community participation (process), between the cost of time and the value of debate and agreement' (Botes and Van Rensburg 2000: 50). In recognising this issue, they respond to critics who claim community participation is too time-consuming, drawn-out and uncertain, by arguing that 'although true participation involves greater costs for the identification, design and planning phases, it may actually be saving more time and money during the implementation and evaluation phases, because it ensures that people take ownership of a project':

Some people and organisations tend to emphasise process and fail to deliver product, whilst others are so product-driven that they neglect community processes. Both are dangerous: process without product leaves communities feeling that nothing is really happening other than a lot of talking, and that time, money and social energy is lost. Product without process runs the risk of doing something communities do not want or need, or cannot sustain (Bote and Van Rensburg 2000: 51).

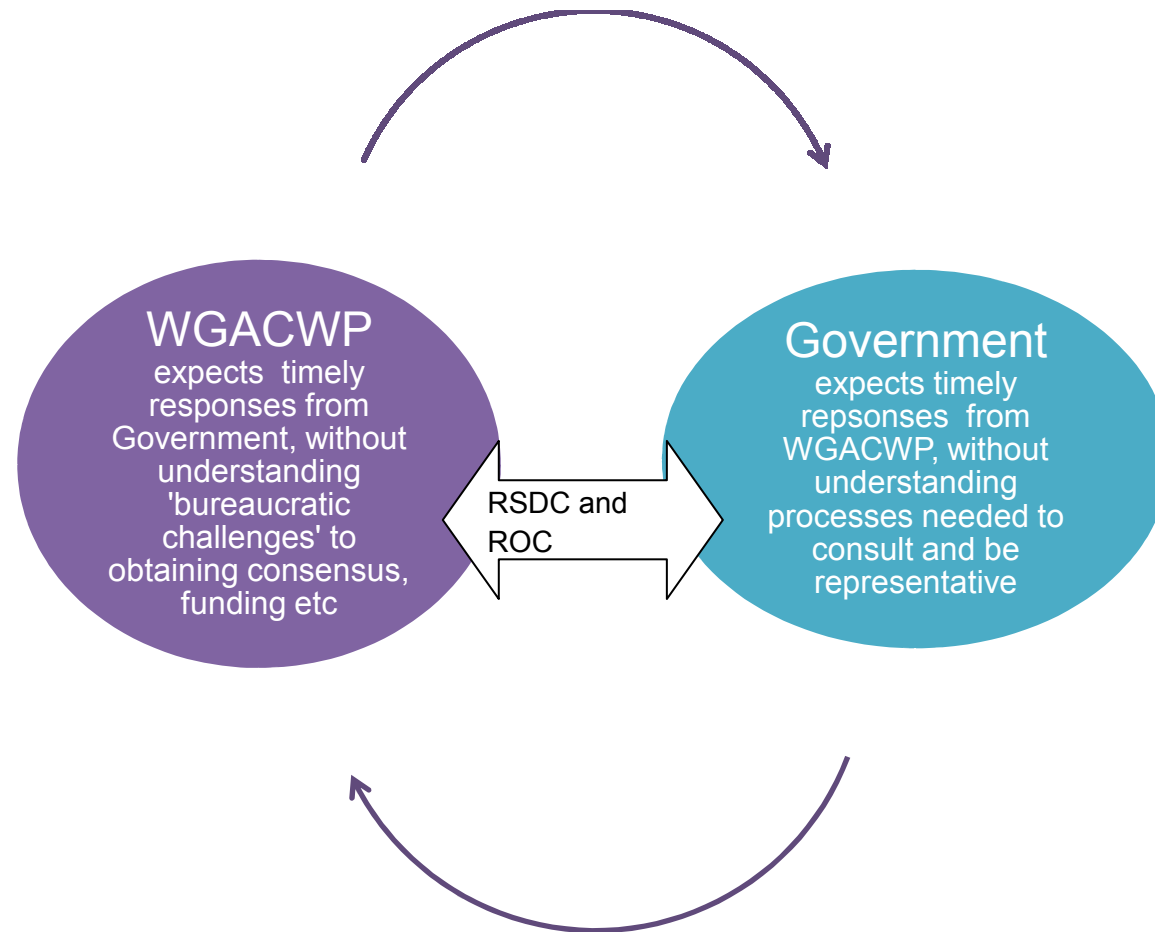
Adam, a government officer involved in high level management of the RSD processes, expressed this tension as a balancing act between the goals and priorities of the planning documents and what he described as the 'behavioural and cultural aspects of a partnership'. In Adam's view, whilst it is:

really important to deliver on the widgets in the LIP - the inputs and outputs - concurrently we need to shift our opportunity to focus on: How is this changing? What's going to be the legacy of how we work on this? Because the process stuff people love, particularly in government. But in community, at the end of this what do we want to have changed? Because there's one constant here, and several elders have reminded me of this, and it plays on my mind a lot, elders have said to me 'Look governments come and they go, ministers come and they go, the community will always be here.' And it's so true.

Expressing a concern about local governance and capacity building, Adam revealed his thoughts on questions concerning him about what the future holds for Aboriginal peoples:

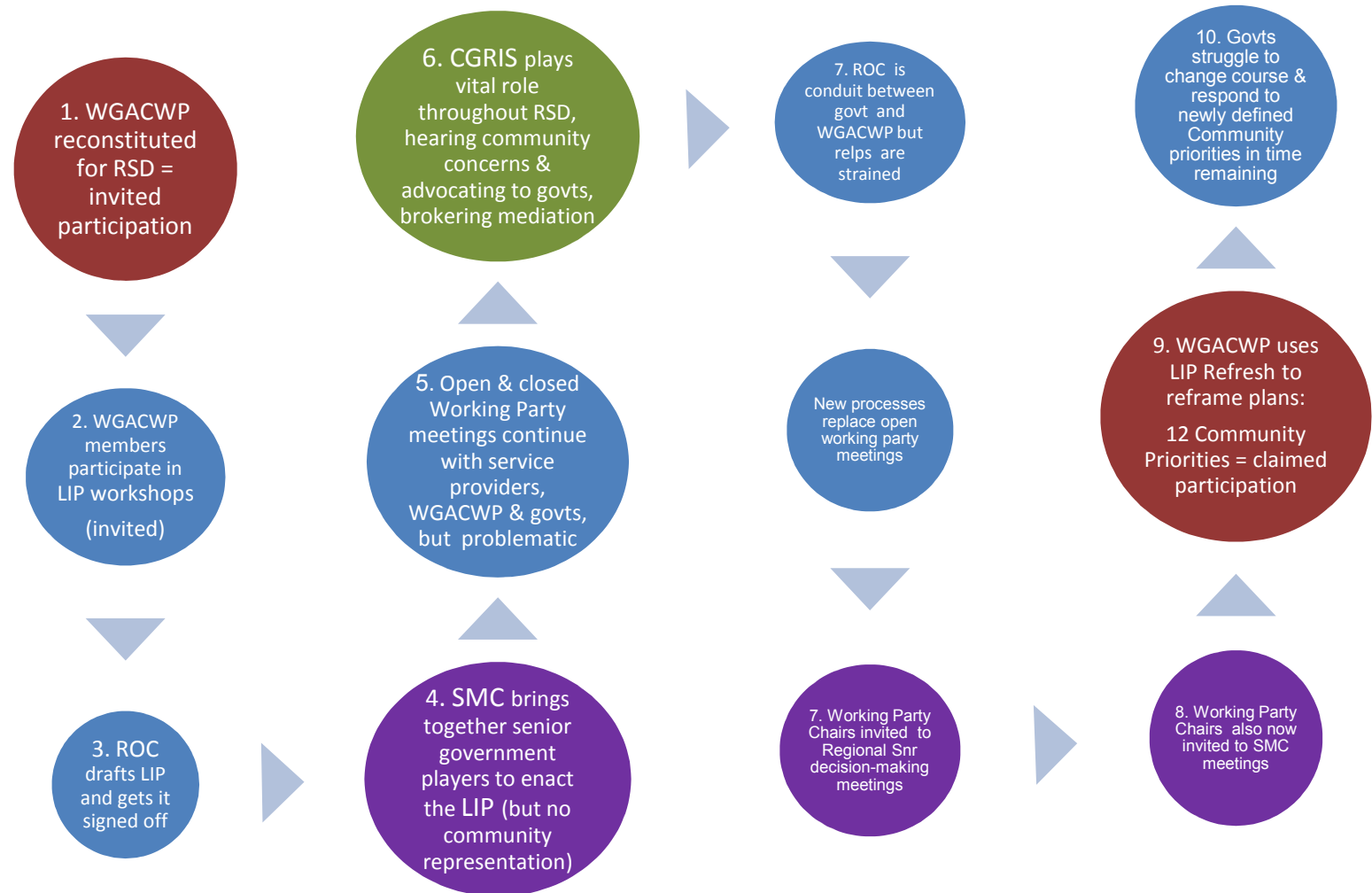
At the end of this, you know, how do we support the community to be in a far better position to be able to influence, and negotiate and lead? At that local level of the community in Walgett what I'm keen to try and get out of RSD ... is that (the community) has the capacity to be able to negotiate, to be able to influence, to be able to work in partnership.

WGACWP members were ultimately disappointed by the level of participation or 'engagement' they were able to achieve during the period of RSD, and Aboriginal community members said they were 'in the dark' about RSD and pessimistic about its achievements. This means government failed to deliver on Output 1 of the RSD Bilateral Plan for NSW, which called for Aboriginal communities to have a high level of satisfaction with government engagement, and for Aboriginal communities to have an understanding and awareness of RSD initiatives. It is clear that a number of important lessons arising from the COAG Trials that preceded RSD were not heeded, in particular: the need to allow long time frames for community planning, to adequately resource and equip community governance bodies, and the importance of a strong focus on building trust and relationships between the key players in government agencies and Aboriginal communities (MPRA and USYD 2015: 19-22).



**Figure 8: Types of pressures parties placed on one another in the case study.**

These reflect a lack of understanding of each others' role and the pressures and challenges each faced to achieve timely action and communication. The RSDC role was as a 'translator' or 'conduit' between the two, with the ROC designed as a 'single-government interface' for engagement by government with communities, facilitating communication. However at various times this broke down or was circumvented, with formal letters demanding responses within timeframes despatched directly, in both directions, between the WGACWP and more senior Government officials.



**Figure 9: Stages and processes that took place in the RSD roll out 2009-2014.** The diagram identifies where and how the WGACWP participated via both invited and claimed processes, including inclusion of WGACWP representation at government decision-making tables and more ground-up community-driven processes to devise the 12 community priorities in the second half of the 5 year RSD period.

## **Cultures of government**

Despite various imperatives and directives around 'engagement', and high level commitment to it through policy documents and advice, as also reflected in the words of officers taking part in this research, what happened on the ground appeared to be a relatively weak or low level form of involvement between government and community. There was no sign that governments rolling out RSD in Walgett were able to achieve anything like the level of participation in decision-making the community desired, nor did it come close to meeting their expectations for involvement.

My fieldwork notebooks are peppered with accounts of community members' describing to me their extreme frustrations with the processes offered by government that denied them access to information they needed and the opportunity they desired to be involved as key decision-makers for the local Aboriginal community. This frustration at one point saw members resign en masse from their positions and at numerous other occasions along the way people spoke about withdrawing entirely from RSD negotiations. One person described herself and others 'venting frustrations that even though (two government senior officers) seem to understand us, and when we ask (the CGRIS) to intervene, he does and things get done, (but) things get lost in translation between them and the ones that have to implement'. Another community research participant reported telling the CGRIS: 'The community should be leading, government listening...'. Later he qualified this recollection to say: 'They listen, but still go off and do their own thing'.

Ultimately, it seemed clear that facilitating and enabling participatory processes does not come naturally to bureaucracies and government agencies which are geared to hierarchical decision making processes, that support and allow their work to progress in predictable ways. As the literature has revealed, both cultural and structural changes within government agencies may be needed before any real shift toward more participatory processes will be achievable (Hunt et al. 2008; Hunt 2013b). There are however signs that NSW government agencies are striving to introduce new ways of working: with more place-based service planning, including co-design and other innovative approaches being trialled, promising changes to traditional government processes and opening the possibility of greater participation by service users and the wider community in design and planning of service delivery (as discussed pp151-152).

## **Tiers of government: complexity of WOG coordination**

It's very difficult to coordinate ourselves and get everybody on the same page.

(Roland, senior government officer, 2013)

Research participants described the enormous difficulties involved in coordinating the activities of various agencies of government, and coordinating WOG responses to community needs across Commonwealth and State jurisdictions, not to mention bringing in the third tier of local government, a major player in municipal service delivery which was not initially brought in as a signatory and player in RSD planning. As discussed in Chapter 5 (pp175-177) Australia's three-tiered government structure, each with different jurisdictional responsibilities, creates layers of complexity when it comes to trying to address unmet needs of Aboriginal communities. This complexity has been identified as a key problem leading to issues of accountability and gaps in responsibility for providing services and infrastructure to remote Aboriginal people (Dillon and Westbury 2007).

An example of the extent of jurisdictional challenges was provided by one research participant who described the inability of governments to achieve agreement on service delivery standards during the period of RSD. This was identified as a highly problematic part of the NPA processes, and one that was particularly fraught and extended for governments, with the NPA reaching its fifth year of operation without agreed service standards in place (CGRIS 2012), against which to benchmark or measure the quality of services provided to remote Aboriginal communities:

So one of the outstanding elements of the RSD NPA is reaching agreement between the Commonwealth and States about what service delivery standards should be for things like essential services infrastructure for example... because it has budget implications it's hard to secure agreement - but we are actively working on it and after all the NPA goes back to 2008, so arguably that's not good.

Interviewer: And RSD finishes in 2014?

Next year... I can say to you that while I think there's been some significant new investment in services... I think the evidence is we've done a lot to improve infrastructure and services across the priority locations in RSD, but the fact is we've not yet resolved what the service delivery standards will be in the long term. So we've not reached agreement, and we've not published them. So it's outstanding and we're hoping that we can secure that agreement in the lead up to the NPA finishing next



year.... It's not easy to reach agreement, because jurisdictions are worried about the costs and there's always issues about what the service delivery standards should be, but we think it's very important. (Roland, government officer)

This difficulty in reaching agreement about service standards was emphasised as a key sticking point for the Commonwealth Government, which had taken the view that one reason the 'gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is so wide is because people in remote Aboriginal communities simply don't have access to the infrastructure and services they need in order to 'live lives like other people' (Roland, government officer).

Poor equity in the delivery of municipal and social services was seen as being compounded by the absence of agreed national standards for service delivery to remote communities. This reluctance to commit to a set of standards may reflect the awareness by various jurisdictional governments that conditions and services available to remote Aboriginal communities are so substandard that they would be very costly to bring up to acceptable levels (as described by Roland; Brown 2015).

## Conclusion

Evaluation of RSD described it as 'enshrin[ing] the three core themes of *improving services*, *engagement* and *coordination*' (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 15). Ultimately however, the RSD's strongest imperatives did not appear to have been about engagement in terms of the first meaning of the term (the meaning most closely aligned with Indigenous participation), but about striving for progress on CTG by ramping up services and improving government (Commonwealth of Australia 2014). The focus remained on governments and their own processes, rather than on genuine attempts to set 'new' relations with Indigenous communities or to facilitate their 'meaningful and effective participation in decision-making' (Human Rights Council 2011: 18). The WGACWP was able to play a part in developing the LIP and their participation in this aspect of the RSD rollout processes was *invited* and facilitated by government, but they were not able to participate in framing or re-framing the RSD/CTG Building Blocks as they had initially hoped (as discussed in Chapter 6, p217), nor ultimately were they able to participate in deciding on strategies and priorities for program and service improvements in their locality.

Officers who took part in the research conceded that there was a long way to go for governments to commit to collaborative decision-making with Aboriginal communities, and

before there is anything like the level of participation in decision-making about their own lives that Aboriginal people so desire and demand, as also conferred by the UNDRIP:

It's absolutely vital that we find a way for government agencies federal and state to develop programs and services that they are going to provide *to* communities, *with* those communities, through some sort of formal framework, like an agreement that's *public* - as a way to compel governments to change, to respond to the culture about not doing that. And I concede that you know from where I sit I've only been able to achieve limited success in doing that. (Roland, senior government officer)

## Chapter 8: Discussion

A policy's a policy. It's how you action it... It's how you implement, deliver it, how you strategise, who you involve to achieve the strategies that you want to occur. That's the key message for any department. So whether you talk about education, health policy or whatever, you know it's how you plan that, how you stage that, who you involve - not consult with - who you *involve*. (Kathleen, WGACWP member)

This quote encapsulates the strong emphasis placed by many Aboriginal interviewees in the case study that the success or failure of policy and program implementation within a community rides on the quality of participatory processes and relationships able to be established to support their implementation process. By distinguishing between consulting and involving, Kathleen clearly advocates that deeper levels of participation are required than processes which might be instituted for instrumental purposes, such as to extract information or tacit local endorsement for the ready-made agendas and plans of government agencies. Rather, participation should provide real opportunities for Aboriginal community members and/or their representatives to drive the decisions that set local priorities and goals, and to devise or choose the policies and programs that are likely to be culturally sound, locally appropriate and well suited to particular community needs and circumstances.

The imposition of top-down policies in Aboriginal communities is a historic phenomenon that has failed consistently to produce desired outcomes. Today community leaders describe themselves as 'crying out' for the right to drive change and improvement in their own localities, communities, lives and livelihoods (Elders Report 2014; Empowered Communities 2015). Aboriginal people in the case study expressed a strong desire for ground-up local decision-making about which policy initiatives to endorse as important, culturally and locally appropriate and therefore worthwhile backing. Aboriginal informants indicated a clear yearning to be able to influence the way that policies and programs are delivered locally, including preferably by community-controlled Aboriginal organisations where appropriate and feasible.

The research strongly suggests that participation in policymaking may help to re-empower Aboriginal people, who have been disempowered and disadvantaged by colonisation and its aftermath, via the processes of solving their own problems. Aboriginal participation in decision-making that affects their lives may also be essential for the fulfilment of commitments made by Australian governments to reduce disadvantage and improve

Indigenous lives. However, this will only happen when governments devolve power and enable Aboriginal participation to impact on policy and planning.

This final discussion chapter reviews the outcomes of Aboriginal participation with RSD in Walgett, including key moments when participation was achieved, and what happened as a result. The major findings of the case study are analysed in light of key conceptualisations of participation from the literature. Finally, the chapter considers what this case study of participation in policymaking by a remote Aboriginal community has revealed that can extend knowledge about participation in Aboriginal policy making. The flow of benefits from Aboriginal participation are theorised from the case study (**Figure 10**) and a framework to guide Indigenous participation in policymaking is developed (**Table 4**).

### **Claiming space for participation**

From the outset, the WGACWP demanded and fought for a strong participatory role in RSD as Walgett's recognised local decision making body for the Aboriginal community. However as RSD progressed, WGACWP members said they felt locked out of processes for decision-making, service planning and coordination for Walgett.

If invited spaces for Aboriginal participation in RSD, via the two LIP development workshops, were judged disappointing and inadequate by the WGACWP, Walgett's Aboriginal governance body would pro-actively create and claim its own spaces for participation. These alternate, claimed spaces included the Friday afternoon sessions, the women's workshops coordinated by the DEG, and the LIP Refresh workshop, discussed in some detail in Chapter 6.

The WGACWP strove to maximise its participation in RSD, by various means:

- a) mobilising itself to work closely with the RSDC to try to understand more fully the implications of the RSD and the NIRA for Walgett, and to identify local opportunities;
- b) seeking resources to support its participation, by asking government to provide a paid secretariat position and funding for its proposed RSD communications strategy, to keep the community informed;
- c) trying hard to claim spaces for participation, both for WGACWP representatives, as well as for broader, direct participation by members of Walgett's Aboriginal community; and

d) withdrawing, or threatening to withdraw, its participation in RSD at various times, to assert displeasure and exert influence when the WGACWP felt its participation was being ignored or significantly undermined by government.

The next sections review the outcomes of RSD and its WOG approach, before returning to a closer analysis of what participation meant for key stakeholders in Walgett.

### **Outcomes of RSD: what did it contribute for Walgett?**

A key challenge associated with evaluating outcomes of RSD was to identify which changes or improvements in services would have happened anyway, as part of the usual work of government agencies, and which new initiatives were specifically attributable to RSD. Many WGACWP and community members made clear that they felt they were unable to identify or point to achievements from the RSD commitment. This was extremely problematic for the WGACWP, which was held accountable by community members for non-achievement of significant local change or improvement.

#### **Particular outcomes of RSD**

While the formal evaluation of RSD listed service improvements and commitments made to Walgett during the period of the initiative, many of these were associated with other NPAs of the NIRA, which presumably were at least partly implemented on the basis of Walgett's RSD priority status; however strictly speaking these were not outcomes of RSD. Commitments identified in the RSD evaluation, aligned to other NPAs and programs, included housing refurbishments and insulation completed under the NPA on Remote Indigenous Housing, and a new chronic diseases building for WAMS as part of the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 37-38).

The evaluation report lists particular tangible outcomes contributed to Walgett as a result of RSD, funded from the IRSD special account, including: the upgrade of Gingie and Namoi community sheds; Friday night sport and recreation activities and a high tech PCYC mobile van to provide activities for Walgett's young people; a renal unit established at Walgett Hospital<sup>114</sup> and shade cloths for the local preschools; the DEG was funded to run the LCAP, and supported to produce 4 issues of its newsletter (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 37-38). In addition, the evaluation identified other RSD outcomes: new supported play groups and parenting programs, youth services being mapped, tenant support workshops and an employment expo run, and a Family Violence Prevention Plan finalised (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 37-38).

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<sup>114</sup> Research participants have refuted that the establishment of the renal unit was associated with RSD.

### **What the community said about the outcomes of RSD**

Walgett's Aboriginal community's perception was, however, that very little was achieved from its commitment to RSD and that the town was left with little to show from government's commitment of approximately \$10 million dollars per RSD community over five years. WGACWP research participants expressed a view that: 'RSD left Walgett with nothing but a skate park and half a basketball court'. Indeed it appears that RSD failed to deliver for Walgett the one important legacy it might have committed: a coordinated service plan for the community, developed via local participation.

### **Complexity of RSD as a WOG initiative**

RSD aimed to apply a WOG approach to improve service delivery in 29 remote communities via better coordination of the service delivery activities and operations of disparate government agencies, whose centres of gravity and operations are state or federal capital cities. This was an ambitious undertaking. In Walgett, RSD did not appear to have achieved significant local improvement in service systems and outcomes<sup>115</sup>, nor did it provide satisfaction for Aboriginal people about their role as participants in the venture.

The ROC, like ICCs in the latter part of the COAG Trial period (Hunt 2007), appeared to have neither the seniority to wield influence and decision-making clout, nor the professional expertise required, to 'coordinate' the activities of multiple agencies operating in RSD communities. Instead the ROC's focus was to feed information and reports up to the SMC of SROs, who were the ultimate decision-makers of RSD. However, with the locus of decision-making so distant from Walgett, the Aboriginal community felt they were subject to 'remote control' (Drewery 2009; and several participants in this research described it thus).

The complexity of government has been identified as a key barrier to successful service delivery for remote Aboriginal communities. While poor collaboration between different tiers of Australian governments is by no means confined to Indigenous policy making, it can however have a greater impact on Aboriginal communities where the stakes and demand for efficient service delivery are higher. As noted in Chapter 4 (p146), non-cooperation between agencies and governments continues to be problematic, with the service needs of Aboriginal people frequently falling through the cracks, despite COAG's WOG initiatives and bilateral agreements on how state and federal agencies should work collaboratively to plan and streamline Indigenous service delivery.

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<sup>115</sup> In 2015 Walgett remained on Tony Vinson's list of the most disadvantaged postcodes in Australia (Vinson 2015).

In fact, achievements in improving Indigenous outcomes via WOG processes have been evaluated as either limited or negligible and it is clear that most of Australia's CTG targets are not on track to be met (Brennan 2015).

### **Complexity calls for participation and place-based solutions**

Complexity in the cross-jurisdictional coordination of service investment, strengthens the argument for greater participation by Aboriginal communities, and for place-based planning that puts communities 'in the driver's seat' of local planning. Strong local involvement in planning offers vital local knowledge of social problems, ideas about culturally and locally appropriate ways to approach solving them, and better understanding of how to ensure increased Aboriginal access to funded services and programs that meet local needs.

Evaluations of Australia's current Indigenous policy environment have identified that both COAG's WOG approach and the Australian Government's efforts to 'mainstream' Aboriginal service delivery have introduced high levels of bureaucratic complexity and remote executive control that are not conducive to good 'engagement' with communities, nor to enabling the levels of participation in local decision-making that Aboriginal people so desire (Chaney 2012: 59; Sullivan 2011a: 121; Commonwealth of Australia 2014). These approaches have been described as the 'antithesis' of ground-up community development approaches that would prioritise participation of people affected by policies and programs in the design and implementation of those initiatives (Hunt 2010: 9).

## **Participation**

The outcomes of participation during the case study of RSD in Walgett are analysed in this section, from the points of view of the key actors: government officers and WGACWP members.

### **From government's point of view**

To enable optimal levels of Aboriginal participation, or engagement (meaning 1, **Table 3**, p273) at the higher end of the spectrum, whereby Aboriginal people are stakeholders and decision-makers in policy making, involves significant commitment on the part of governments. Considerable intensity of time, skill and resources are needed to: 1) build relationships of trust; 2) adequately scope, map and understand community dynamics, to ensure representation on the community governance bodies government deals with is sound; 3) develop and implement participation processes toward local decision making; 4) plan and implement a strategy or policy within electoral cycles.

In the case study participation at the level expected and demanded by Aboriginal people was not achieved. Well identified in the literature is the tension between the requirement for community engagement and to achieve policy and service improvement goals, which frequently militate against one or other. In the case study agencies were hard pressed to collaborate with one another (evident in tensions between officers, as noted p165-166), let alone work well with the Aboriginal CWP and wider community.

### **Place-based approaches**

Each place-based strategy or solution requires much time and attention to be devoted. This is a deterrent for time-poor and pressured, if frequently well-intentioned, government officers. In addition, senior officers in agencies may see place-based approaches as an unbalanced injection of resources to a small number of priority communities, given their responsibilities typically stretch to providing for service needs of entire regions of the state, or even state-wide. A 'trial' mentality, frequently applied in Australia's Indigenous policy sphere, is often used to justify the time and attention applied, for successes and process learnings are theoretically able to be scaled up or re-purposed in other contexts.

However, Aboriginal people see the need for place-based approaches differently. For they frequently identify as different 'nations' (a diverse array of language groups associated with particular areas of country), in addition to identifying with the different local communities and towns in which they now live. Aboriginal people frequently assert that the uniqueness of both their community contexts and cultures requires unique place-based and ground-up solutions.<sup>116</sup> They argue the need for each local community to identify and frame the unique set of social problems it is affected by, and to participate fully in the shaping of solutions to address these. For one-size-fits-all solutions will be both ineffective and unpopular with local Aboriginal people, who see themselves as rightful decision-makers, local knowledge and culture experts.

In her analysis of the RSD initiative, Prue Brown has identified government agents as impacted by 'rational epistemology' (Brown 2015: 6) which creates a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality, that

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<sup>116</sup> Comparative studies by Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology Sydney and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research testify to significant differences in crime rates for Aboriginal towns which have many similar disadvantage factors and features, but which each have unique circumstances that impact on community safety outcomes (McCausland and Vivian 2009; McCausland and Vivian 2010).



works against developing contextual solutions for particular communities or regions. Indeed, her analysis of RSD identified a tendency for 'locally developed priorities (to be) sidelined if not consistent with government's priorities' (Brown 2015: 7). Analysing the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial, Jarvie and Stewart identified significant costs for bureaucracies of implementing place-based approaches, and that such commitment is therefore not considered to be viable in all cases (2011). Place-based service planning approaches require significant change to both cultures and processes of governments if they are to truly enable and respond to Aboriginal participation in policy making. This was not achieved in the RSD case study in Walgett.

### **Government responses to Aboriginal participation in the case study**

Two key moments of Aboriginal participation occurred in the case study: the women's workshops, which garnered broad community participation to identify social problems; and the LIP Refresh, which was a highpoint of participation by the WGACWP. In the first instance the ROC appeared to ignore the women's report; in the second, government agreed to the 12 community priorities being Walgett's new LIP, however it was ultimately unable or unwilling to resource any of the community priorities, within the remaining period of RSD. Whatever the reason for government's poor response to the LIP Refresh, it left WGACWP members feeling 'gutted' and reeling from the insult of local participation offered and rejected.

Interview data did not adequately clarify what took place in the final 1.5 years of RSD from government's point of view, and why government was unable to support the community priorities; however, some key impacts no doubt included changed political circumstances (with new federal government priorities, removal of the CGRIS, and IRSD funds previously committed being rescinded), limited period left to run on RSD, and community priorities not closely aligned to existing agency agendas and remits.

### **From the WGACWP's point of view**

RSD was a complex WOG exercise that focused on governments' own processes of coordination, driven from state and federal central offices, that was not well placed to enable local Aboriginal participation of the kind anticipated and demanded by the WGACWP and the local community. Nevertheless the WGACWP persistently strove for participation in RSD.

As RSD in NSW involved executive control over coordination of service delivery, via SROs in a committee (SMC) that the WGACWP members were not, at least initially, invited to participate in, it was very difficult for Walgett's Aboriginal governance body to wield the influence it felt it

should have had - as local leaders, community and service representatives - over planning for local service-delivery.

Meanwhile it seemed clear to the WGACWP that the numerous government departments and agencies involved in RSD each had its own plans and agendas that pre-existed its RSD engagement. The WGACWP had hoped to influence agencies to support the priorities it identified as needed and/or beneficial to Walgett's Aboriginal community and service sector. Whilst the outcomes were disappointing, there were however signs of positive impacts for the community from the processes of participation itself.

Two key moments of Aboriginal participation in the case study are highlighted here, for what they achieved and promised.

### ***Walgett women's workshops***

The women's workshops contributed insights from the ground - lived experience, suggestions about how to tackle tough inter-related social problems - Aboriginal, local approaches. However it was not obvious that these were incorporated or applied by governments implementing RSD, and this was a lost opportunity for both learning from local participation and for goodwill to be shown in engagement. Had items from the Women's Workshop Report been obviously incorporated into the LIP, this would have acknowledged and validated the women's efforts and their participation.

In successful participatory governance experiments, local ground-up insights such as these were drawn on via joint local decision-making cells that brought community members together with officers from key service agencies and authorities, to great effect (Fung and Wright 2001). Whilst the women's workshops were conducted separately (ie: not as part of a joint committee with local services and government agency representatives), there was a clear intention that the outcomes and insights emerging from the women's workshops be included in Walgett's LIP, as a contribution to collaborative planning between governments and the WGACWP as part of the RSD initiative.

The women's workshops were unique within the period of the RSD in Walgett, in that they managed to facilitate participatory processes to involve 'ordinary' Aboriginal community members (as opposed to service workers, or WGACWP members more used to participating via formal committee-type processes). Extensive pre-workshop planning and consultations took place, and this was combined with thoughtful staging, and location of the events in accessible community venues close to where people live, to encourage broad participation.

This allowed the women's workshops to produce a rather outstanding document that drew on local knowledge about local problems and provided important insights into social problems and service needs and accessibility for the Aboriginal community in Walgett. The workshop process also enabled the women an opportunity to nominate two representatives to attend the WGACWP, carrying forward concerns and returning communication to community members, as the representatives of Aboriginal women in Walgett.

### ***LIP Refresh***

During the LIP Refresh the WGACWP tried hard to bring the focus of RSD back to urgently needed resourcing for local Aboriginal organisations which play a crucial part in both service delivery and community governance. Better support would, it argued, both improve service delivery to Walgett's Aboriginal community and secure a sustainable local service industry that is a key employer of local Aboriginal people. The LIP Refresh identified items that might, if achieved, secure a tangible legacy from RSD for the community, such as via provision of facilities to improve cultural, leisure and service activities, in addition to opportunities for youth development and local Aboriginal employment.

While government was not able to respond to the Community Priorities in the time remaining for RSD (and WGACWP members felt 'gutted' by this disappointment), it did commit facilitative support at this late stage of RSD, to assist the WGACWP to refine its goals and research the priorities, toward 'envisioning' a better future for Walgett. In 2015, beyond RSD, WGACWP has continued to focus on, revise and keep current the Community Priorities going forward as the basis for future planning for Aboriginal community needs, aspirations and goals, and build on strengths of Walgett's Aboriginal community.

### **Salience of participation literature to Aboriginal policymaking**

The international literature on participation highlights many potential benefits it can contribute to the lives of marginalised and impoverished peoples. While participation remains an emerging concept and site of debate within the scholarship and practice of Indigenous policymaking, emphasised via its formal recognition in the UNDRIP, this thesis has found that key elements from the significant body of participation literature, developed within international contexts over the past four decades, to be salient to analysis of participation in indigenous contexts.

The findings of this research support the proposition that participation offers both the means and ends to re-empower and engender collective efficacy for (Aboriginal) people who have

been disempowered and traumatized by colonisation and its aftermath (Atkinson 2002; Krieg 2009; Ratnavale 2007; Campbell et al 2005, Labonte 1999).

However, the extent of benefits to participants and to policy outcomes is dependent upon whether and how governments enable or adopt contributions that are the fruits of participation. For the promise of participation, which is later unfulfilled, is itself disempowering. WGACWP members would be deflated when the outcomes of their significant efforts to participate and contribute to planning and priority setting appeared to have gone nowhere, when government was ultimately unable or unwilling to address the products of Aboriginal participation in Walgett (ie: the Women's Workshop Report and the community priorities of the LIP Refresh) by integrating them into RSD plans or supporting the identified priorities as place-based projects.

Research participants described feelings of insult and futility when their ideas and proposals were overlooked, despite significant time and community effort contributed. This in turn undermined the positive experiences of participation, which at the time had seemed valuable and empowering. Ignoring participation that springs from local initiatives may be a dangerous game, which government can ill afford to play, if - as bilateral policies state - governments want Aboriginal people to 'engage' rather than to disengage from mainstream society.

The potential for participation to have a range of beneficial outcomes for disadvantaged minority communities, including the transformative empowerment described by White (1996), will not be realised if Australian governments continue to ignore the voices of Aboriginal participants. Key issues identified in the literature, of power, purpose, representation and form are considered in the next section.

## **Participation and Aboriginal decision-making processes**

### **Representation**

In Kathleen's statement, cited at the beginning of this chapter, there is an acknowledgement that the *right* people need to be involved in decision-making around policy planning and implementation in order for success to follow. Who these people are will depend on the context and nature of the issue at hand. As noted in Chapter 1 (p71), notions of representativeness in Aboriginal political systems are not necessarily based on democratic principles of equal rights to participate. For in the Aboriginal domain individual and local group autonomy is strongly emphasised, and the right to participate or represent others typically arises from the possession or assertion of particular interests and qualifications relevant to the

context of decision-making, such as 'membership of a particular family or descent line, land ownership, seniority, knowledge (or) ritual authority' (Martin and Finlayson 1996: 7). In addition, processes of dispersed governance typical in Aboriginal contexts (Sanders 2005) see principles of subsidiarity invoked to determine the most suitable scale at which power over decision-making should be located, that is, at the lowest level competent to make the decision (Hunt 2013b: 10-11).

In the case study it was evident that people in certain social categories (elders, young people, parents for example) were considered to have direct rights to participate and have a say on particular social issues and problems that affect them and their families. For example Bob expressed outrage that the NSW Department of Education had rolled out a major new policy initiative in town without making any effort to consult directly with the parents and grandparents of Walgett about problems at the local high school, emphasising that 'people have strong views on this' and they 'need to be given a voice' (Bob, WGACWP member). Various measures were implemented or proposed during RSD to enable the broad, ground-up community participation that was considered to be necessary, including the women's workshops and consultations proposed for development of an 8th building block for land and culture.

Also notable in the case study was a strong emphasis on the need for local decision-making over issues of service delivery and planning for Walgett. This resonates with what Martin and Finlayson have identified as the 'intense localism' that frequently characterises Aboriginal political systems (Martin and Finlayson 1996). The authors point out that the processes of representative democracy that underlie Australia's mainstream political system, whereby 'individuals cede or delegate their decision-making powers to others', does not sit well with Aboriginal people, for whom values and issues are most commonly 'grounded in the particular and local, rather than the general, regional or national' (Martin and Finlayson 1996: 5,7). The important issue of local decision-making in the RSD case study will be returned to later in this chapter.

Key issues of representation within Aboriginal governance, and how to ensure representation within participatory processes is considered legitimate, fair and culturally appropriate within a particular Aboriginal community, are critical elements in and pre-requisites to the achievement of optimal participation. As discussed in Chapter 5 (p188), a family-mapping exercise was conducted for the case study to identify which sectors of the Aboriginal community are aligned or linked to each of the main local organisations and groups, as well as

with the demographic sectors represented on the WGACWP. Almost every one of Walgett's 40 Aboriginal families was found to identify as aligned with one or more of the main Aboriginal organisations and groups. This was not to say that there weren't challenges to the WGACWP's legitimacy during the case study, however clear efforts were made by the WGACWP to be as representative as possible of the whole community, such as via its terms of reference, and by inviting a vocal detractor to join the CWP and participate in decisions.

### **Deliberative processes for social learning and healing**

The participation literature advises that deliberative processes may be an essential component of optimal participation, leading to more 'engaged' community members and citizens and more legitimate and accountable decisions (Gaventa 2012). These outcomes may in turn lead to an improved governance environment, more social cohesion and a growing sense of collective efficacy.

In Aboriginal contexts, deliberative processes that lead to social learning, whereby people come to have a clearer understandings of the causes of their oppression and to devise strategies to redress it (Carmona 2013), may contribute to healing within communities, while improving the chances of better social development outcomes. Eve was one research participant who particularly emphasised the need for Aboriginal people to 'go back and understand our history, before we can start to fix the problems we have today'.

In Aboriginal contexts deliberative processes may be referred to as yarning or 'collaborative yarning'; these processes may involve speech-making and other types of dialogue that enable groups of people to listen as well as critique and challenge others' perspectives, towards consensus decision-making (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010: 40; Bishop et al. 2009). The Indigenous Governance Toolkit describes processes of consensus building in Aboriginal decision-making processes, that involve opinions being slowly moulded, often by influential people, and resulting in 'chains of cooperation within and across networks' (Reconciliation Australia 2014). In order for decision-making within such systems to be effective, the Toolkit advises that 'authority to make decisions should be located closest to the local group of people within a network who are most directly associated with the issue at hand (eg: the owners of the land, the resources, the knowledge or the dispute) and so most affected by the outcome' (Reconciliation Australia 2014).

In the case study, yarning or group deliberation occurred during two key processes: the women's workshops and the WGACWP's LIP Refresh workshops. Both processes were

highlighted as significant breakthroughs for the community in terms of enabling social learning and healing. Strides were made by the women's workshops in developing and documenting valuable local framings and potential solutions to pressing social policy problems affecting the community, and via WGACWP work to develop and research proposals for identified community priorities. Previous animosities and rivalries appeared to be overcome or set aside, at least for the period of participation, enabling collaborative processes that were described by participants as rare and satisfying opportunities.

### **Power**

It seems important that to satisfy those taking part, participation must include at least some level of power transference. This may require devolution of decision-making power to lower levels than bureaucracies are accustomed or inclined to facilitate.

Without a transfer of decision-making power, the processes of participation may feel hollow, pointless and disheartening when people realise that decisions they have made via collective, deliberative processes are not to be acted upon, but simply shelved by officials and agencies proceeding along different paths and implementing pre-existing plans or agendas.

In the case study, WGACWP members emphasised their awareness that though they considered themselves local leaders, who should at least have been consulted and preferably been accorded rights to lead local decision-making, the particular processes and architecture put in place for the RSD denied them any real decision-making power in relation to local service delivery for Walgett.

Participation literature considers not just whether participation is taking place, but suggests the interrogation of power, representation, purpose and form (White 1996; Arnstein 1969; Cohen and Uphoff 1980; Cornwall 2011, 2008), for some types of participation may convey little benefit to those involved. Theorists encourage us to consider issues of specificity, quality and the level of power over decision-making that is being claimed, achieved or enabled by participation.

In the Australian context, Behrendt has emphasised the need for participation processes that enable Aboriginal people to exert real power, influence and control over decisions that will affect them (Behrendt 2005). This resonates with Fung and Wright's concept of 'empowered participation', whereby reasoned deliberation and the decisions it results in are directly tied to actions. In this model, reasoned deliberation at local levels enables ordinary citizens and

officials to work together 'in the field', where power over decisions and implementation is devolved to 'local action units' (Fung and Wright 2003b: 24).

This model describes the type of process that WGACWP members appear to have anticipated would and should have taken place in Walgett as part of the RSD processes to improve local service delivery. However Aboriginal people in Australia frequently complain of 'lip-service consultation', whereby governments and other parties consult community representatives in short-term extractive ways - to obtain information or tacit consent to go ahead with policies or initiatives - but which rarely transfer to those who participate any real power in decision-making over which initiatives should be rolled out and how (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 11). Such consultations may extract local knowledge and perceived legitimacy, without providing any associated benefits to those participating in terms of empowerment or efficacy.

### **Participation or engagement?**

A key concern of this thesis has been to consider potential reasons for the fact that in the Australian policy context the term engagement is usually preferred over participation. Reasons for this differential use of terminology were considered in some depth in Chapters 1 and 7, including that use of the term engagement may justify the return of a strongly assimilatory tone and orientation within Australian Indigenous policymaking since the late 1990s. For critical slippages in meaning are enabled by the term engagement's antonym. It allows the rhetorical notion that if Indigenous people's disengagement - such as from employment, education or other activities mainstream society considers to be healthy or beneficial - is the policy problem to be solved, then engagement of Aboriginal people, with mainstream values and practices, can be readily ascribed as the solution.

However, such formulations of policy problems and solutions clearly facilitate ahistorical accounts of the causes of Indigenous disadvantage, ignoring the ongoing impacts of colonisation and leaving little space for alternate Indigenous framings of policy problems, nor the design of relevant solutions. This in turn disables the validity of needing to consider distinct or separate Indigenous ways of life as in any way positive or worthy of protection or maintenance, and excludes the need to value or include distinct Indigenous worldviews in the formulation of policies designed to assist them. For there is direction in the NIRA and its associated Engagement Principles that governments need to 'engage with' Indigenous people to the extent that they will understand and help to implement government's Closing the Gap policies being rolled out and accept their part in consenting and striving to achieve the behaviour changes required of them (COAG 2008: Schedule D 66-69). In terms of RSD this



principally means Aboriginal people's commitment to engage with, utilise or attend an increasing range of services to be offered or improved in the community.

The term 'engagement' preferred within the Australian Indigenous policy context today is frequently used to describe the particular, fairly superficial interactions of government officers with Aboriginal people 'in the field' within communities. Reviewing the job descriptions of the RSDCs and IEOs, it is clear that these locally embedded officers' roles were designed to provide a key point of contact or 'single interface' for governments to communicate with communities, to convey to them what was happening with the rollout of the RSD policy initiative, to hear and allay community concerns. These roles were not assigned nor intended to facilitate community development-type approaches, nor to enable the transfer to Aboriginal people of local decision-making powers, usually more aptly described in the literature as participation. Rather, a key part of their roles was to convey the impacts that government policy decisions made elsewhere, would have locally, to seek or engender local cooperation with CTG and RSD policy measures, and ideally contain or smooth any tensions that may arise in the space between what Aboriginal communities needed and demanded, and what governments were willing and/or able to provide.

Similarly roles dedicated to 'community engagement' in various other contexts (eg: people employed by local councils, or in the police force), are not generally intended to wield or facilitate transfer of power to those being 'engaged', but rather the task of the role is arguably 'placation' (Arnstein 1969) or 'diversion' of particular community sectors or groups, such as disaffected youths or groups of Aboriginal people frequently in trouble with the law, whose undesirable or unsociable behaviours, unmet strivings or needs may be seen to threaten social harmony and the status quo.

The use of the term engagement in relation to RSD and in the NIRA reflects a more pervasive preference for its use over the word participation by Australian governments and policymakers, perhaps for good reason. For engagement suggests a more peripheral space of everyday dealings and face-to-face interactions between citizens and bureaucracies (Lipsky 1980; Hupe and Hill 2007), where governments typically assign relatively low level officers to represent them as government's interface with Aboriginal community members. Indeed Hunt has identified that Australian government resources developed to guide 'engagement' with Indigenous people tend to focus on advice for individual officers about how they should work with Aboriginal people in the field, rather than providing higher level advice on the governance

arrangements and processes needed for 'sustained participation' of the type required in the complex area of Indigenous policy (Hunt 2013b: 15).

In the case study, after the start up of RSD and initial work with their assigned RSDC, Aboriginal research informants said it soon became clear to them that the real decision-making power resided elsewhere, and their direct 'engagements' with locally-based RSD officers or regionally-based ROC staff would not - and were never intended to - afford opportunities to participate in local service-delivery decision-making. As WGACWP members learned more about the architecture and processes of RSD they grew increasingly unhappy about decisions that affected their lives being made for them, as if via 'remote control' (Drewery 2009), by high powered government officers at meetings in distant urban locations. It was the antithesis of a place-based, community development approach.

#### **Local decision-making and tensions introduced by the drive for rapid progress on CTG**

Despite policy rhetoric about flexible, place-based solutions and 'engaging' with local Aboriginal communities, COAG's approach in relation to Closing the Gap targets applied more executive control and less local or regional Aboriginal control over decisions than ever. In the case study, community participants spoke of their sense that the processes for service decision-making slowed down during RSD as multiple agencies were responsible for collaborating on a policy area or objective, and significant delays seemed to creep in when various high level sign-offs were needed (both WGACWP members and government officers interviewed for the research mentioned these effects).

With the SMC making the ultimate service-delivery decisions about Walgett, the WGACWP and other local service representatives felt excluded. Multiple similarities and pro forma items included in the LIPS for Walgett and Wilcannia, who shared the same ROC, were identified by the Auditor-General's report on RSD (ANAO 2012). This seemed to confirm the suspicions of a number of WGACWP members that government was implementing or imposing upon them pre-formed agendas, while presenting the appearance of developing ground-up community plans for RSD.

As already noted, diversity and cultural orientation mean Aboriginal people frequently prefer the locus of power in decision-making to be closest to those affected by the decision, and that power devolve to the lowest level where a decision can be appropriately made. In the case study WGACWP members considered themselves the local decision-makers appropriately qualified to make decisions about service provision to the Aboriginal community of Walgett.

There was significant pressure on government agencies to make rapid progress towards CTG targets since COAG's 2008 commitment to the NIRA. This undermined the ability of agencies and their staff to dedicate the time and resources needed to involve Aboriginal communities as active participants in planning and decision-making, despite commitments in the NIRA to work well in partnership with Aboriginal people to achieve government's targets to reduce Indigenous disadvantage within set timeframes (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

In the case study Aboriginal people expressed strong desire for control over processes associated with service delivery in their community as well as over local development initiatives. Whilst drive-in drive-out service delivery by external NGOs was identified as posing a threat to the survival of local Aboriginal organisations, alternatives like partnership approaches could have enabled external NGO providers, government agencies and philanthropists to help resource and strengthen capacity in Aboriginal organisations, rather than undercutting or competing with them (Maddison and Brigg 2011: vii; APO NT 2013).

### **Starting where the people are and working in the right order**

Ground-up community development approaches, which emphasise participation for empowerment as fundamental, are strongly preferred by Aboriginal communities, in contrast to top-down service delivery-focused approaches routinely favoured by governments (Hunt 2010). The latter approach may address the symptoms of disadvantage but fail to affect its underlying causes. Unlike community development, top-down service delivery approaches fail to build social and economic capital within Aboriginal communities (NSW Ombudsman 2011: 7). In fact they may continue to disempower disadvantaged communities and remotely control Aboriginal lives (Drewery 2009).

As discussed in Chapter 2 (p100), participation is a foundational principle of community development approaches. It involves starting where the people are, to involve community members in planning and devising their own development (Ife 2013; Campbell et al 2005; Labonte 1999). Skilled facilitation of such processes is identified as very important, as well as 'starting early in the program or project development' to enable time for deliberative and negotiated processes to take place (Hunt 2013b: 2). Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson has emphasised a critical need for governments and collaborators to work with Aboriginal communities 'in the right order', building trust and relationships, allowing time and dedicating resources and processes for healing (Chaney 2012: 65).

Several case study informants emphasised their view that ideally approaches to addressing social policy problems in Aboriginal communities should be focused and systematic, rather than trying to achieve too much. This means working with local Aboriginal people and/or their representatives to identify targeted, achievable yet locally important priorities or goals first, before moving on progressively to address other problems or goals in turn. This view expressed by a number of informants in the research reinforced messages in the literature, about the importance of focussing on empowering Indigenous communities by building on existing strengths and assets, and focusing on 'small achievements along the way to mutually agreed longer term goals' (Hunt 2013b: 2). Where collective efficacy in a community is low, and relationships between the community and external parties are either strained or non-existent, well-planned processes that go at the community's pace, rather than the outsiders', may offer the requisite time and opportunity for parties to build long-term relationships of 'trust, respect and honesty' identified as essential to empowering communities via participation (Hunt 2013b: 2).

In Walgett Bob explained that this would ideally have involved focusing one or two identified priorities at a time, instead of planning to achieve hundreds items across diverse building block areas, as the RSD process had dictated. The simpler, staged alternative process advocated would, according to Bob, have enabled the community's trust and faith in government's intentions and goodwill to work with them to grow gradually over time. Such processes have strong potential to build the collective efficacy of community members, who witness the effectiveness of processes they are taking part in, and see that they are 'getting runs on the board' (both Bob and Jerry emphasised this approach and described it thus).

In their evaluation of the COAG Trials, Jarvie and Stewart identified a similar preference in the smaller communities involved, who:

found it easier to focus on clearly-defined, doable projects in their community action plans than the larger ones. For many of these communities, this was the first time they felt they 'had a voice' and government attention. Projects that were asked for and delivered included a youth centre, a cemetery make-over, and a community garden. These projects established an environment of trust, demonstrating that the Trial could deliver on its promises (Jarvie and Stewart 2011: 17).

This type of slower, more systematic and progressive participatory approach to local policy problem solving, importantly allows time for sustainable relationships and trust to grow between local participants working together, as well as between community and government

officers or other external parties working with them. Meanwhile the processes that enable participation have time to evolve, as the parties devise and develop methods of collaboration that will work for them.

Community efficacy - belief and pride in what has been achieved by community members working together, and in the potential for further goals to be achieved via collaborative effort - may grow from such processes and be a vitally important factor in the re-empowerment of people affected by colonisation and intergenerational trauma, for Aboriginal communities in need of healing.

The participation literature establishes that to optimise participation, power inequalities must be recognised and sincere attempts made to share power. This means that processes for identifying and strategising community priorities and goals will ideally be driven by the Aboriginal community and should also, according to Kaylee and Dani in the case study, strive to build on community strengths and assets instead of always attending to deficits and gaps, as the current Closing the Gap agenda has a tendency to do.

#### **Decision-making requires information and the ability to direct funds**

To participate fully as local decision-makers in place-based planning, Aboriginal governance bodies need sufficient high quality information about service environments. This includes visibility over program and service mapping and a clear understanding of the financial resources committed by governments. Access to this information is surprisingly difficult to obtain, for place-based service mapping rarely takes place and even the governments that resource them suffer from lack of visibility over service systems.

Though the RSD initiative was place-focused, on particular geographic locations, and it did start off with baseline mapping of service delivery, local conditions and problems, and there were two LIP development workshops run in Walgett, the latter took place before the baseline reports were available to the community. Later, the WGACWP complained that it was denied access to information it would have liked - reports about what was being committed to Walgett as part of RSD for example - in order to be in a position to participate in planning and decision-making.

In addition, it seems necessary that at least a portion of financial investments from government be set aside as flexible funding to allow truly place-based responses to local needs that are identified by Aboriginal people, enabling locally identified service and community strengthening objectives and priorities to be supported.

New NSW policy initiatives in this vein are promising. NSW Treasury is making efforts to provide service mapping and financial transparency to regional Aboriginal alliances under the Local Decision Making initiative of OCHRE. Meanwhile, Just Reinvestment is an initiative being implemented in Bourke NSW, that aims to draw funding from criminal justice systems and reinvest it into vital community support services that Aboriginal people identify they desperately need (eg: drug and alcohol or mental health services), and which, will theoretically, reduce high-cost investments in gaols and hospitals, for these are the places people land by default when vital support services are lacking.

### **Alternate ways to approach Aboriginal policy making**

The literature reveals alternate ways to enable Aboriginal participation, as per the desire and right of Indigenous people.

Eva Cox has considered evidence of what works in Indigenous service delivery and identified important elements and approaches, including: strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled NGO sector, and applying collaborative place-based approaches, that allow Aboriginal people to drive and own service design and delivery (Cox 2014b: 14). Supporting Indigenous organisations is identified as important because of the role they play in supporting, strengthening and sustaining Aboriginal communities (ANAO 2012a: 32) - increasing social capital toward improved community wellbeing.

The NSW Ombudsman has identified a number of current NSW policy initiatives that promise to support place-based service delivery reform in Aboriginal communities to better identify and meet local needs (NSW Ombudsman 2015: 106) - including co-design processes to redesign regional community service systems, and the Far West Initiative which may enable a clearer focus on the particular needs of communities in the western region of the state.

### **Need for innovation**

The depth of problems facing Aboriginal communities suggests that innovation is needed (Hunt 2013b: 6). Solutions to deeply ingrained and structurally embedded Indigenous disadvantage seem unlikely to be achieved by fixing up service delivery coordination issues from afar. *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook* describes social learning and social invention as two important desirable outcomes that may come of high quality participatory processes within community development contexts, such as where stakeholders effectively invent new practices and institutional arrangements suitable to their needs, and that they are willing to adopt (World Bank 1996: 5).

Analysts have identified a key role for NGOs in facilitating community development - or 'Aboriginal development' approaches, as Hunt describes them (2010) - as these organisations are more experienced in applying participatory processes and may be more capable of working well with Aboriginal organisations for a number of reasons. Hunt provides key examples of innovative collaborations between Aboriginal communities and external non-government agencies working to support local community development initiatives in land care and mental health collaborations (Hunt 2010).

However the case study showed that government policies discourage this type of partnership supportive approach, as NGOs must compete against one another for finite service funding. While international NGOs may have particular expertise and sophisticated processes of participation and community development approaches that could be valuably contributed to Aboriginal development contexts (Hunt 2010), Campbell et al (2005) point out that community development approaches have rarely been implemented in remote Aboriginal Australia, where the government's approach has been described as the antithesis of community development principles (Hunt 2010: 9).

### **Support for the vital role of local Aboriginal organisations**

Evident in the case study was the inherent value of Aboriginal organisations, as local employers, as culturally embedded and locally engaged bodies able to play multiple roles in governance, advocacy, service delivery and participation. WGACWP members argued this needs to be more fully acknowledged, valued and prioritised, within selection criteria and processes applied to resource allocation.

If Aboriginal organisations are to survive and be able to fulfil their important role in enabling Indigenous communities to have control over their own lives and affairs, a substantial shift is needed in the way governments perceive and value them within the Indigenous service delivery model. Substantial changes to the competitive tendering processes currently used by mainstream government departments and program managers to allocate service provision contracts are indicated, principally to more strongly value the particular benefits that Indigenous-controlled local organisations may bring to service delivery, as well as to local employment and governance.

### **Capitalising on the potential benefits of participation**

Participation literature notes that 'translating voice into influence' involves more than capturing what people say, and that for participation to be optimal 'voice needs to be

nurtured' in the sense that people need to feel able to express themselves, without an 'expectation of not being listened to or taken seriously' (Cornwall 2008, p278). For involvement is not the same as influence. Cornwall emphasises that encouragement needs to come from above and below: political will and institutional processes need to be in place to allow governments to be receptive and responsive to participants' input; and support needs to be given for development of processes of participation 'from below' which are suitable to the particular population group or community sector. She recommends strategies need to be in place to build and support collectivities so they can continue to exert pressure for change (Cornwall 2008: 278). In addition, there is a need for clarity about what decisions can be influenced by participation, the processes and mechanisms by which participation will take place, and at what stage or stages these processes occur.

Participation can offer many benefits for the design and implementation of policy: it can help governments and public servants do their work solving problems and designing more effective services and programs; participation can provide valuable information about local contexts and cultures, and greater understanding of citizens' lives, needs and perspectives. This quote from a senior Australian public servant reinforces a recurring theme from international literature, that participation can offer policy makers new knowledge and ways of thinking about a problem:

We need not only to consult citizens, but invite them to collaborate in the design of services and of policy. Citizen engagement in service and policy design is not only the right thing to do but will provide a rich new source of ideas to government. (Moran 2010)

Participation by Aboriginal community representatives in decision-making around policy, service and program planning also has potential to engender a sense of ownership in those taking part, which may assist with successfully implementing policy, running or embedding services and programs within a community.

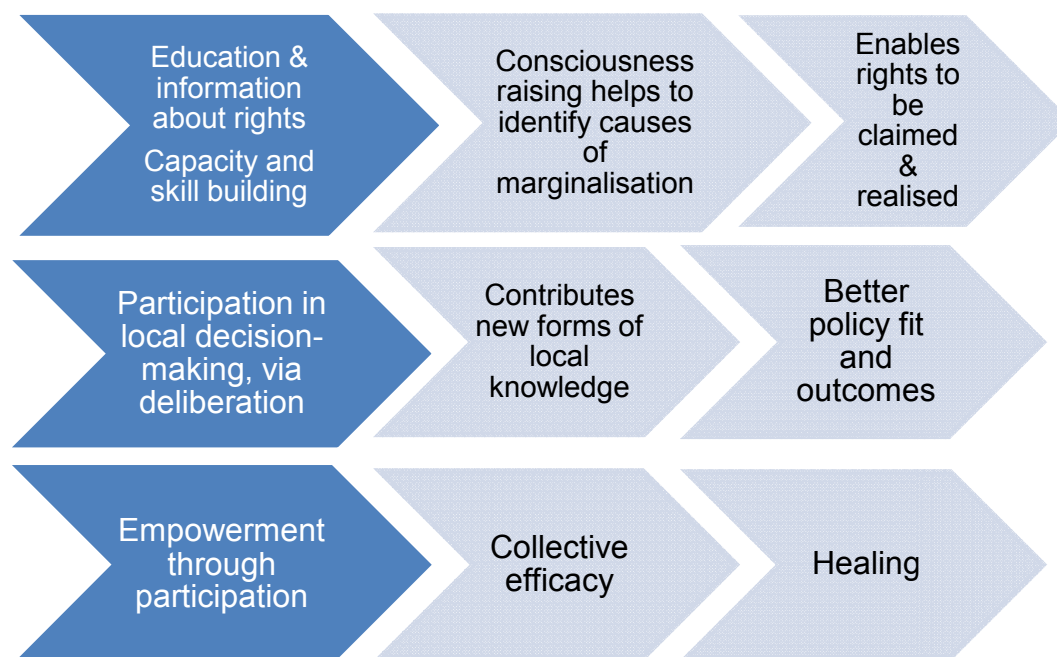
Beyond these types of benefits, which may accrue to policy outcomes, participation also offers to empower individuals and communities to have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Achieving optimal participation is undoubtedly challenging, however where people have had their views listened to and perceive they had an impact on plans or outcomes, participation may have significant flow on effects via improved local governance and collective efficacy. Participation may also therefore provide both means and ends to healing that is so needed by Aboriginal communities.



Importantly participation can provide space for community members to work together to envision and plan better futures. The empowerment that participation can bring may be particularly important for people suffering ongoing effects of colonisation and dispossession, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. Where the promise of participation is offered but not adequately delivered however, communities and their representatives may feel more frustrated and despairing than ever.

**Figure 10** below depicts the flow of potential benefits participation may optimally deliver for Aboriginal communities, as theorised from the case study in this research. The dark arrows at left show the elements and processes required to enable participation, the middle arrows describe processes and outcomes that may take place as a result, and the right hand arrows show the optimal outcomes that may come from participation: rights claimed and realised, better policy outcomes and healing for Aboriginal communities.

**Figure 10: How participation may realise beneficial outcomes for Aboriginal communities**



Community representatives in the case study fought hard for their right to participate, to gain the support and resources they needed to participate, and to establish the level of influence over decision-making processes for the community that they desired and considered to be their right. Various strategies were implemented by the WGACWP to this end. Nevertheless

there was a sense of wasted energy and effort, disappointment, and even despair at times, among WGACWP members. This resulted from their lack of satisfaction with RSD outcomes and the fact that the wider community blamed the WGACWP for what was considered to be a lack of progress or tangible outcomes from the RSD.

However, some more hopeful processes did take place during the LIP Refresh period at the halfway mark of RSD. At this time WGACWP members found the strength and opportunity to come together to strategise about community priorities and took control of the planning process, claiming space for participation rather than continuing to inhabit the invited space government had offered them in the RSD processes. It was noted by several research informants that this collaborative work by the members was an unexpected positive outcome of their involvement in the community priority planning process. This collaboration occurred in spite of past tensions and a lack of resources directly applied to achieve healing.

### **Claiming a space to participate**

Although the outcomes achieved in Walgett were far from satisfactory for the community, the RSD did provide a framework and new impetus for WGACWP members to meet and work together. In response to the WGACWP's consistent advocacy, government also eventually provided some secretarial resources to support the unpaid work of members participating. Whilst the LIP Refresh process was initially driven by government, with the ROC delivering to the WGACWP for approval a 'report card' of over 200 LIP items that provided very little information, the WGACWP decided to take control of this process, claiming the right and taking the opportunity to revise the entire LIP. They would replace hundreds of items with the 12 top level community priorities. This was seen by WGACWP members as a vast improvement on the original LIP document, which they had signed in spite of strong reservations, because they were promised that it would be a living document.

The WGACWP's revision of the LIP at this late stage of RSD was far from enthusiastically endorsed by government, and little apparent effort was made to commit to addressing any of the identified priorities, which, to be fair, were likely outside the realms of what any of the responsible government agencies could conceive of achieving or supporting, in the absence of additional flexible funding. However, the members of the WGACWP described the LIP Refresh process as the first time their group had really come together as community representatives to plan out priorities and aspirations for Walgett, which in their view would make a difference and be worth fighting for.

## Why participation is important

Analysis of the case study indicates there is both a strong desire and need for Indigenous participation in policymaking processes in Australia today. This involves participation in decision-making that affects Aboriginal lives and livelihoods: from high level policy framing and national agenda setting through to planning, designing and implementing policy and program solutions at regional and local levels. Not only would this see Australia facilitate the Indigenous right of participation in decisions that affect them, as recognised within the UNDRIP (2007, supported by Australia in 2009), but it may well be a missing ingredient in the Indigenous policymaking landscape. For participation:

1. is strongly desired and consistently demanded by Aboriginal peoples;
2. has potential to tap into the intimate knowledge of those closest to problems, that is Aboriginal people;
3. makes it more likely that problems will be framed and policies designed with an understanding of underlying factors from the standpoint or worldview of Aboriginal people (including, for example, the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the experience of intergenerational trauma)<sup>117</sup>;
4. may lead to more sustainable change and outcomes, such as where policies or services that are well embedded, culturally relevant, locally accepted and owned by Aboriginal people; and
5. where deliberative processes are part of participatory policymaking, such processes can drive learning for all parties involved, breaking down cognitive and other barriers to forge solutions parties feel more readily able to accept and commit to (optimising fit to purpose, need, aspirations and culture); and, most importantly
6. participation in decision-making has the potential to (re-)empower people adversely affected by the ongoing impacts of colonisation and the imposition of controlling, paternalistic and oppressive government policies, when they are enabled

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<sup>117</sup> Such framings undermine mainstream a-historical interpretations of Indigenous disadvantage as a wicked problem to be solved; and policy assumptions that label Aboriginal cultures and people themselves as dysfunctional, rather than identifying certain 'maladaptive coping mechanisms' as normal human responses to trauma, which require healing (APO NT 2012b).

to be decision-makers in their own lives and communities, and afforded agency in the setting of goals and aspirations of their own choosing, for their own futures.

**Table 4** presents a framework for participation in Indigenous policy making based on research findings and analysis of the literature.

Table 4: Framework for participation in the sphere of Indigenous policymaking	
<p><b>Critical elements</b></p> <p>(processes)</p>	<p><u>Healing</u> as a pre-requisite to good governance and optimal participation<sup>118</sup></p> <p>Free and informed <u>consent</u> - governments must consult 'in good faith' (UNDRIP 2007)</p> <p><u>Local decision-making</u> - devolution of decision-making to appropriate level / locus<sup>119</sup></p> <p><u>Representation</u> that is locally accepted to be legitimate and broadly representative of all sections of a community</p> <p><u>Two-way accountability</u>, ensuring the legitimacy of representation via communication back to community members as well as accountability to government and the public (eg: in re use of funding)</p> <p><u>Good governance</u> - accountability, legitimacy, cultural/local fit , Aboriginal decision-making processes</p> <p><u>Deliberation</u> processes</p> <p>Transfer of <u>power</u> - not just to comment but influence/decide, set priorities, plan outcomes and goals</p> <p><u>Information</u> and technical advice to participants to enable their decision-making</p> <p>Acquisition of <u>skills and knowledge</u><sup>120</sup> - as prerequisite to participation, and as an outcome of it</p>

<sup>118</sup> May help overcome trauma and conflicts between people in communities affected by colonisation and disadvantage (Abele 2012, re Canada Royal Commission).

<sup>119</sup> Aboriginal people typically prioritise the local as the locus of responsibility, power, knowledge. This makes the idea of distant/remote decision-making about local issues highly offensive and objectionable for Aboriginal communities. Martin and Finlayson emphasise 'Aboriginal political systems are often characterised by an 'intense localism' (1996, p7).

<sup>120</sup> Necessary to enable local Aboriginal people to take an informed/effective part in decision- making (Carmona 2013); this in turn empowers. Processes such as PAR involve consciousness raising about root causes of marginalisation and enable capacity to overcome oppression/structural forces (Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights 2013; Research participant Eve also spoke of a need to 'understand our history first').

<p><b>Resources</b></p> <p>(needed to enable participation)</p>	<p><u>Time</u> for due/required processes and to build required relationships of trust (pressured processes don't work)</p> <p><u>Trust / relationship</u> building - '3 cups of tea' needed before you start talking business)</p> <p><u>Facilitation</u> &amp; secretarial /administrative support</p> <p>Participants are ideally are <u>paid or reimbursed</u> for costs associated with their contribution</p> <p>Well-resourced <u>Aboriginal organisations</u> - 'competent, broadly supported organisations' are vital (Martin 2003, p7)</p> <p><u>Capacity of government</u> officers and other players to work well with Aboriginal communities in intercultural environments<sup>121</sup></p>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>(oriented toward / optimally may achieve)</p>	<p><u>Efficacy</u> - collective/self belief through problem solving<sup>122</sup></p> <p><u>Community control</u> / self-determination - contributes to social determinants of health and wellbeing</p> <p>Local buy-in / <u>ownership</u> of projects and programs - resulting in broader service 'engagement' and outcomes</p> <p><u>Empowerment</u> of those disempowered by poverty, disadvantage and discrimination</p> <p>Acquisition of <u>skills and knowledge</u></p> <p><u>Better local /cultural fit</u> of policies and program delivery may lead to more effective <u>outcomes</u></p>

<sup>121</sup> An important facilitation role exists for government officers within participatory decision-making processes, but this requires well developed skill levels and capacity to work within intercultural environments.

<sup>122</sup> Efficacy is related to hope and optimism, belief in positive futures/ power over own destiny for those long dominated and discriminated against.

## Impacts of the research

Key principles are now well established within the literature of Indigenous research methodology and ethical guidelines developed to inform researchers working in this field (Smith 1999; AIATSIS 2011; Sherwood 2010; AH&MRC 2009). Ideally, the research process itself is participatory and therefore has potential to empower participants, as everything from the subject matter of research to its goals, processes and interpretation of findings should be open to community participation and/or control (Nicholls 2009).

The current research was devised in collaboration with WGACWP members, as the key representative body for the Aboriginal community of Walgett, who negotiated with me what might be appropriate and useful subject matter to be researched within the community. The WGACWP deliberated for some time over a range of potential topics suggested by me, before coming up with another, quite specific research topic they decided they would like the research to focus on: providing an independent observation and analysis of Walgett's Aboriginal community's negotiations and interactions with government over the RSD implementation.

Pro bono policy work carried out by me during the research period assisted community representatives with their work on the RSD, thereby helping the community to understand and negotiate what often seemed to be a 'bewildering' landscape of government processes and demands, as Stella and Dani both described it. WGACWP members participated in the research process as interviewees, as well as providing iterative feedback on analysis of the findings, and signing off approval before any presentation of findings in the public sphere or any publication took place. WGACWP members therefore participated in some way in this research during every stage. Whilst they did not conduct and analyse the interviews, they were involved as collaborators from the early design stage of the research, through to involvement as interviewees, and later assisted with validation of interpretation and findings. The Community Report on research findings, provided to participants and other members of Walgett's Aboriginal community, is attached as Appendix C.

On the other hand, the researcher was told by government officers on a number of occasions not to 'underestimate the impact' of the research itself upon negotiation processes, given that the research involved tracing the processes taking place and analysing the nature of relationships that were ongoing during three years of policy planning and implementation in Walgett. An important aspect of this impact, described by both Brooke and Adam, was that the

research provided an imperative and an opportunity for government officers at various levels to reflect on the quality and level of community participation being achieved and enabled.

Successive phases of interviews provided an opportunity for the researcher to challenge senior government officers to respond to critical perspectives expressed by WGACWP members about the quality and level of participation enabled and offered within the architecture of RSD implementation. During the interview process senior government officers were encouraged to be reflexive and analytical about the processes taking place in the negotiation space between governments (from Senior Responsible Owners of LIP items to ROC officers and embedded RSD workers) on the one hand and community representatives on the other, and how these might be improved in response to the community's desire for more information, communication and decision-making power. Evidence suggests the research process itself therefore had some impact on the level of participation enabled by government and achieved by the WGACWP within the case study.

### **Limitations**

The single-case study design is a limitation in terms of the generalisability of the findings about the policy processes that occurred in RSD communities more broadly. The complexity of conducting cross-cultural research in a remote Aboriginal community, and the time needed for careful management of the research engagement, including carrying out reciprocal obligations of pro bono work, prohibited the possibility of including multiple case studies in the research design. However, the use of a single-case design has enabled a more intensive research engagement to take place with the case study community than would otherwise have been possible, in turn enhancing the depth and validity of analysis. Furthermore the findings have been analysed in relation to knowledge developed in other Indigenous contexts about participation and engagement in policy making.

### **Implications of the research for future policy development**

Findings of this research have strong implications for future policy development in the area of Indigenous policy making in Australia and elsewhere. Strong desire and demands were expressed by the local Aboriginal community in the case study for realisation of their decision-making rights. Community representatives indicated that this involves more than just being invited to act as advisors to decisions-makers, or as consultants to government on the decisions they might make. Rather they expressed the desire to be empowered to influence and decide on local issues, objectives, strategies and implementation processes to be applied,



and to establish local aspirations and goals that can guide policy making activities undertaken within their own community.

Evidence from the research indicates strongly that in order to reduce Indigenous disadvantage and improve the lives of people living in Aboriginal communities, significantly greater emphasis and time needs to be placed on enabling processes for the participation of Aboriginal people, in decision-making that affects their own lives. Failure to do so impacts both the efficacy of policy implementation and its outcomes within communities. Aboriginal people are strongly disinclined to embrace top-down policies and decisions that are made by governments in distant locations if they have no opportunity to consider and reshape these policies in accordance with local need and challenges with local implementation.

### **Further research**

Now enshrined in the UNDRIP, participation is an emerging concept and site of debate within the scholarship and practice of Indigenous policy making. This thesis has made a timely contribution to that scholarship by applying concepts of participation developed through four decades of practice, critique and theorising in the sphere of international development and participatory governance. Further research is needed for clearer understandings about the issues of governance, accountability and representation and how optimal participation might be achieved in Aboriginal contexts. Whilst Australian governments are not necessarily heading in the direction of enabling participation for Aboriginal people, evaluation of experiments or examples of participatory processes, such as the participatory research processes assisted in some RSD communities by Ninti One, will be valuable. In NSW, promising examples of ground-up participation in policy making include: development of the state's OCHRE policy initiatives, operationalised via a series of Taskforce consultations with Aboriginal people around the state; and codesign processes being introduced by NSW Community Services, which involve Aboriginal service users, workers and community members as participants in the re-design of regional service systems. These examples are worthy of further research and evaluation to identify success factors as well as areas that challenge the negotiation spaces between communities and governments involved in making policy together.

## Conclusion

If Indigenous disadvantage has come about as a direct result of colonisation, dispossession and institutionalised racism, then re-empowering Aboriginal people via real opportunities to participate in policy decision-making may be vital to redressing past and ongoing injustices, overcoming inequality and disadvantage, and allowing Aboriginal communities to envisage brighter futures in which community-driven aspirations are fulfilled. To impact closing the gap and genuinely improve Indigenous lives, opportunities and livelihoods, Australian governments need to recognise and address Aboriginal peoples' desire for control over their own futures. To do so, it appears essential to enable the right of Indigenous people to participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

As this thesis was being finalised, the *2016 Prime Minister's Closing the Gap Report* was released, revealing a majority of Closing the Gap targets are not on track to be met (Australian Government 2016). In his address to parliament introducing the report, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull quoted Indigenous education specialist Dr Chris Sarra, who had told him: 'we need policy approaches that nurture hope and optimism rather than entrench despair', and that Indigenous people want governments to 'do things with us, not to us' (Turnbull 2016; Sarra 2015). These statements convey two key messages relevant to the findings of this thesis: that policy should focus on strengths rather than deficits, and that Aboriginal participation is vital.<sup>123</sup>

This thesis has investigated the nature of Aboriginal participation in policy planning and decision-making with Australian governments, examining the extent to which Aboriginal people desire and pursue participation, and whether this is being valued and enabled by governments. A range of issues and challenges were found to impact the negotiation space between governments and Aboriginal communities when planning and implementing policy. Close attention has been paid to the outcomes of participation for community representatives

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<sup>123</sup> During this speech Turnbull importantly also announced government's commitment to a significant new initiative to enable Indigenous participation: Empowered Communities, proposed collaboratively by leaders of eight Indigenous communities around the country, to provide an enabling framework for place-based development, designed and driven by Indigenous communities with support from governments and corporate leaders (Empowered Communities 2015). It will be important for governments and other partners to throw their support behind this initiative, and others like Local Decision Making in NSW, as communities strive to empower themselves via participation and to achieve improved outcomes for their people.

and government officers, and what can be learned from this about participation in policy making to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage.

Aboriginal participation in policy making has been theorised via a remote community case study, which revealed the processes that took place when an Aboriginal community attempted to assert its right to participate in policy planning and decision-making, claiming space for participation and renegotiating the terms of its working relationship with government. Concepts about the meanings, significance and effectiveness of participation, drawn from international literature, were applied to the context of Aboriginal policy making and found to be salient to analysis of negotiations between Aboriginal people and governments in Australia.

Research findings support a need for greater emphasis on Aboriginal participation in decision-making processes, as both means and ends to empowerment and improvement of Indigenous lives. The case study revealed a strong drive and commitment from Aboriginal community members and their representatives to participate as local decision-makers, and a range of imperatives that urge governments to strive to enable this. However it has also revealed numerous structural and resource challenges that undermined the level of Aboriginal involvement and quality of participation achievable.

Participation is a complex process that requires careful staging, commitment and resourcing over longer periods of time than governments typically allow. Interaction is hampered when high levels of mistrust exist in relationships between governments and Aboriginal communities, typically due to legacies of colonisation, the damage and hurt caused by past policies (Gooda and Kiss 2013). The case study confirmed a need for both government officers and communities to be better resourced, trained and equipped with the capacities they need to enable them to achieve optimum participation within the challenging intercultural negotiation space. Government should not underestimate the need for quality facilitation and other types of support and resources required to strengthen and build local governance and leadership in communities, as this is vital to enable local communities to effectively participate in decision-making to the extent that they so desire, and which is their human and collective Indigenous right. In particular, this means addressing the shortfall in adequate funding and other supports needed by Aboriginal organisations to play their critical part in local community governance, as well as providing service delivery and local employment.

Optimal participation relies on, and facilitates, sustained relationships between groups of people, working towards shared goals. This may, in turn, generate longed-for healing

processes for Aboriginal communities, growing the social capital and collective efficacy that may be essential to collective Indigenous wellbeing. However, participatory processes require relationships built on trust and integrity that develop over time.

The case study showed that broad community participation, via processes like the women's workshops, can offer unrivalled insights for policy making, for they allow deeper understandings to emerge about the particular, complex social problems and service delivery challenges facing remote Aboriginal communities. Importantly such participation contributes both local perspectives and Aboriginal worldviews to the framing of problems and prioritising of initiatives to address them. Meanwhile, representative participation by an Aboriginal community governance body like the WGACWP, offers innovation to policy making, via new framings of both policy problems and solutions starting from a place-based perspective. During the LIP Refresh period, the WGACWP would decide to take control of planning processes, driving a new agenda to redirect the focus of government investment toward commitments that would support and strengthen local Aboriginal services, enhance community cohesion and wellbeing, and leave tangible legacies from RSD in Walgett.

While government did not ultimately make the most of the contributions offered via Aboriginal participation in Walgett during RSD, claiming space to participate brought a number of positive outcomes for local people and for community governance, at least in the short term, for these processes brought people together to deliberate on local problems and negotiate over proposals and contributions. Meanwhile there were high quality outputs from participation processes in Walgett that may inform future planning and policy making.

Participation literature theorises that optimal levels of participation can be transformative of people's lives (see White's typology, **Figure 2** on p39). In the case study there were clear signs that participation had the potential to empower Aboriginal people, while simultaneously contributing high quality local knowledge and informed advice to government. Had government been able to utilise this advice more fully, it seems likely to have enhanced planning and potential for positive outcomes from investments made. It is clear that the benefits offered by Aboriginal participation in policy making cannot and will not be realised unless governments are prepared to divest decision making power, so that local decisions can be made about investing in the things that Aboriginal people decide they need.

Participation importantly offers Aboriginal people an opportunity to drive the agenda, to be the policy makers, empowered to devise opportunities, to envision and act towards securing

better futures for their families and communities. Governments can facilitate Aboriginal participation by allowing adequate time and resources to support participatory processes, by valuing outcomes contributed via participation, and working in the order of needs and priorities identified by Aboriginal people. Supporting participation requires genuine political will, and processes in place to allow power in decision-making to be shared, or devolved to, Aboriginal people.

If Aboriginal people demand and desire participation in decision-making in matters that affect them, as their human and Indigenous right, Australian governments tend to describe their interactions with Aboriginal people as engagement, rather than participation. As critiqued in the thesis, this alternate terminology leads to slippage in understandings about what government officers are committed to do. Are they obliged to engage Aboriginal people as stakeholders and policy actors (as participants), or merely to engage them as the objects of policy and service delivery improvements who need to become 'engaged' by new services on offer?

Participation in policy making, as called for by the Aboriginal participants in this study, has the potential to re-empower Aboriginal peoples disempowered by the ongoing impacts of colonisation. It may well be the missing ingredient Australian governments have been seeking to fulfil commitments they have made to reduce or eliminate Indigenous disadvantage. Participation can provide the means and ends to overcome the disadvantage and marginalisation that are legacies of colonisation, enhancing the collective efficacy and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, and enabling local control over Aboriginal development towards achievement of the goals and aspirations that Aboriginal people choose to prioritise.

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## Appendix A: Interview Topic Guide Indigenous community representatives

### Stage 1 interview guide:

Identify yourself and your role in the community <sup>124</sup>

In this interview, I'm going to first ask you to think back to the time you first became aware of RSD:

How do you think the community originally saw its role in RSD?

Were you involved in workshops or other processes to develop the LIP?

What's been your involvement since then?

What hopes did you personally have for RSD and Closing the Gap in general?

In your view, what is the overall purpose of RSD? What do you see are its main aims?

Why has Walgett been chosen as an RSD community?

Tell me about your experience so far of negotiating RSD in Walgett:

- how have you personally been involved / how has the WP been involved?

More generally now, let's talk about any particular issues that have arisen:

- any difficulties so far, any roadblocks?

- achievements to date?

- can you identify any particular issues that still need to be dealt with

[eg: process issues - resource issues - relationship issues - information issues]

What do you see as the role of the Working Party in re RSD? What role does it aspire to play?

Realistically, how well do you think the CWP is able to carry out this role?

Have there been opportunities for the community or CWP to provide advice & oversight on RSD?

How satisfied do you feel with the processes that have taken place?

What, in your view, are the 3 key challenges facing Walgett's Aboriginal community?

What strengths does the Walgett community have that you'd like to see incorporated into policy?

Do you think it was important for the Working Party to develop its own list of community priorities? If so, why?

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<sup>124</sup> Anonymity of interviewees will be protected via an individual pseudonym and generic role title. A pseudonym may also be used for town name if the WP deems this appropriate.

In your view, what does the term self-determination mean?

Is it a goal or something that is being implemented or practised in Walgett today?

What do you see as the vital steps and stages along the way to progressing the community priorities?

Blue sky thinking:

Setting aside reality for a moment, if there were none of the known barriers to getting things done, what 2 initiatives would you personally like to see happen in Walgett?

### **SCENARIOS for Community Representatives**

#### **Scenario 1: (wellbeing, self determination)**

Now think about what wellbeing means to you as an Aboriginal person living in Walgett. I'm going to describe an imaginary scenario.

Imagine a time in the future when the Aboriginal community has been given the power to set out or define its own path to achieve wellbeing. As a community leader you are part of a group helping lead the community to define 3 most important things needed for Aboriginal people in Walgett to have sense of wellbeing.

You may decide to run community consultations to help define these goals. What you predict the outcomes will be?

#### **Scenario 2: (empowerment, community development, self determination)**

Imagine the community has been approached by a large private donor who has offered to generously fund one or more projects in Walgett provided the community can come up with its own creative ideas that seem feasible and likely to make a big difference for Aboriginal people in Walgett.

To come up with some creative ideas that draw on community knowledge and experience, a series of community consultations have been run. You have played a key role in organising and facilitating these consultations.

Describe how you feel after the workshops. How do you think others feel?

#### **Scenario 3: (blocking)**

Imagine that you've just completed community consultations about community priorities. You are ready to start negotiating with government about the community's wish to re-shape policy objectives and measured outcomes.

The Working Party turns up to meet with officers from the ROC expecting to be able to start negotiating around the community's proposals. Instead you are told that time is pressing on, funding for programs needs to be spent, and government has an obligation to show results in

relation to existing CTG targets. You're told it's too hard and too late to amend the Closing the Gap building blocks or the LIP at this late stage.

What would you do next?

**Stage 2 interview guide:**

Some time has passed since our last interview. How have community consultations and negotiations around RSD progressed since we last spoke?

- achievements / progress
- difficulties, roadblocks
- issues still to be dealt with
- what resources have community consultations and negotiations with government required?
- has the process led to any conflict or frustration?
- have there been any positive or negative outcomes for the community from the consultation process?
- any positive or negative outcomes from the policy negotiation process?
- what do you predict will be the likely outcome of negotiations going forward?

Are you aware of any other factors (politics, policy changes) coming into play that might have an impact on the way that RSD is being implemented in NSW?

**Stage 3 interview guide:**

Thinking about how RSD has been implemented in your community over the past 4 years, how would you rate its success?

- has it made a difference to people's lives?
- achievements
- difficulties, roadblocks
- issues still to be dealt with

How well do you feel RSD has succeeded in contributing to the overall objectives of Closing the Gap for your community?

- do you feel the CWP / community initiative has improved delivery of RSD outcomes?



- how did you personally feel about the processes that took place?
- what might have been done differently?

Do you perceive any long term benefits in your community's proactive approach to be recognised as active policymakers rather than merely service recipients?

What might other policymakers and Indigenous communities take away from observing your experience?

## **Appendix B: Interview Topic Guide - Government officers**

### **Stage 1 interview guide:**

What is your role in implementing the Remote Service Delivery (RSD) commitment?

What do you see as the core objectives of RSD?

- in general / nationally

(ie: are core objectives reform of agency practices, to streamline fragmented services, introduce efficiencies via whole of government co-ordination; intra-government and interagency co-operation; or is it about improving relationships govt and communities; or mainly about achieving specific outcomes on the ground?)

- are there particular objectives most relevant or important in NSW?

- in Walgett?

How do these relate to the overall objectives of CTG?

How has the process of implementing RSD progressed to date?

- achievements to date

- difficulties so far, any roadblocks

- foreseeable issues needing to be dealt with

Are you aware of Walgett Community Working Party's (WP) intention to conduct action research to develop a Land & Culture building block as part of its engagement with RSD and CTG?

- what do you anticipate will be the outcomes of this process?

- advantages / disadvantages of the community's chosen path

- how might government respond or negotiate with the WP?

Might there be indirect positive outcomes from the action research process?

- is there flexibility in CTG and RSD to allow a re-negotiation of building blocks at this stage?

- who has discretion to decide / negotiate with the community?

Are there any risks involved?

(eg: people feeling discouraged by a process that may not be able to meet expectations, or be fully realised in the end)

What do you see as the potential outcomes of this process?

Blue sky thinking:

Setting aside reality for a moment, if there were none of the known barriers to getting things done, what 2 initiatives would you personally like to see happen in Walgett?

Scenario responses:

(See separate scenario options following)

**Stage 2 interview guide:**

Some time has passed since our last interview. I'm going to ask how you see the implementation of RSD progressing to date:

- in general / nationally
- in NSW
- in Walgett

How has the process of implementing RSD progressed since we last spoke?

- achievements
- difficulties, roadblocks
- foreseeable issues still to be dealt with

How well do you feel RSD is succeeding in contributing to the overall objectives of CTG?

Now let's talk about particular processes of negotiation around the proposed Land & Culture building block in Walgett.

What's taken place since our last interview?

- what resources has this negotiation required?
- has the process led to any conflict or frustration for either party?
- can you foresee any positive or negative outcomes from this policy negotiation process?
- what do you foresee will be the likely outcome of the negotiation?

Have any other factors come into play that have changed the landscape in terms of how RSD is being implemented in NSW, and what this might mean for the community's desire to add a Building Block?

**Stage 3 interview guide:**

Reflecting on processes of implementing RSD, how would you describe the success of implementation of RSD:

- in general / nationally
- in NSW / Walgett

How has RSD implementation progressed since we last spoke?

- achievements
- difficulties, roadblocks
- foreseeable issues still to be dealt with

How well do you feel RSD has succeeded in contributing to the overall objectives of CTG?

In terms of the particular processes of negotiation around the proposed Land & Culture building block in Walgett, I'll ask you now to reflect on what's taken place since our last interview:

- do you think the CWP / community initiative has enhanced delivery of original RSD goals?
- has it hampered achievement of any RSD goals?
- how did you personally feel about the processes that took place?
- what might have been done differently?

Do you perceive any long term benefits in this community's proactive approach to be recognised as active policymakers rather than merely service recipients?

What might other policymakers and community participants take away from observing this engagement?

## **Scenario responses: Government officers**

### **Scenario 1 - RSD officials (implementation problem: staffing )**

Consider the following hypothetical scenario relating to an Indigenous community we'll call Y, an RSD project community.

For RSD to be optimally implemented in Y, 3 locally-based RSD roles have been created and advertised. However, challenges of remote recruitment mean that only one of the roles has been filled within the first 2 years of the rollout. Time is pressing on, with funding for this program needing to be spent and an obligation to start showing results in relation to Y's CTG targets.

What impact do recruitment problems have on rolling out RSD in Y? What options are there to overcome or work around this major stumbling block to RSD rollout in Y?

### **Scenario 2 (implementation problems: consultation )**

Although a Local Implementation Plan (LIP) has been signed off in relation to RSD community Y, the community's Working Party are voicing concerns and demanding more say in how RSD is shaped and rolled out in their community. It appears they are unhappy with how the roll-out is going to date, seeking more information about how money is being spent and what decisions are going on 'behind closed doors', as they perceive it.

Though they would like to address or placate community concerns, officials feel constrained by departmental and agency confidentiality. They can also see a bigger picture and have pressures bearing upon them from superiors and other stakeholders.

Progress on achieving LIP goals has been slower than expected. Nevertheless, the community continues to demand more consultation and feedback. What is your best course of action?

### **Scenario 3 (implementation problems: governance/community working party )**

RSD community Y has a long-standing Community Working Party (CWP), whose membership was refreshed at the start of RSD. The CWP is recognised by the local community and by various government and non-government agencies as representing the majority of indigenous people in Y.

Is there anything government can do to ensure that different families and sectors of the community are fully represented in negotiations and decision making?

### **Scenario 4 (implementation problems: tiers of government )**

The CWP in Y has been involved in negotiating, drafting and signing off its (LIP) with Commonwealth and State government representatives. The local council also had some input, sending along a representative (Aboriginal liaison officer) to every second consultative meeting. In the end however, Council did not sign off on the LIP, nor has their commitment thus far shown to be particularly enthusiastic.

There are some very important LIP outputs aligned to Building Blocks which ideally require Council input. What processes might take place to enable State and Federal RSD officials to leverage vital Council support and activity towards Closing the Gap?

Scenario 5: (service delivery bench-marking)

Baseline mapping of services has been carried out for Y.

A key principle of the National Partnership Agreement on RSD is that remote Indigenous communities are entitled to standards of services and infrastructure broadly comparable with that of "other Australians in similar sized and located communities with similar levels of need" (CGRIS 2011).

Are resourcing needs for Y to be calculated via close benchmarking against a particular 'non-Indigenous comparator community'? If so, can specific details of this process be provided to community leaders in Y? (eg: which community is Y being compared against, how was the selection made, and is baseline data for the other community able to be shared)

CGRIS 2011, Australian Government webpage: Office of the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services, [www.cgris.gov.au/site/rsd.asp](http://www.cgris.gov.au/site/rsd.asp), accessed 1/9/11, p2

Scenario 6: (community as clients or active partners in policymaking)

Though Closing the Gap targets have been widely embraced by government and community sectors, the building block action and reporting framework has been criticised for ignoring important Indigenous priorities (eg: relating to culture, land, language).

In focussing on service delivery, RSD positions Indigenous communities as clients in receipt of services. The CWP in Y argues the community holds knowledge that positions them as experts in their own lives. They wish to be genuinely involved in and consulted about ongoing decision-making and planning to improve services in Y, beyond 'lip-service' consultation.

The CWP is pushing for more information to be shared with the community, enabling them to play a more active part in planning and decision-making to improve local conditions. What scope is there for allowing the community in Y to play a more active part in shaping policy, identifying important measures of success and participating in processes to implement change?



# Talking back to policy: a case study of Indigenous community participation

Community research report

May 2014

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## Acknowledgement and thanks:

Sincere thanks to the members of Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (WGACWP) for their support, involvement and collaboration in this research project. The PhD research would not have been possible without the individual and combined support of the WGACWP. This case study of community participation in policy making is testament to the enduring and tenacious commitment of WGACWP members in representing the needs, interests and priorities of Walgett's Aboriginal community over many years.

This community report is about research conducted from 2012 to 2014 in Walgett NSW by Inara Walden, PhD researcher with the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia, in collaboration with Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party

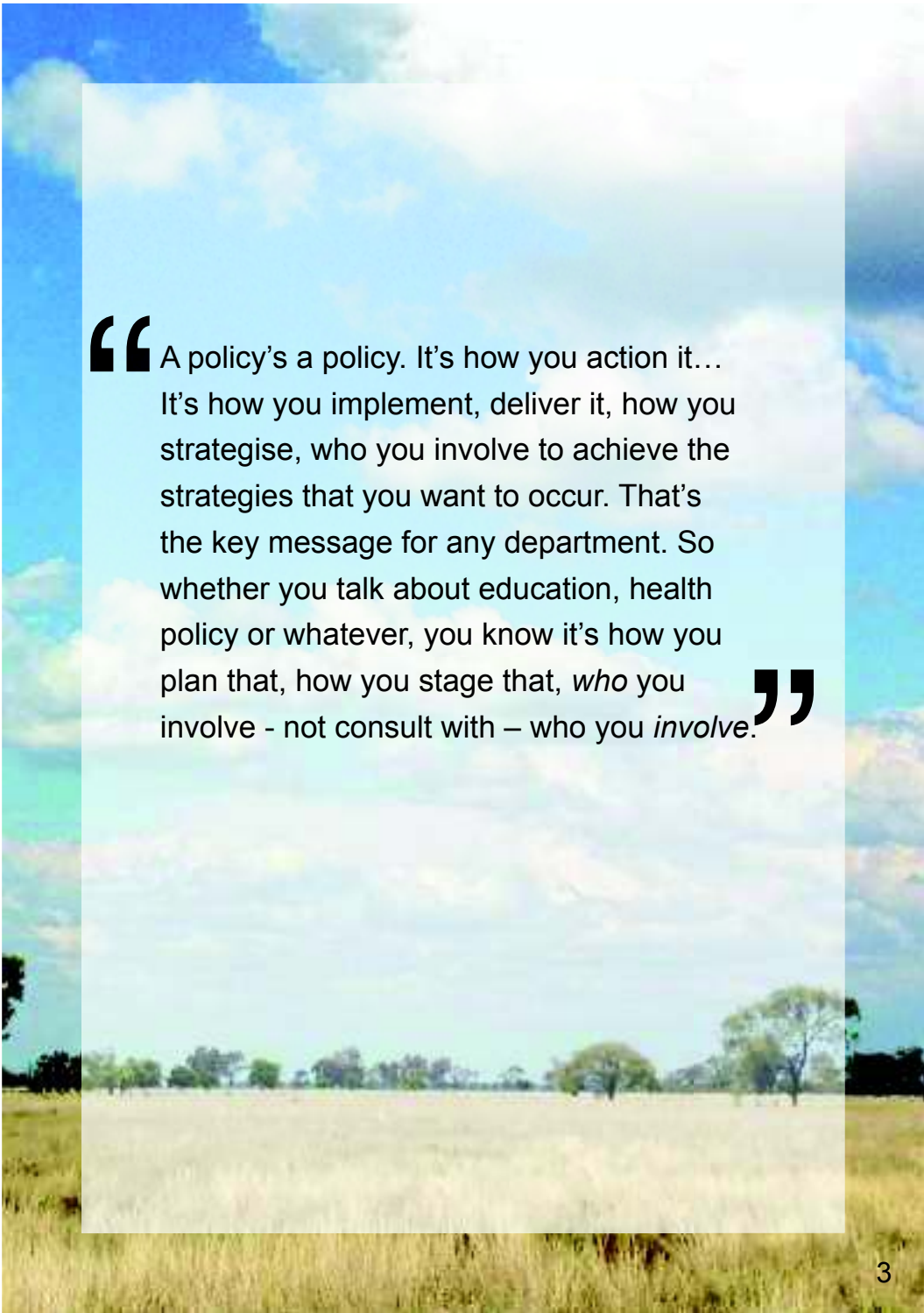
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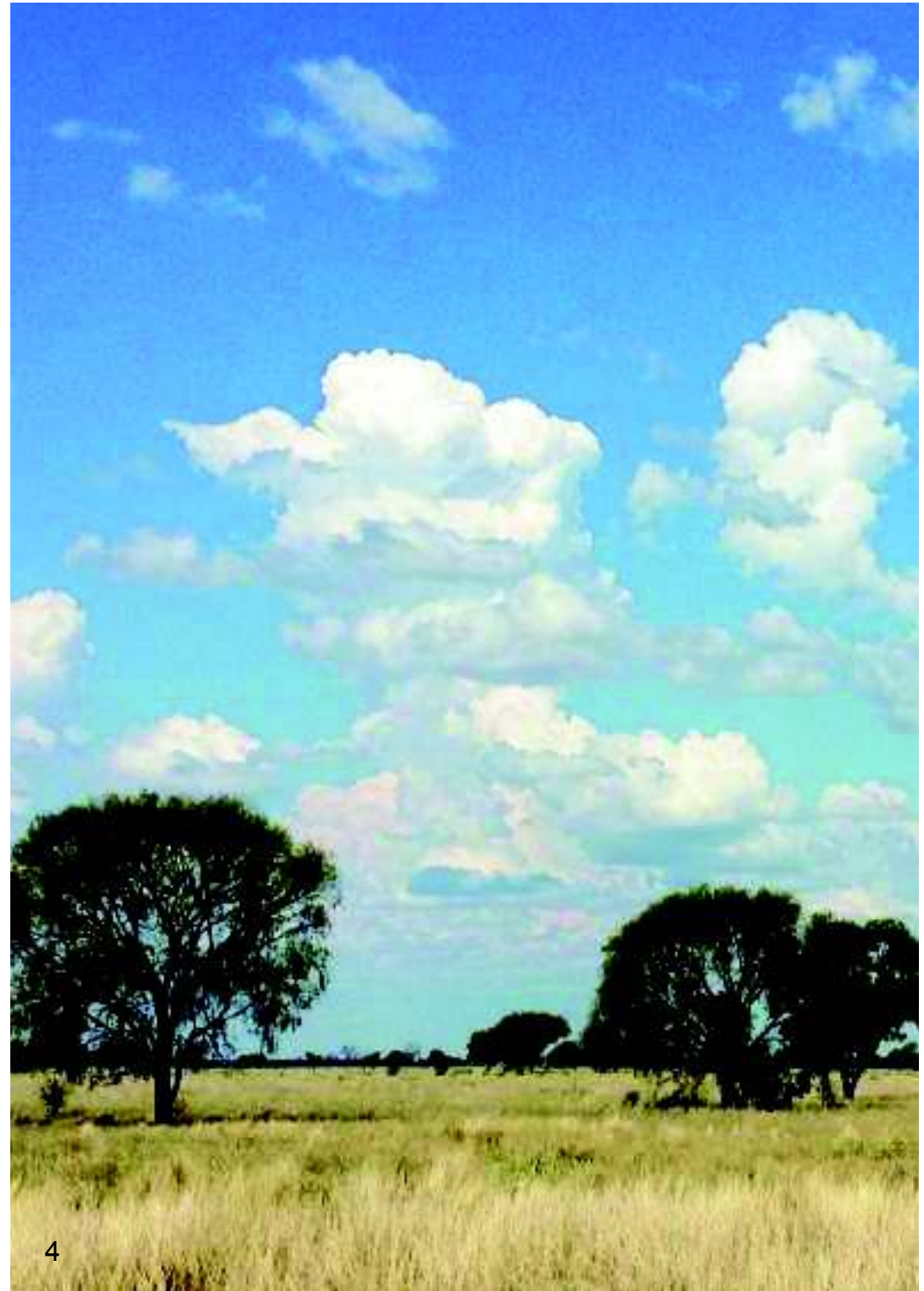
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“ A policy’s a policy. It’s how you action it...  
It’s how you implement, deliver it, how you  
strategise, who you involve to achieve the  
strategies that you want to occur. That’s  
the key message for any department. So  
whether you talk about education, health  
policy or whatever, you know it’s how you  
plan that, how you stage that, *who* you  
involve - not consult with – who you *involve*. ”





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Quotes from community research participants are cited anonymously throughout this report.

## Participation as an Indigenous right

Participation in Indigenous policy making is a primary concern of this PhD research.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007) now recognises:

“Indigenous peoples have the right to *participate* in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves...” (article 18)

“States shall consult and cooperate in good faith... to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect (Indigenous people)” (article 19)

“Indigenous people have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development”

“...(and) the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions” (article 23)



## Why is participation important?

In his address to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda emphasised both a pressing need for ground-up involvement by Aboriginal people in planning and design of services delivered in their communities, and the need to build and support the capacity of Indigenous people to undertake this participatory role. He said that:

“Much of the failure of service delivery to Indigenous people and communities, and the lack of sustainable outcomes, is a direct result of the failure to effectively engage with Indigenous people and of the failure to invest in building the capacity of Indigenous communities to participate.” - Mick Gooda, 2010

According to Gooda, participation is a vital, if frequently overlooked, element necessary to achieve positive outcomes in the area of Indigenous policy making. Speaking about the Government's Northern Territory Intervention, he identified that the “single most valuable resource” that initiative had lacked from its inception was the “positive, willing participation of the people it was intended to help” (Gooda 2010, para. 23).

While Closing the Gap seems to have signalled a renewal of energy and commitment from federal and state governments toward tackling shameful levels of Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, Indigenous leaders have expressed concern about the rapid development of new policy reforms, shaped and implemented by governments without “significant engagement and participation by Indigenous peoples” (Calma 2008). According to Dr Tom Calma:

“It's absolutely vital that the people whom governments are hoping to help in any given policy context are active players in the design and delivery of the policies and programs that result.” - Tom Calma, 2009

## Different levels and features of participation

Participation takes place at different levels:


federal, state, regional or community

Depending on who is involved, what participation is about, how often, at what stage of planning processes it takes place, and to what ends it is applied, participation can also be:

broad, deep, shallow or narrow (Cornwall 2008)

Spaces for participation can either be invited or created by people for themselves by their own initiative, such as networks of neighbours or workers, women's groups or social movements.





Invited participation is usually structured and owned by those who provide it. This means it is important to consider who is initiating participation, for what purpose and how that participation is being framed.

Getting the level of participation right is important. Individuals and communities may at times feel they are being over-consulted without really being listened to. It can be especially frustrating for those who commit their time to a consultation process to perceive that the views and suggestions of their community are not being acted on by governments.

“ People on the ground actually like talking to the decision makers. They're sick and tired of the in-betweeners 'cause they don't know where the information has gone – whether it's been chopped to pieces, sanitized to the point where it's ineffective. So when people actually get to meet and greet with high level decision makers they are very happy. You get a more positive response. ”

## Research questions

The main research question of this thesis is: What is the nature of Aboriginal participation in policy planning and decision-making with Australian governments?

Five research questions have been used to explore this:

1. In what ways is participation in policy planning and decision-making desired and pursued by Aboriginal people?
2. What signs are there that Aboriginal participation is being valued and enabled by Australian governments?
3. What sorts of action might an Aboriginal community take to assert a right of participation?
4. What issues and challenges impact the negotiation space between governments and Aboriginal communities when planning and implementing policy?
5. What are the outcomes of participation for community representatives and for government officers, and what can we learn from this about participation in policymaking to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage?



## Background to this research

This research set out to observe and analyse the nature of policy interactions between Australian governments and Indigenous community representatives in Walgett, a remote community in north western New South Wales with a fascinating history and a vibrant and strong Aboriginal community. It is a community that also faces many ongoing social problems as a result of the enduring and ongoing impacts of colonisation.

The research was carried out in partial fulfilment of a PhD thesis by Inara Walden, a student with the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW.

The researcher was invited by the WGACWP to undertake this research as an independent observation of the community's experiences interacting with government in the implementation of the Remote Service Delivery commitment, as part of Australia's Closing the Gap policy agenda.

### Critical issues for remote Australia include:

1. Strong demographic trends in rural and remote areas, with increasingly young, Aboriginal populations, as non-Aboriginal residents either move away or age
2. Changes to the rural economy in past decades have greatly reduced opportunities for Aboriginal people to participate in paid work
3. High costs and often complexity involved in providing services remotely

4. Communities may feel they are under 'remote control', when decisions that affect Indigenous lives are made by agency heads many hundreds of kilometres away in Sydney and Canberra (Drewery 2009).

Community representatives see themselves as experts in their own lives and communities, but are rarely recognised as rightful local decision makers.

### Key service delivery & coordination problems in Walgett:

- Difficulty in recruiting trained staff needed to provide/maintain services in Walgett. Insufficient skill-base locally and difficulty in attracting skilled people to relocate to the community
- Inefficiency or duplication, such as multiple employment services funded by government although there are few jobs on offer in the community
- New programs popping up without local consultation, then competing with existing programs run by local Aboriginal organisations, and
- Critical under-servicing of the two Aboriginal villages located outside the town boundaries

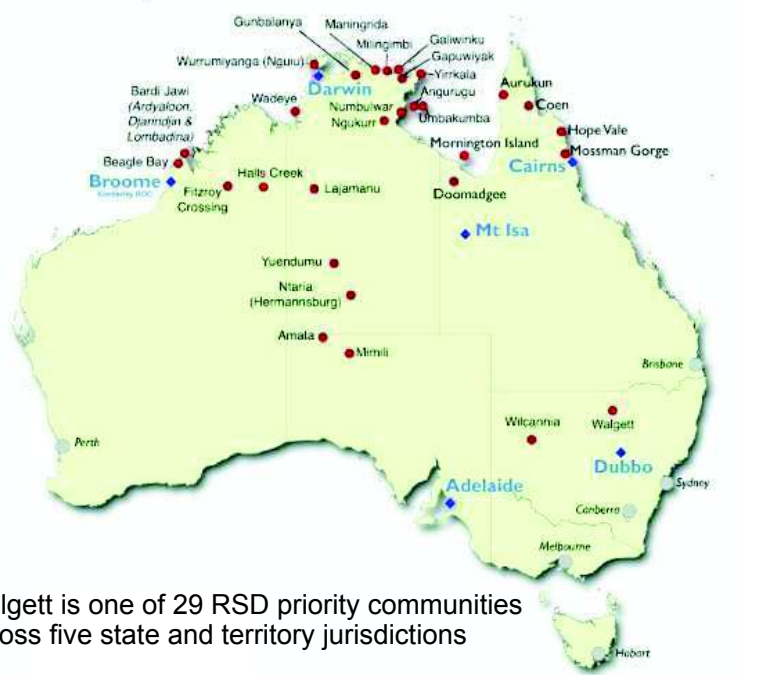


## Remote Service Delivery policy context

Walgett was chosen by government as one of 29 remote priority communities to be the focus of COAG's Remote Service Delivery (RSD) commitment.

Socio-economic disadvantage and social problems affect each of the 29 priority communities. Each of the communities is also significantly under-served relative to need.

RSD committed \$291.2 million over six years from 1 July 2009 to mid 2014 to 'improve access to government services and facilities, raise the quality of these services, and better support Indigenous community governance and leadership' in the 29 priority locations (Australian Government 2009).



Walgett is one of 29 RSD priority communities across five state and territory jurisdictions

## Who was involved in RSD?

COAG (the Council of Australian Governments) committed federal and state governments to work together on RSD, as well as with Indigenous communities, to improve coordination of service delivery in the 29 priority remote locations.

Local Councils were later included too, as a third tier of government that ought to be important players in RSD.

A Regional Office of Coordination based in Dubbo was the site of co-location for state and federal officers charged with implementing RSD in Walgett and Wilcannia, the two NSW RSD communities. An RSD coordinator was also based on the ground in each community.

A state management committee (SMC) met bi-monthly, including about 20 senior public servants from different departments and agencies identified as 'senior responsible owners' (SROs) of RSD activities. Meetings of these SROs were designed to enable more cooperation and coordinated activity between different agencies.

Walgett's Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party (WGACWP) was the Indigenous governance body that operated as a key point of contact between Walgett's Aboriginal community and government over RSD. Sitting on the Working Party are representatives of local Indigenous organisations involved in health and education, the Elders and Local Land Council, as well as members representing the interests of youth, women and men.





Walgett's Local Implementation Plan was developed with 210 items. It had to address the 7 building block areas of Closing the Gap.



## What was RSD funding for?

One apparently widely misunderstood aspect of RSD was that its funding was allocated to be spent on processes that might improve governments' systems for coordinating services into Indigenous communities. It was not therefore, intended to be spent directly within the communities to fund particular projects and initiatives.

A separate flexible stream of RSD funding for 'special projects' was however established in early 2010, with \$46 million committed over three years dedicated as a flexible funding pool able to provide one off grants for community identified projects, including improvements to infrastructure that could improve service delivery (Australian Government 2011).

**Outcome:** Money from the RSD 'special projects' fund was allocated to upgrading Gingie and Namoi access roads in Walgett and to refurbishing the Foundation Hall. However, by early 2014, after a change of federal government, the community was notified that these commitments had been withdrawn.

Ultimately it was not clear to the WGACWP what money had been spent on Walgett as part of the RSD. Information about where RSD special project funds had been spent was eventually provided to the community, however annual financial reports on the special project fund were not made publicly available after 2011.



## How was this research carried out?

The research used Walgett's experience as a case study of community participation in decision-making towards policy implementation.

Information from recorded interviews conducted in 2012 and 2013 was the primary source of data for this case study, combined with policy documents and other publicly available material.

Interviews were conducted with more than 20 individuals, including:

- WGACWP members / community representatives
- Government officers working on RSD, drawn from three different tiers of government



## Key findings of the research

### 1. Low satisfaction about the level and type of participation community representatives were offered

- Insufficient support and resourcing to enable representatives and/or other community members to participate
- Little or no opportunity for the broader community to directly participate in processes to develop the local implementation plan or to provide feedback
- A communications strategy devised by WGACWP was never fully implemented or supported
- The creation of a secretariat position to support the WGACWP's work on RSD saw negotiations between government and the Working Party that were conflicted and drawn out, derailing good will and seriously threatening the ongoing viability of the WGACWP's involvement.





“Originally we thought our role would be there for the whole process. Any decisions made would come through the Working Party and we'd be the voice for the community.”

“ (Government) don't realise the value of the Working Party and how they can use it. And the Working Party's offering themselves as the sort of first port of call to give information about Walgett. So the Working Party can focus what they offer to Walgett in an effective way. And most don't seem to use it - let alone value it - it's amazing really because you'd think that was the first thing they'd want to do before they even design programs to be delivered in Walgett - you know they'd need to actually find out what the needs are and how best to deliver services into Walgett. But you know they're not even having those first yarns.”

## 2. Problematic processes

- Processes established for RSD in Walgett were perceived as problematic
- Existing service coordination mechanisms included interagency meetings, had been poorly facilitated by government for some time
- Local government made a public declaration blaming the WGACWP for failures to achieve outcomes and apparently justifying its refusal to participate in joint meetings
- Over time, the WGACWP was eventually able to negotiate a seat at more senior planning tables concerned with RSD delivery in the community, including a new regional coordination process and Working Party Chairs invited to attend State Management Committee meetings
- During the middle years of the RSD, the WGACWP was able to call on the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services (CGRIS) for help to resolve intractable process and relationship issues between the Working Party and governments at various levels
- The CGRIS was described by community representatives as playing an important ombudsman-like role as well as an 'un-blocking' role for Indigenous communities, however by 2014, after a change of government at the federal level, the CGRIS role was deleted. At this stage there were six months of RSD still to run.



“ Perhaps if there'd been better facilitation, you know these things might have been discussed rather than just a grenade being delivered at an open meeting. ”

“ The Working Party is there for the community, we're the *Community Working Party*, and so it'd be great if we're aware of all that so we can *feed* back to the community, and let the community know that we're being proactive in a sense. ”

“ I mean an example of one of the frustrations that I've had being on the Working Party is programs being bought into town or delivered and Working Party not being aware of them, or not being aware until the last minute when they've actually been implemented here. Or even funding, because we initially thought if they're getting funding as part of the RSD then the Working Party should know about it, but a lot of the times we didn't... ”

### 3. Frustrations with RSD implementation

- Frustrations were expressed that outcomes of RSD spending within the community were hard to identify. It was difficult for WGACWP and other community members to discern what RSD had set out to do, how it would improve services and service coordination. The aims and possibilities of RSD were thus neither transparent nor clear to the community.
- Community representatives found the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) to be too long and confusing, with no clear benchmarks, timelines, deadlines or outcome measures established against which to assess progress
- Alternate planning done by the WGACWP during a dedicated workshop in late 2012 came up with a streamlined list of 12 Community Priorities that the Working Party asked government to consider funding. When government requested detailed briefs about the 12 Community Priorities, WGACWP members worked hard to develop these at short notice. Ultimately members felt very disappointed to receive very little feedback or response from government about the proposals.



“When we sit there voluntarily and we've got day time jobs and we're involved in other community organisations as well, you know like it became quite onerous and tedious to actually get the work done and I think like individual organisations because we didn't really have the man power to (backfill our roles) - really we shut the doors. It's just one meeting after another, and i suppose visiting government bodies and things like that.”

“So what we said as the Community Working Party is that well we'd like to know the papers that go to the SMC so we have the time to contribute and say what's right, what's wrong and whatever. 'Oh you can't do that' and we said "Why not? We'd like to know what you're saying about us.”

#### 4. Difficult role for WGACWP representatives

- The WGACWP is an unincorporated body whose members are unpaid and frequently time-poor, holding numerous other roles and responsibilities in the community.

- Tensions arose over the Community Working Party's role in decision making:

If governments needed to consult the community for particular purposes at various stages of RSD implementation, WGACWP members considered themselves leaders, advocates and local experts, who ought to be 'involved' and influential at every stage of decision-making processes.

Working Party members felt they were often treated as a 'tick a box' consultation body for government.

- WGACWP members reported they were often criticised by community members for the lack of visible progress or improvement in the community as a result of RSD. The Working Party was held responsible for perceived failures of RSD to make a difference.

- For WGAWCP members, the role of participating with government in RSD implementation, on behalf of the broader Aboriginal community of Walgett, could be onerous. Many expressed feeling disenchanted and frustrated. At times members threatened to resign, and on occasion, actually did resign their posts in protest over behaviours of government officers, particularly because of poor communication, lack of information sharing and perceived lack of respect for the WGACWP's role as local advisers and decision-makers.



## 5. Challenges faced by governments

Various factors were mentioned as affecting governments' ability to engage well with the Aboriginal community in Walgett over the RSD implementation, including:

- High staff turnover and difficulty to recruit to key RSD positions
- Tensions between tiers of government
- A changing political environment
- Pressure on government officers to achieve visible outcomes to progress Closing the Gap targets
- Tight time frames to implement complex processes
- Communication between governments, agencies and with communities was challenging

“ I couldn't *remember* all the people but there's been a huge amount of government officials coming in and out of the community. And so many of them have changed their roles or gone into different government positions. So you never really know who's who in the zoo, or what's happening because you always have different government representatives. ”

“ Well it's just the next person's agenda, what they want to happen, what they see as good for the community. And it's basically starting all over again. So they don't have that history of what's happened, and so the WGACWP has to basically repeat themselves – go through the whole process again... ”

### What did community representatives do in the face of challenges?

A range of strategies and processes were used to fight for more say and a stronger voice and involvement. The Working Party lobbied for:

- Information
- Opportunities to engage
- Administrative support

And it:

- Developed a communication strategy
- Embarked on this research collaboration to document their experience



The WGACWP also carried out its own deliberations:

- Analysed Closing the Gap policy and proposed the new Land and Culture building block
- Developed 12 Community Priorities to simplify and focus long term goals
- Encouraged government to see the benefit of community planning, and
- Implemented action research processes to achieve its goals

### Successes of the Community's approach

Despite tensions and setbacks along the way, successes of the WGACWP's approach include:

- The WGACWP was described as professional and good at holding government to account over RSD commitments
- More flexible supportive enabling processes developed towards the end as a result of WGACWP continuous feedback
- Planning processes run by the WGACWP promised a longer-term legacy than immediate outcomes of RSD
- Some community representatives said they felt empowered by participation in independent deliberations to develop the 12 Community Priorities as locally-driven, long-term goals. However frustrations were also expressed about not being able to achieve funding or support for the Community Priorities via RSD.

## Conclusion

If Indigenous disadvantage has come about as a direct result of colonization, dispossession and institutionalized racism, then re-empowering Indigenous people via real opportunities to participate in decision-making about policy problems and solutions seems a vital missing piece of the puzzle. Australian governments need to recognize and address this to impact closing the gap and genuinely improve Indigenous lives, opportunities and livelihoods.

Participation is a complex process, and government officers as well as communities need to be better resourced, trained and equipped with capacities that will enable them to achieve optimum participation.





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## Appendix D: Timeline of RSD in Walgett (including key policy events/phases preceding Closing the Gap and RSD)

Date	Event on RSD timeline	Comments/observations
1990s - 2005	<b>ATSIC period:</b> Murdi Paaki Regional Council (MPRC) is one of 36 elected regional councils (Murdi Paaki region is established after amalgamation of the 2 western NSW ATSIC regions in 1994)	Community Working Parties (CWPs) form in the various communities during this period
1996	MPRC negotiates with NSW Government a <u>Regional Agreement on Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure</u> ; an Implementation Manual is prepared for this agreement (1997)	<p>Walgett's first Community Working Party called the Gamiloroi Goondi Community Working Party forms - focus at this time is on the housing &amp; environmental health infrastructure initiative</p> <p>MPRA emphasises the significant drive in various local communities in the region to work collectively to advocate for rights, social, housing and other initiatives over time; and that formation of Community Working Parties often extended or formalised pre-existing local arrangements:</p> <p>"All CWPs in the Murdi Paaki region have been spontaneous outgrowths of community aspirations for governance and self-determination" (MPRA and USYD 2015: 19)</p>
1997	<u>Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation (MPRHC)</u> established and nurtured as a strategic initiative of MPRC - a separate entity for contract delivery, training and employment of Aboriginal people in construction	
1998	<u>Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP)</u> rolled out by NSW Government. All communities involved in ACDP in the region now form CWPs to facilitate roll-out of development projects, in parallel with funded capital works	
1999	<p><u>Community Working Parties</u>: 2nd edition of Implementation Manual (Burns Aldis 1999), described as 'the first formal initiative to define and document CWP governance structures and protocols... also served as a manifesto setting out the MPRC's expectations of the way governments and government agencies would interact with communities' (MPRA and USYD 2015: 19):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each CWP identifies: the needs of its community; how to meet the needs; who is to benefit; the priorities for funding; the order of work; the suitability of solutions and how results can be measured</li> <li>• The representation on each CWP is designed to avoid undue influence by particular sectional interests</li> <li>• A CWP typically includes representatives of all local</li> </ul>	



	community controlled Aboriginal organisations; non affiliated members of the community representing young people, elders, women and others; local government; ATSIC; the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs; NSW Health; and other state and Commonwealth agencies as relevant – agency representatives do not have voting rights	
2000	<p>COAG commits to collaboration of federal, state &amp; territory governments to address Indigenous disadvantage - establishes nationally agreed priority outcomes (x12) and pledges periodic assessment of progress.</p> <p><u>Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) - Key indicators reports</u> (roughly biennial) released by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), Productivity Commission.</p>	First OID report in 2002, later Closing the Gap target areas would be incorporated into reporting remit of SCRGSP
2002-2007	<p><b>COAG Trials:</b> first whole-of-government experiment in 8 sites across the country including Murdi Paaki region, with its 16 communities in Western NSW, including Walgett.</p> <p>Trial structures include - MP Action Team, MP Steering Committee, MP Regional Group and MP Data Working Group, and Community Working Parties (CWPs)</p> <p>CWPs in Murdi Paaki region are 'refreshed' at the start of COAG Trials - now with to have a greater governance remit than in previous initiatives</p> <p>8x Project officers are employed assigned to assist the CWPs with their work</p> <p>Community Action Plans (CAPs) are developed by each of 16 communities in Murdi Paaki region as the framework for place-based service planning - developed between 2004 and 2006</p> <p>COAG Trial described as a high point of interaction between</p>	<p>While government assisted with the 'refresh' of the CWPs (ensuring Terms of Reference and processes to elect representatives) at the start of the COAG Trial, MPRA emphasises that:</p> <p>"The CWPs in Murdi Paaki region were not constituted passively in response to a whole-of-government policy agenda; they autonomously developed an appetite for governance across the gamut of issues their communities contend with" (MPRA and USYD 2015: 22)</p>

	MPRA and governments - 'vision on both sides' (MPRA and USYD 2015: 29), however slow progress and perceptions of no improvement in service delivery; lessons learned from the Trials were not heeded in set up of next Whole-of -Government exercise RSD; eg: need to properly resource community governance; allow adequate, long timeframes for community planning processes (MPRA and USYD 2015: 23)	
2003	<u>Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation (MPREC)</u> established and nurtured as a strategic initiative of MPRC (later MPRA). MPREC has continued to attract federal funding for regional delivery of services and programs, eg: CDEP and the remote employment program RJCP which replaced it after 2009; various training initiatives; and youth leadership programs	- Research informants described some tensions with the bigger regional organisation MPREC described as an 'octopus' monopolising Aboriginal service sector opportunities in the region to the detriment of smaller local organisations
2003-2012	<b>Two Ways Together</b> - partnerships, a new way of doing business with Aboriginal people - NSW Aboriginal Affairs plan:  40 discrete Aboriginal communities in NSW to be engaged via governance bodies in processes toward improved service delivery	Attorney General's performance audit (2011) would find the program failed to engage many of the communities nor to make the desired service and engagement improvements.
Mid-2004	Federal government announces abolition of ATSIC.  <u>Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly</u> - made up of Chairs of 16 Aboriginal CWPs - forms to continue as the primary regional Aboriginal representative body for Murdi Paaki region, after the demise of MPRC (ATSIC)	
2006	<u>Close the Gap Campaign for Indigenous Health Equality</u> - launched by coalition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health peak and professional bodies - aims to convince governments to introduce a national plan, and for health equity by 2030 (within a generation)	
December 2007	COAG agrees to inter-government national partnerships to tackle	

	Indigenous disadvantage	
February 2008	<u>National Apology to Stolen Generations</u> by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, introduces the concept of 'Closing the Gap' in his speech, which would become the new whole-of-government policy frame	Two weeks later Prime Minister Rudd and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Jennifer Macklin make a flying visit to Walgett, where they meet with the Community Working Party, visit Namoi and Gingie villages, and drop in on local schools ( <i>Yundiboo</i> February 2008).
November 2008	<p><b>Closing the Gap</b> policy codified in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) signed by COAG, with 6 targets and 7 building blocks established</p> <p>7 related <u>National Partnership Agreements</u> were made, each with substantial funding committed, toward Closing the Gap targets. Remote Indigenous Housing and Indigenous Health are allocated the largest financial commitment (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2013):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous Early Childhood Development (\$564.6 million over 6 years)</li> <li>• Remote Service Delivery (\$291.2 million over 6 years)</li> <li>• Indigenous Economic Participation (\$228.8 million over 5 years)</li> <li>• Remote Indigenous Housing (\$1.94 billion over 10 years)</li> <li>• Indigenous Health Outcomes (\$1.57 billion over 4 years)</li> <li>• Remote Indigenous public internet access</li> <li>• Northern Territory (\$807.4 million over the 3 years, to continue the NTER)</li> </ul>	
2009 & 2012	<b>Regional Partnership Agreements</b> (RPA) between MPRA, the Commonwealth and NSW Governments - set out 3 year regional plans for the 16 community region, including Walgett and Wilcannia. Overlaps with RSD but no clear links between the two initiatives.	While it would have been desirable for the RPAs and RSD initiatives to be linked, this was described as challenging as the two had different policy drivers, timeframes and decision-making processes (MPRA and USYD 2015: 25)

January 2009	<b>Remote Service Delivery (RSD)</b> National Partnership Agreement signed by Commonwealth, NSW & other state and territory governments - 29 priority communities identified	
April 2009	Aboriginal organisations in Walgett first learn about RSD when Government officers visit to meet with representatives - some interest and excitement about the prospect of \$ to be committed to Walgett (article in April 2009 edition of <i>Yundiboo</i> reports announcement of 'New millions for Walgett')	
26 August 2009	<p><u>First 'Community Workshop' for RSD</u> held at Euragai Goondi, a local facility in town. While meetings had previously been held with representatives of various local Aboriginal organisations, this was the first formal community meeting and announcement of RSD to the broader community in Walgett.</p> <p>'The purpose of the workshop was to present information about the RSD Partnership and hear from the community regarding local priority issues and opportunities. Presentations were also given on various key local plans and strategies that are already in place or under development.' (Walgett RSD Team 2009a)</p> <p>A Workshop Report is released, made available on WAMS website (Walgett RSD Team 2009b)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research participants reported optimism, and being pleased the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services (CGRIS) was in attendance</li> <li>- They said there was a good facilitator, but the format was not really enabling of quality group participatory work to involve different sections of the Aboriginal community - 120 people in attendance and people calling from the floor to add items to a whiteboard</li> <li>- A number of people said they had been unaware of the purpose of the meeting in advance (ie: that government was considering it to be a workshop toward LIP development) and therefore had not come prepared with ideas or information to contribute</li> <li>- Representatives of Aboriginal organisations said they were unprepared to have to stand up and give an account of their organisations (this was sprung on them)</li> </ul>

		<p>- WAMS and other organisations did make an off the cuff presentation at the meeting, but the DEG declined to do so, promising to present at a later date or offer a written submission (however, due to poor notification of the second workshop, no one from DEG was able to be present at the second community workshop)</p>
October 2009	After lengthy deliberations, DEG members decide to re-join the WGACWP; community tensions had previously kept them away.	
Late 2009	<p>RSD team appointed for Walgett - officers (DAA) and RSDC (FaHCSIA) are employed to work together as the RSD team for Walgett.</p> <p>There would be 3 different officers in Walgett's RSDC role over the 6 year period of RSD, as well as 2 periods of five month gaps when no RSDC was in the role.</p> <p>The IEO position was never appointed in Walgett, but rather moneys were re-allocated by agreement towards a Secretariat role, finally recruited by December 2012 (more than a year after it was first discussed in October 2011).</p>	
December 2009	<p>(2) <u>Second Community Workshop toward Walgett's LIP development</u> held at Euragai Goondi (see Chapter 6)</p> <p>- no workshop report appears to have been produced this time</p> <p>- research informants described workshop processes - people sat at tables in groups, butchers paper used, worked in Building Block groups as per interests and knowledge</p> <p>- described in <i>Yundiboo</i> Feb 2010, p7 as: 'a hurried attempt made</p>	<p>- DEG wasn't at the 2nd workshop, no report was recorded nor photos documenting the event</p> <p>- Representatives from DEG were not present at the hurriedly organised gathering as they were able to attend due to last minute invitation</p> <p>- Some informants said services dominated</p>

	to start Walgett's Local Implementation Plan in December, after completely inadequate consultation. All realised the draft was inadequate, but so far, no further work has been done to even agree on a process for developing the final Plan. We are impatiently awaiting signs of organising this process which will be complex and time consuming so that we get it right.'	the workshop, community were not getting a say - there was a tendency to discourage innovative or aspirational ideas put by community members as too hard or not do-able
2009 to 2010	<p><u>Baseline mapping underway for the 29 RSD communities</u> - consultants hired to do this mapping - a 'resource intensive' process (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 11)</p> <p>2009 - Senate Estimates key points from Baseline Mapping are provided for each of the RSD communities</p> <p>2010 - WGACWP received confidential full draft</p> <p>Baseline reports released too late to effect / provide information to influence LIP development and planning - the CGRIS was critical of this problematic timing in his 2nd 6 monthly report (CGRIS 2010)</p>	<p>The draft Baseline Mapping Report for Walgett was received by the community too late to usefully inform work on LIP development.</p> <p>A research informant described that while 'thoughtful intelligent people did the baseline mapping, no work was then done to evaluate and match it up with LIP items and how to meet the (Closing the Gap) targets'.</p>
Late February 2010	<p>Hurriedly arranged meeting with staff member from office of CGRIS - the visit to DEG had been unannounced - explained that the first task of RSD in 29 communities was LIP development, baseline mapping is underway with consultants</p> <p><u>DEG requests healing processes</u> be implemented for the community as part of RSD, however this would remain unheeded; a paper on the need for healing is prepared by the DEG for government, but 'no assistance came'</p>	
April 2010	Draft Terms of Reference (TORs) for WGACWP as governance body for RSD engagement	
May 2010	(1) <u>Friday afternoon workshops on RSD</u> (see Chapter 6) started up	

	between WGACWP and RSDC re the NIRA and building blocks. These ran for 4 weeks, a few hours each Friday, before the RSDC was instructed not to continue the workshops.	
June 2010	<p><u>WGACWP recognised as the local governance body for RSD engagement</u> - letter of recognition from State Manager to WGACWP acknowledges TORs and WGACWP role.</p> <p>Simultaneously DEG experiences a funding crisis after discovering it will lose over 50% of funding for annual projects, now facing real difficulties - meets with ROC/RSD manager to seek assistance</p>	NOTE: By the time WGACWP was recognised as the Aboriginal community representative body for RSD, the 2 LIP development workshops for RSD had already been run, and drafting of the LIP was in the process of being finalised.
August 2010	<p>Ceremony for <u>signing of Walgett Local Implementation Plan (LIP)</u></p> <p>- WGACWP expressed to RSD team that the LIP had errors, baseline mapping data in particular, and they were not entirely happy with the document but under pressure agreed to sign, told it was a 'living document' that would be amended; however it would not be amended until the 2012 LIP Refresh</p>	
August to December 2010	<p>(3) <u>Women's Workshops</u> held on Closing the Gap building block areas x4 workshops run in the period (see Chapter 6):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Safer Community for Women (law, justice, family violence)</li> <li>• Schooling, Jobs and Training (education, employment and training)</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Where to Now? (follow through and implementation of strategies and programs to address issues identified in the first 3 workshops (Dharriwaa Elders Group 2011: 2-3))</li> </ul>	
February 2011	Report from Women's workshops endorsed by WGACWP, provided to RSD team and released on web via DEG website	- research informant says 'we have no way to know or trace the influence it had'
2nd half of 2011	<p>Subcommittees kicked off, formed at the initiative of the WGACWP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Childhood - 1 year plan, already meeting</li> <li>• Health subcommittee to start 10 November</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schooling to go next</li> </ul>	
October 2011	<p>Proposals put to ROC by WGACWP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for <u>secretariat role</u> to support WGACWP, to be achieved by cashing in funds for IEO role; and</li> <li>- funding of a <u>communications strategy</u> (\$20,000) to enable community to be informed about what's happening with the RSD</li> </ul>	
Late Oct 2011	WGACWP considering how to develop its proposed 8th building block to reflect community values culture and land related actions and priorities; concerned to identify projects to create legacy from RSD; and wondering how to measure success of outcomes from RSD	WGACWP invites IW to help develop its proposed 8th building block (pro bono role) - later however, my role would change to assisting with the LIP Refresh workshop
December 2011	A 'showdown' takes place between the WGACWP and the ROC over access to the Communications Strategy they have been drafting. The WGACWP refuses to hand over its unfinished document to the ROC as it considers this to be its intellectual property.	
29 Feb 2012	CGRIS - the 'big man of RSD' - visits Walgett and attends WGACWP meeting - members express 'increasing dissatisfaction' with RSD	
1 May 2012	<p><u>WGACWP members resign in protest</u> over problems in dealing with the ROC: perceived lack of respect for role of the Community Working Party; still no paid secretariat to support their work; non-payment of invoice for work of interim secretariat; perceived 'bullying' over plans to run Walgett's Local Community Awareness Program (LCAP), a program to induct RSD workers</p>	<p>'Community should be leading and government listening, but they just go off and do their own thing' - WGACWP member</p> <p>WGACWP is described as 'paralysed at the moment'.</p>
	WGACWP is informed by the ROC about the LIP Refresh process coming up - WGACWP realise now no time to do a proper job of developing Land and Culture building block - this proposal will need to be set aside	
21 May 2012	The media reports Walgett Shire mayor calling for the WGACWP to be overhauled - declares he has stopped attending the	



	meetings since October 2011	
30 May 2012	CGRIS flies in to Walgett again to intervene: convinces WGACWP members to come back as interim chair/secretariat; calls a meeting with Shire Council to conciliate tensions between WGACWP and Shire.	
June 2012	<p>DEG delivers Local Community Awareness Program (LCAP) for RSD and other workers (commissioned by FaHCSIA)</p> <p>Copies of the Women's Workshop Report are provided to workshop attendees, most of whom had never heard of the report, and said it would have been good to have the document earlier.</p>	Later, FaHCSIA would propose an open tender for further delivery of the LCAP, however the WGACWP objected to this stating the program must be delivered by a local provider and DEG was the appropriate organisation to do so. Ultimately the DEG was awarded the further contract to deliver LCAP again.
September 2012	<p>(4) <u>LIP Refresh day-long workshop</u> (see chapter 6)</p> <p>- WGACWP are asked to respond within short time frame to LIP report card, provided with hard copy only</p> <p>- WGACWP decides to draft new 'refreshed' version of LIP with 12 community priorities only, replacing the LIP with over 200 items</p>	Researcher's pro bono role acting as facilitator for this workshop
November 2012	<p>Change of personnel in the NSW RSD team - senior officer's commitment made to see action on the 12 Community Priorities and 'leave a legacy of RSD'.</p> <p>WGACWP is asked to provide detailed proposals and costings for the 12 priorities. Members work hard to pull together in a short timeframe provided of just a few weeks. RSDC helps to work them up as briefs, but the WGACWP is not allowed to see the final versions of the briefs.</p>	NOTE: After the RSDC leaves the role (Jan 2013) members will be told that the briefs have been lost.
December 2012	New arrangements for WGACWP Chair to be invited to SMC meetings and Regional Steering Committee meetings.	- WGACWP chair and secretariat work to prepare papers for the meeting, which is postponed at short notice until Feb 2013.

	State manager writes to thank WGACWP for its LIP Refresh work stating that this will be held 'in high regard in discussions with agencies and other partners'.	
	<p>Secretariat role finally appointed and about to start work in Walgett. However tensions flair again and WGACWP threatens to resign over the issue of location of a workspace for the position holder - set to be placed in Council chambers instead of located in one of the Aboriginal organisations that sit on the WGACWP.</p> <p>CGRIS is called to intervene in the dispute between WGACWP and the ROC, a compromise arrangement is made.</p>	- Given frosty relations between Walgett Shire and local Aboriginal organisations, the location of the position holder in Council offices posed issues such as security of communication, storage of data and supervision of the work of the secretariat, whose role was supporting the WGACWP
March-July 2013	<p>An Aboriginal, Walgett-connected FaHCSIA officer is assigned to work with WGACWP on its Community Priorities - visits monthly and attends CWP meetings.</p> <p>As a facilitator with business, government and community background, he is assigned without a defined task - as he described it - but rather plays a governance mentoring role to help 'build the 'why?', grow vision, leadership and optimism for the community beyond the experience of RSD.</p>	- Research informants describe impact of this facilitator's involvement as positive, helping WGACWP stay focused on developing the community's own objectives, despite disappointment with RSD and government responses to the community priority proposals
May 2013	WGACWP meets with senior official to discuss community priorities . WGACWP members describe one sentence responses to each of the priorities - 'dead ends, fobbed off, no real response' to proposals - other than the Foundation Hall proposal, to which government had already committed funds; WGACWP is told of an increase in amount of commitment for this from \$300,000 to \$1.2 million.	- Informant described this as the 'peak of being gutted by government' . Having rushed to prepare papers for the chair to attend SMC, which was then postponed 3 months; then Walgett's 2nd RSDC left the post; and finally being 'fobbed off' re the community priority proposals - said they were 'all pretty disgusted and fed up'
September 2013	<p>Change of government to Abbott-Liberal Government:</p> <p>Indigenous Advancement Strategy - 5 new goals identified by government - effectively replace CTG as policy focus for government, although reporting on CTG targets continues.</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Under the new arrangements the office of Prime Minister &amp; Cabinet now assumes responsibility for all Indigenous programs, including taking over from FaHCSIA, previously a major player in the RSD commitment</li> <li>- Prime Minister appoints hand-picked advisory team (x12)</li> <li>- Announces de-funding of National Congress of Australia's First Peoples; and other significant cuts to Indigenous programs are signaled in the Government's first budget (May 2014)</li> </ul>	
October 2013	A fire at the IGA supermarket in Walgett destroys the town's only grocery store, creating a food security crisis. CGRIS is in contact with WGACWP chair, who briefs parties.	An action team is formed in the Shire to deal with the crisis in the interim before the store can be rebuilt
Early 2014	<p>CGRIS office is abolished, significantly undermining the ability of the 29 RSD communities to have a voice in communicating and raising concerns to government</p> <p>Soon after this, in February 2014 WGACWP receives a letter saying 3 major items promised from the IRSD Special Account are no longer committed - namely repair of Gingie and Namoi Roads and Foundation Hall refurbishment.</p> <p>Other RSD communities also receive similar letters declining previously promised financial commitments.</p>	
June 2014	RSD formally ends	
Late July 2014	RSD Evaluation report released	

Australian Indigenous Health/*InfoNet* (2013) 'What are the National partnership agreements and how do they fit in?'  
<http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap/key-facts/what-are-the-national-partnership-agreements-and-how-do-they-fit-in>.

Burns Aldis (1999) Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement Implementation Manual, 2nd edition. Murdi Paaki Regional Council.

CGRIS (2010) *Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services' 2nd six monthly report*.

Commonwealth of Australia (2010) *Remote service delivery Baseline mapping report Walgett*.

Dharriwaa Elders Group (2011) *Walgett Aboriginal Women's Workshops Report*. Endorsed by the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party 23 February 2011.

MPRA and USYD (2015) Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and University of Sydney Engagement Model.

Walgett RSD Team (2009a) Public notice about Walgett Remote Service Delivery Community Workshop held 26 August 2009  
<http://walgettams.com.au/partnerships-organisations-related-initiatives.html>.

Walgett RSD Team (2009b) Workshop Report: Walgett Remote Service Delivery Partnership. <http://walgettams.com.au/partnerships-organisations-related-initiatives.html>.



**Appendix E: Summary of government agencies' responses and other outcomes of the 12 Community Priority proposals, devised by the WGACWP as Walgett's Refreshed LIP from 2013<sup>1</sup>**

Refreshed LIP item - Walgett Community Priority	Description of proposal and significance to Walgett Aboriginal community & service needs (Issues & key benefits identified by WGACWP in LIP Refresh)	Summary of responses from government agencies and any related outcomes
<b>1. New youth Centre &amp; youth organisation, facilitating and delivering existing youth services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Current youth centre inadequate and with new PCYC no longer going ahead, an urgent need for a new facility for youth</li> <li>◦ Need to establish our own youth organization</li> <li>◦ <u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP</u>: Economic participation and youth engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Agency responses did not reflect the purpose of this priority</u></li> <li>◦ Agencies stated they fund existing youth services &amp; programs, run by the Shire Council, however this Priority was devised because existing programs do not adequately reach nor advocate for Aboriginal young people</li> <li>◦ No effort was committed to assist formation of a new Walgett Aboriginal youth organisation or centre</li> <li>◦ However one agency reported plans for an interim PCYC to begin operating from Walgett high school grounds (opened more than a year after the end of RSD in September 2015)</li> <li>◦ A portable PCYC van, equipped with high-tech digital entertainment, was also eventually delivered under RSD, able to travel to various locations in the Walgett Shire</li> </ul>
<b>2. Housing maintenance and repair business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Need for structured employment and on-the-job skills training in Walgett</li> <li>◦ Unfilled demand for housing maintenance and repairs services</li> <li>◦ <u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP</u>: Economic development, traineeships for Aboriginal people, housing maintained for community in safe working order; pool of skilled local workers to service Walgett building contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Agencies' did not address the purpose of this priority</u> - agency stated that refurbishment and upgrades of local community housing have already been funded by government. Whilst upgrades are essential and necessary, they don't address ongoing need for maintenance and repairs, nor do they necessarily provide ongoing local training and employment</li> </ul>
<b>3. FAHCSIA to fund and coordinate subdivision of Dewhurst, Namoi and Gingie Villages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Housing shortage; impaired access roads to town services; environmental health issues from dust, poor road drainage; lack of home ownership promotes reduced responsibility for home maintenance</li> <li>◦ <u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP</u>: access to vital services;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>IRSD Special Account funds were promised</u> for Gingie and Namoi road repair, however the new federal government (September 2013) <u>renege and withdrew funding</u> for roads by early 2014</li> <li>◦ In 2015 land and infrastructure issues across 61 NSW discrete</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Source documents: Agencies' comments on how they can support the Refreshed Local Implementation Plan for Walgett 2012-2013 (document provided to WGACWP after September 2012 federal election); other outcomes drawn from NSW and federal government announcements to the end of 2015.

	improved roads; promotion of construction of new homes; reduced overcrowding and self esteem, personal responsibility and improved quality of life	communities (including Walgett) and 2500 former Aboriginal reserves is an ongoing issue receiving renewed emphasis under OCHRE. Transfer of responsibility from LALCs to local councils can only take place once the communities are formally surveyed and subdivided and infrastructure upgraded to a standard acceptable to local councils - road and other infrastructure upgrades a critical part of this
<b>4. Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) premises, upgrade vehicles and sustainable core operating funds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Severely impaired capacity of important Walgett cultural learning hub, built since 1999 by local Aboriginal leadership and volunteers, sponsors and federal government short-term funding projects</li> <li>Adequate recurrent core funding source needed</li> <li>Replace/upgrade vehicles, premises, computers and phones</li> <li><u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP:</u> Sustainability of Elders' organisation for the future, including priceless local cultural collection; retain value of government and community investment already made; Unique cultural learning hub able to grow projects and address community development needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Agency responses did not address the purpose of this Priority</u> - that capital/core funding needs of the organisation need to be addressed</li> <li>Agency responses were a business as usual approach - indicating that ROC could help DEG apply for small grants as they became available</li> <li>Small grants for a newsletter and other projects do not provide core funding, capital and other funding needs identified</li> </ul>
<b>5. Two new buildings needed for Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need for a new building as Early Childhood Centre - current service location a temporary solution only</li> <li>Replacement of water and white-ant damaged shop front buildings to enable health training and specific programs to be expanded or run in Walgett (including a proposed Methodone program)</li> <li><u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP:</u> centre for Aboriginal women and children; respite care for parents; healthcare workers able to target and support families; more therapeutic programs able to be delivered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Response from agencies states federal funding already committed \$3m</u> for a different WAMS complex in Walgett - that agencies are aware of proposals to redevelop other WAMS buildings for EC and a SEWB centres</li> <li>No further commitment made</li> </ul>
<b>6. Community hall and conference centre for 500</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community centre much needed to be used for social, meeting and training events as well as to provide a non-licensed venue for funeral wakes, weddings etc; alcohol and gambling free social events (cinema, performances); current meeting venues without suitable kitchens for self-catering (leading to greater costs for organisations)</li> <li><u>Key benefits identified by WGACWP:</u> smoke free, drug and alcohol, gambling-free venue for functions and events;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency response says <u>2 sheds at Gingie and Namoi already refurbished using \$ from RSD</u></li> <li>Whilst attractive, historic, cultural murals were painted inside the sheds to decorate them, and upgrades were made, the sheds remain very basic, metal sheds on concrete slabs, lacking fit-out suitable for larger special events (inadequate seating, no aircon) and located a distance from town, so not centrally located nor accessible to the whole community</li> </ul>

	facility for community meetings, social functions and training	
<b>7. Foundation Hall project</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Important heritage site where Walgett branch of Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs established a community centre in 1971<sup>2</sup>; now a derelict eyesore in the main street. Vision to rebuild, facility available for community use, Shire information centre and provide Land Council office space</li> <li>◦ ARUP had already scoped project; 3 stages to go: business plan, scope of works and tender for construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ IRSD Special Account promised \$300,000, increased to \$1.2 million after WGACWP Chair attended SMC and spoke passionately.</li> <li>◦ However <u>new federal government (Sept 2013) reneged and withdrew promised funding</u> commitment</li> </ul>
<b>8. Skills training and employment for local organizations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Succession planning for local organizations</li> <li>◦ Shortage of skilled leaders and managers in local community</li> <li>◦ Fear that organizations are too dependent on current leaders</li> <li>◦ Key benefits identified by WGACWP: local Aboriginal employment; sustainable local services and organisations; future quality advice to government for effective service delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Agency responses did not address the purpose of this Priority</u> being about succession planning</li> <li>◦ Each agency just stated training opportunities they provide (in re sport and rec or child care)</li> </ul>
<b>9. Partnership with Walgett Shire Council (WSC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Desire from WGACWP for RSD team assistance for it to develop an MOU with Council to include recognition and respect for Aboriginal people in the community and for the WGACWP</li> <li>◦ Recognises vital role of local government in service delivery and Shire's poor record in relation to supporting the Working Party and servicing /understanding needs of its Aboriginal constituents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Agency responses did not address the purpose of this Priority</u> - stating that <i>they</i> already work with or fund Shire Council initiatives. However this priority was about how the Shire respects and partners the WGACWP, local Aboriginal organisations and people - not with other government agencies</li> </ul>
<b>10. Cultural programs / Tirkandi-style facility on country: Cultural camp/work farm model to provide culture and skills training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Land needed for a healing centre and rehab facility</li> <li>◦ <u>Key benefits</u>: community healing, skills and employment development, support for service provision</li> <li>◦ Issues identified: reduced access to country for Walgett Aboriginal community; loss of land management skills now needed to reduce threats to social and ecological sustainability of catchments and to increase resilient natural resources management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>No response was provided from government agencies to this Priority</u> - perhaps because it was perceived to be beyond what government agencies see as their remits</li> <li>◦ This is a shame given this was an innovative community proposal related to improving social outcomes across the board, designed to address community and service needs - including strength and capacity building through culture and</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Following the 1965 Freedom Ride, Walgett activists kept a close association with the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in Sydney, establishing their own branch in 1968, then, wanting a community centre based on the Sydney model, they obtained land, raised money in a local appeal - backed by a grant from the Sydney-based foundation of \$10 for every \$1 raised. The building was built between February and September 1971 (Curthoys 2002: 275-276).



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Lack of crime prevention and rehab programs</li> <li>◦ Properties near Walgett may be available for purchase</li> <li>◦ All staff of local service providers and government agencies interacting with Walgett Aboriginal community need community and cultural induction/training (would provide perfect venue for this)</li> </ul>	<p>other forms of skill training, while creating a place for much needed healing processes to take place. Cultural inductions, land and culture experiences/wellbeing, rehabilitation and crime prevention. Though justice agencies were not directly included in the RSD, nor was there any CTG target relating to reducing incarceration rates for Indigenous people, Safe Communities building block is somewhat related to this Priority</p>
<b>11. Health coordination.</b> <b>Coordination of Walgett services in health, education and early childhood</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Outside agencies need to confer with local agencies before implementing new services, to avoid duplication</u></li> <li>◦ Staff and training urgently needed Walgett hospital, especially dialysis; Speech pathologist needed</li> <li>◦ <u>Difficulty recruiting and retaining</u> health personnel (doctors, nurses, dentists, allied health, Aboriginal health workers)</li> <li>◦ <u>Cessation of commercial airlines</u> between Dubbo and Walgett since December 2008 severely impacted reduction of service delivery</li> <li>◦ Health coordination essential to ensure no duplication of services; and that everyone has fair and equitable access to services provided to the community</li> <li>◦ Walgett Shire already resourced by federal government via Healthy Communities program (to June 2014) - \$ could be used to re-establish Walgett Shire Health Forum (WSHF) to ensure agencies involved in health service provision in Walgett understand what others are doing, prevent duplication and inefficiencies. Shire to provide coordination and secretarial support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>Agency responses did not address the purpose of this Priority</u> - neither the issue of health coordination, nor the proposal by WAMS for renewal of the WSHF to achieve it</li> <li>◦ Government agencies' responses focused on pointing out existing funding provided for one off health check days and funding for visiting clinical services; that federally funded parenting and playgroups already support health checks and information delivery, and that an NGO is funded to deliver a healthy babies program in Walgett</li> </ul>

<p><b>12. Establishment of incorporated Women's Group for Aboriginal women living in the Walgett community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Need for a women's group organisation identified by Women's Workshop, especially at the 4th 'Where to Now?'</li> <li>◦ Local women need skilled support to build capacity needed for an ongoing organization</li> <li>◦ Key benefits identified: community healing, skills and employment development, support for service provision</li> <li>◦ Provide a place for healing, support, info sharing, governance, leadership, encouragement to build self-esteem and confidence. Representative from the Women's group to sit on the WGACWP as a member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <u>State government agency said they could assist local coordination, facilitation and project management of the Aboriginal Women of Walgett (AWOW) group</u></li> <li>◦ Playgroup and parenting programs also able to assist and support Aboriginal women starting up a group</li> <li>◦ As of late 2015 however, the proposed women's group remains fledgling; the interim Walgett women's representative on WGACWP, elected at the Women's Workshops, has recently moved away - so there is <u>currently no women's rep on the Working Party</u></li> <li>◦ Federal agency response that \$ <u>already being provided</u> to Murdi Paaki Strong Women's Program under small grant fund (just \$28,000 provided to service a women's program across 16 dispersed &amp; remote Murdi Paaki communities)</li> <li>◦ It is worth noting that MPREC received \$70,000 to help set up men's groups in the same period, and Walgett Men's Shed Group had more success in forming during the final phase of RSD, including with support from a male RSDC</li> </ul>
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# Walgett Aboriginal Women's Workshops

Report endorsed by the Walgett Gamilaraay  
Community Working Party 23 February 2011



**Dharriwaa Elders Group** ABN: 26 795 240 948

Financial support provided by Commonwealth Government through the Department of Families and Community Services, Housing and Indigenous Affairs Indigenous Women's Program.

## Introduction to the Dharriwaa Elders Group Women's Program

The Dharriwaa Elders Group Women's Program was first funded by the Department Of Families and Community Services, Housing and Indigenous Affairs' Indigenous Women's Program in the 2006/07 year. It provided funds to employ a casual Aboriginal local woman and provide the DEG centre and services including transport for women members of the Dharriwaa Elders Group to meet separately as women and support activities they designed to do together. These activities included counselling each other, holding a fancy dress ball for children, making jewellery, undertaking regional shopping trips and meetings with other Aboriginal women in neighbouring towns, and becoming an organised voice which could be advocated for within the DEG advocacy service. The program was funded in 2008/09 and in 2009/10 funding was halved and the objectives changed by the funding body to *"four workshops for the Aboriginal women of the Walgett community, including the two reserves, Namoi and Gingie. These workshops will target issues identified by the women as priorities in their communities."* After much discussion by the women and men of the DEG, and the growing recognition of DEG members and staff that we would need to work harder to ensure that the RSD "Closing the Gap" Walgett Local Implementation Plan ("LIP") truly reflects the needs of the Walgett Aboriginal community, the aims of the project became to conduct four workshops with the Aboriginal women of Walgett to produce

- A list of priorities from Walgett Aboriginal women to be included in the Walgett RSD LIP
- The election of two representatives of Walgett Aboriginal women to attend the Community Working Party and other representative fora.

## Process

On 24 March 2010 a reference committee made up of representatives from Walgett AMS, Walgett Community Centre, Thayamali Violence Prevention Service (i.e. all the Walgett providers of women's programs at that time) and the FaHCSIA RSD Co-ordinator, met and determined how the proposed workshops would be a success.

Research was begun into providing a crèche service, and offering ECAV workshops. After discussions with ECAV, Dharriwaa Elders Group's Women's Group and Elders Council and service providers, the ECAV workshops were found to be unsuitable. Provision of a crèche service also proved difficult.

After this period of consultation and discussing the ingredients for achieving the aims, the Dharriwaa Elders Group directors decided to develop DEG's workshops with local Aboriginal women with expertise in each subject area that Dharriwaa Elders Group women selected as priorities which were determined as:

1. law, justice, family violence ,
  2. education, employment and training,
  3. health and
  4. providing information to assist with the follow-through and implementation of strategies and programs to address the issues identified in the first three workshops, particularly with the RSD.
- Information was to be provided that would inform understanding of processes needed to activate an Aboriginal women's representative body, and to elect two representatives to carry on with that task.

Planning consultations / meetings were held face to face with relevant local services and stakeholders (i.e. Walgett AMS, Thayamali Violence Prevention Services, Barwon Cottage, Walgett Community College, Walgett Police, Greater Western Area Health Service, Outback Division of General Practice, TAFE, FaHCSIA RSD team, and active community women) regarding "Health" workshop 11, 19, 22, 24, 28 October 2010; re the "Schooling, Jobs and Training" – 21 September, 25 October 2010, re "A Safer Community for Women" workshop - 23 September 2010 and the final governance workshop at various times throughout the period. In addition, the workshops were discussed and guided by meetings of the Dharriwaa Elders Group Elders Council and Women's Group, and with the Walgett CWP and RSD team. Extensive phone and email consultations and copies of meeting notes and workshop scripts were emailed until eventually a plan for each workshop, including scripted questions were finalised.

Fliers and personal invitations were produced and hand-delivered as well as delivered to services' reception and display areas, for each of the four sessions.

Four workshops were conducted. "A Safer Community for Women" (2 November 2010 – 32 attended), "Schooling, Jobs and Training" (organised for 26 October and rescheduled due to TAFE double commitment to 26 November 2010 – 16 attended), "Health" (30 November 2010 – 14 attended) and "Where to Now?" (14 December 2010 – 18 attended).

Catering was supplied by Café 64 and in one instance Walgett RSL Club. The Walgett RSL Club venue was selected for its cost, accessibility and neutrality. A lucky door prize of handmade scented soaps and moisturisers were won at each workshop. Beadmaking materials supplied by the DEG were provided as a hands-on activity to assist more relaxed conversation. Jewellery items made by the women were taken home by them.

Scribing duties were performed by Leigh Leslie, Wendy Spencer, Kylie Kennedy and some workshop participants on butcher's paper. Transcriptions were prepared from the combined scribing output and are provided in the Appendices of this Report. DEG provided a projector and notebook computer to project the main scribe's output so it could be seen clearly by workshop participants and checked throughout the workshops. At the end of the final workshop, the combined draft transcriptions from the previous three workshops were checked by the women present, and additional suggestions and additions were made.

Wendy Spencer facilitated the four three-hour workshops. This was requested by each of the planning meetings for three of the separate subject areas. In the case of the "Schooling, Jobs and Training" workshop a local Aboriginal schoolteacher had agreed to facilitate the workshop but on the day pulled out (although participated in the workshop) and so Wendy stepped in as facilitator for that workshop too.

At the request of the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party ("WGACWP"), recommendations from the workshops were presented at the 23 February 2011 meeting of the WGACWP. It was agreed at a previous meeting that findings in the Report endorsed by the WGACWP will be forwarded to the RSD team for inclusion in the Walgett Local Implementation Plan for the Remote Service Delivery Project. This was reported to the women at the workshops, who requested that the Report be written to contain focussed recommendations as well as the complete workshop transcripts.

This Report has been prepared by Wendy Spencer. The first part of this Report is organised under the current Walgett LIP Building Blocks and footnote references are given to each of the outputs connected to that particular Building Block. This has been done to facilitate the incorporation of the output of the workshops into the Walgett LIP. This has meant that some recommendations have been repeated in different Building Blocks, but this duplication has been kept for ease of transfer into the LIP at a later date. As one would expect, many of the workshop recommendations are relevant to multiple LIP Building Blocks, but the cross-referencing has not been completed in this version and is left to the better resourced RSD team.

Because the Women's Workshops were limited by time (i.e. 12 hours) they focussed on the subject areas prioritised by the DEG Women's Group of health, schools, economic participation, safer community and governance. This meant that other very important subject areas (e.g. early childhood, essential services, culture and land, healthy homes) were not focussed on - however they were raised during the discussions, so this content has been included under these LIP Building Blocks in this Report. Because this Report contains only the recommendations from the four Women's workshops, it should not be seen as a definitive list of recommendations by Walgett Aboriginal women for the Walgett LIP, but rather as a substantial contribution from women which should be built upon by the RSD team and the community in the future.

## Early Childhood

The Health workshop referred to the importance of providing programs to prevent **foetal alcohol syndrome**<sup>1</sup>

Unanimous support was voiced in the workshops for a **Walgett-based birthing unit**. Until that is provided, more support including transport and accommodation should be provided for girls giving in birth in Dubbo<sup>2</sup>.

### **Early intervention social and emotional wellbeing services.**<sup>3</sup>

The need for more children's services including preventative and counselling programs was identified. It was suggested that DoCS provide more workers to deal with all cases of sexual assault ("SA") and respond to the needs of the victims including providing more protection for children when SA matters are heard in court.

The need for more counselling and other social and emotional wellbeing services were identified repeatedly, in particular for victims of sexual assault. Children need to be taught that SA is not their fault, and ways that they feel comfortable to report abuse, ask for help and resist shame. Age appropriate content should be used to teach children recognition of loving relationships and when sex becomes assault, about how to keep safe when there are parties at home, how their parents need to be aware of where they are, and about the location of safe places they can go to if they don't feel safe at home. Two workshops identified the need for parents and children's services to educate young boys in ways that will help them as men cope with social change and disadvantage, teaching how to build resilience. Young girls and parents need to learn that abuse is not acceptable and tactics for recognising and not accepting abusive behaviours.

### **Regular health screenings**<sup>4</sup>

The "Health" workshop identified that more health screenings and health promotions programs from an early age are required for Walgett children and strategies must be developed to intervene and address health issues.

### **Parenting / caregiver support services**<sup>5</sup>

The need for education programs for parents about keeping children safe at parties, how parents need to be aware of where they are, how kids are assaulted when parents are asleep, the impacts on children of sleep deficit and about safe places children can go if they don't feel safe at home. Age appropriate education programs for men and women and youth about loving relationships and when sex becomes assault are needed, as are programs that provide families with the support they need to stand up and say sexual assault is not acceptable in our family, and not to cover it up. Families need support in order to provide support for the victims of sexual assault and to take strong measures to sort out a perpetrator in their family. Community information is needed that maps existing local and regional family services and how families can access outreach services.

### **Program to involve parent's involvement in pre-schools**<sup>6</sup>

Many times the workshops stressed the importance of parents' greater involvement in early childhood services so that parents can understand and be actively involved in their child's learning development<sup>7</sup>, and in delivering the health and other intervention strategies that may be identified by the regular health screenings and intervention strategies recommended above. Parents must be taught to understand that their child's early years are the formative years, the importance of reading

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<sup>1</sup> 1.1 Output: Families have access to and use culturally appropriate antenatal and postnatal care

<sup>2</sup> 1.2 Output: Families have access to and use culturally appropriate birthing settings

<sup>3</sup> 1.4 Output: All children have access to early intervention social and emotional wellbeing services

<sup>4</sup> 1.3 Output: All children have access to and utilise culturally appropriate health assessments and follow up allied health treatments, including NSW Personal Health Record Child Health Checks for 0-4 years and SIEPS 4 year vision screen

<sup>5</sup> 2.2 Output: Parents and caregivers have access to and use parenting support services when needed

<sup>6</sup> 4.2 Output: Early learning services (playgroups, preschool, long day care) are linked to maternal and child health and family support services

<sup>7</sup> 2.1 Output: All families have access to information on the importance of early childhood development

and being around books and to find the time to read to their children at night and support their children's learning in other ways too. Programs should support cultural change and set "norms" re school and home behaviours that promote learning. Mothers' involvement could be improved by the provision of transport to playgroups and pre-schools. The Library and AIM programs were cited as good examples of parents' involvement. Once this participation is underway, the need for the provision of information to parents about support services, and consequent referral pathways to other services will need to be implemented.

Programs are needed to empower and educate parents regarding parenting, including to educate parents about parental responsibility and the appropriate uses of discipline. It was suggested that DoCS and Police also should have a role in delivering this information to community meetings.

#### **Access to quality early childhood services<sup>8</sup>**

The need was identified for an Aboriginal Long Day Care Centre for 0-5 yrs – so families can put their child in a safe environment when they need to deal with their other issues. Women remembered such a service existed in the past and should be re-activated. The need for affordable Day Care services was identified as providing a strategy for increasing women's participation in education and employment. Currently the shortage of Day Care places and their expense proves a barrier for mothers and grandmothers' economic participation. The expense of Day Care is a disincentive to work for low-income earners. In addition, women often have to leave work to look after grandchildren or children due to threats created by substance abuse and domestic violence. More accessible Day Care services would increase the participation of women in employment and further education. There is a need for Day Care providers to regularly publicly advertise how many Aboriginal priority placements they have and when places become available, and to be seen to implement fair and transparent placings policies for Day Care.

## **Healthy Homes**

#### **Safe homes for women and children<sup>9</sup>**

The need to reduce overcrowded housing was a priority identified in each workshop, but particularly as a strategy to improve the safety of women and children. The need to find strategies and implement support programs for women to enable safe separation from partners and to remove violent men from the home to cooling-off places was identified so that the safety of women and children can be improved.

**More frequent and honest services from local community housing providers<sup>10</sup>** are required, as well as higher quality housing maintenance.

#### **Strategies identified to reduce overcrowding<sup>11</sup>**

Overcrowding and the need for more housing was emphasised in each of the women's workshops and was identified as one of the highest priorities. Recommendations included to provide more flats for young people as there will be less conflict at home when the younger generation can live independently. The women recommended that governments need to purchase new housing as patching up the existing houses does not solve the problem of houses getting wrecked from the same large amount of people living in them. The Land Council housing list needs to be "sorted out" and housing allocations have to stop being perceived as a family affair.

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<sup>8</sup> 3.3 Output: Options for additional learning settings explored, 4.1 Output: A range of quality early childhood services (playgroups, preschool, long day care, health services, family support services) are coordinated to be delivered in a number of locations, at different times, targeting a range of high risk groups

<sup>9</sup> 1.3 Output: Women and children have access to safe homes

<sup>10</sup> 2.1 Output: Access to appropriate and accurate housing information

<sup>11</sup> 2.3 Output: Strategies to reduce overcrowding



### **Access to essential services<sup>12</sup>**

Public transport to enable access to employment and training, and to health services was identified. In particular public transport for the frail and aged, and women with young children, is needed. Essential services required by the community that are currently not available are a regular dentist and doctors. Safe drinking water and fluoridation of drinking water were also identified as concerns.

## **Economic Participation**

### **Programs needed to increase economic participation of Aboriginal women in Walgett<sup>13</sup>**

Support is needed to assist Walgett Aboriginal women to have the freedom to make their own choices about their lives and be in a position to choose to work and undertake further studies so they can give their children and themselves a better lifestyle. A barrier to achieving this goal is the control and abuse imposed on women and girls by Aboriginal men, which takes away their freedom to make their own choices. Aboriginal men have lost more than women in society – “Everything was taken away from them which has led to substance abuse”. They are more likely to come into contact with the police and so are less likely to be employed than women. More women therefore earn for the family and this disempowers men and creates resentment. The structure of ABSTUDY and other social benefits provide disincentives for women to work. Women might leave work as a result of their reluctance to talk up about harassment, intimidation, bullying. Many Walgett employment opportunities for Aboriginal women are only short-term funded projects e.g. pilot projects offering limited term casual work. Often the low incomes earned from employment are not worthwhile because childcare is either not available or affordable. Often women need to leave work in order to care for grandchildren due to substance abuse and domestic violence in the family. Discrimination prevents women accessing employment in some Walgett enterprises. Lack of a driver’s licence and nervousness about criminal records are other barriers that prevent women from applying for work. If they do apply for a job, the Job Service Provider often writes their job application which leads to inappropriate job matching and often disappointment when the employer discovers the real skills of the applicant. If they succeed to the interview stage Walgett Aboriginal women are often too nervous to undergo the interview, and Job selection panels are often problematic either because they don’t understand the community factions, are too choosy, or have undeclared conflicts of interest.

Strategies identified by the workshops to overcome these barriers to women’s economic participation include:

- Mothers and early childhood and school programs educate young men from an early age to assist men to cope with the social changes, to build their resilience, hope and optimism
- Assist women to recognise abuse, that it’s not acceptable and not to put up with it
- Support employment and training initiatives that offer flexible working hours so young mothers can work during school hours and attend to sick children when needed, and that provide working hours that are more targeted to their clients needs e.g. Youth activities need to be in afternoon and evening and weekends
- Examine social benefits and remove disincentives to work and study or combine the both.
- Provide transport options for women to travel to work.
- Affordable and accessible Day Care must be provided and Day Care services must promote their places more actively in the Aboriginal community.
- Protocols for job selection panels and processes need to be developed that are Walgett-specific and are sensitive to factions and the local employment situation, and promote the use of more than one Aboriginal person on selection panels.

### **Training needs<sup>14</sup>**

More resources for Aboriginal employment support and training programs were identified as urgently required. Employers must be encouraged to provide on-the-job training. Women must be

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<sup>12</sup> 3.2 Output: Access to essential services

<sup>13</sup> 1.1 Output: Provide opportunities to identify training and job interest and needs of community

<sup>14</sup> 1.2 Output: Provide access to training that meets their interest and job opportunities (check number)

provided training in the later stages of school to get them used to work and improve their skill sets for work. Career education should begin in the schools at Year 7. Women need programs that provide training to write the job application themselves and how to succeed in interviews. Opportunities should be provided for women to learn about different jobs<sup>15</sup>, and support and training provided to assist women to achieve their driver licence. Women need information about how criminal records may affect chances of job selection.

June Dally Watkins' self-esteem, grooming and deportment classes were remembered positively. Intensive self-esteem-building casual workshops for women and girls that promote confidence in public speaking and communicating with a wide range of people were identified as an important strategy.

Support programs for women generally, and women at work should transfer budgeting, managing finances, organisational and time management skills. Young mothers need training in parenting skills to learn how to support their children so grandparents don't have to do it. Skills in using GPS, software packages, typing, shorthand, literacy including job-specific literacy were training needs also identified. Locally-based Aboriginal counsellors are needed to assist women with gambling, drugs and alcohol and support them to remain employed if they have these health issues.

A mentoring team to mentor students, trainees and employees through family and other issues as they arise in their work was recommended. They would also supply transport and other support services for those beginning work.

#### **The development of new local enterprises and associated training<sup>16</sup>**

The following enterprises that would provide CDEP<sup>17</sup> and women local employment and training opportunities they would like, were identified by workshop participants:

- Revegetate and repair around the rivers, eradicate weeds
- Carp eradication – dry them out and sell for fertiliser.
- Wind farms, domestic energy reduction programs & solar energy enterprises – addressing high cost of electricity
- Town beautification projects i.e. erection of picnic shelters, parks and gardens enhancements
- Community market garden and medicine garden
- Hairdressing
- Beautician
- Florist
- Funeral director / undertaker
- Kitchen work
- Cleaning work
- An administrative human resources agency – providing typing, clerical, and secretarial, administrative and project management services
- Fashion design
- WWW - based selling e.g. EBay

The NSW Catchment Management Authorities were identified as an agency that could provide more employment and training programs for Walgett and concern was expressed that they should be made more accountable for taking on this role and actively develop Walgett projects.

#### **Walgett Aboriginal Employment Strategy<sup>18</sup>**

The workshops identified the goal to "make more Aboriginal people work at the front desk of every government organisation in Walgett". Government Walgett employers should be required to have an Aboriginal Employment Strategy and mentors in the workplace, starting with the Shire. The

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<sup>15</sup> 2.1 Output: Opportunities are provided to the community to increase awareness of available economic participation options

<sup>16</sup> 2.2 Output: Economic participation opportunities are established

<sup>17</sup> 3.2 Output: Implement CDEP Community Action Plans

<sup>18</sup> 4.1 Output: Government agencies provide employment opportunities to the community

Employment Strategy when implemented would target people in schools, assist them to try out a range of different types of work experience and provide mentoring when they are employed. Mandatory cross cultural and cultural immersion training should be undertaken by all government agency staff in Walgett. Attitudinal change amongst non-Aboriginal people needs to be understood and promoted to build trust in Aboriginal people and trust in their abilities. Employers should be actively encouraged and incentivised to provide on-the-job training and supported to employ more than one Aboriginal worker in each workplace as a staff retention measure.

## Schooling

### **Need to understand the educational achievements of Walgett students and where the blockages in Walgett to achievements are.<sup>19</sup>**

The workshop participants all believed that Walgett students were underachieving at school and had little faith that governments actually know how to remedy this situation. They recommended that new education strategies designed for Walgett, be researched. Work needs to be done to understand the achievements of Aboriginal students and the support mechanisms that need to be in place for students to achieve improved outcomes. Then the support needed must be provided. A strategy for some of this research was suggested whereby the educational performance of Aboriginal students that travel to different schools be examined and conclusions drawn from why they have performed better while at other schools than in Walgett. The way statistics are collected about students' performance and achievements should be redesigned to reveal useful information like this. Other data should be used to identify where the gaps are in services and where extra supports need to be applied within the school. The relevance of teaching and its delivery in Walgett needs examination.

### **Structural changes<sup>20</sup>**

One strategy recommended to improve the resources in Walgett schools is the introduction of a community ratings system that rewards teachers according to their performances. Incentives for teachers to work in Walgett should be changed so that the good teachers are more likely to stay in Walgett. The good energetic teachers that sometimes come here as casuals should be offered permanent jobs and long-term locally based teachers who may be tired and not innovative in their teaching methods should be offered greener pastures.

A policy regarding regional positions should be changed to recognise Walgett's greater need so that currently regional educational services are concentrated locally. Team teaching should be adjusted so it works. The teaching teams need to employ similar teaching styles and the expertise of the teachers involved.

Other recommendations were to ensure consistency of policy implementation regarding behaviour which is currently perceived to be inconsistent between the primary and high schools, and to define the roles of AEOs so that they can be more effective.

### **The need for increased literacy**

The workshop participants felt that there should be a greater focus on literacy in the schools as there are "many illiterate kids in Year 9".

Strategies suggested for achieving a greater focus on literacy were to enforce the implementation of an 'Individual Education Program,' developed by teachers for each child in conjunction with the parents which plans to bring each child's achievements up to accepted norms with the support of tutors if required; and to devote more resources to attending students rather than those who don't attend.

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<sup>19</sup> 1.1, 2.1 Output: Activities and supports within the school that enhance our children's overall wellbeing and readiness to learn

<sup>20</sup> 1.1, 2.1 Output: Activities and supports within the school that enhance our children's overall wellbeing and readiness to learn

### **Other strategies required to enhance children's wellbeing and readiness to learn<sup>21</sup>**

Strategies that reduce housing overcrowding and that reduce the impacts of depression on the child need to be employed. A community dormitory / hostel should be trialled for those who think their children will achieve better at school if they live away from the overcrowded family home. The parents must be involved in planning and implementing this new project. While living there students would learn living skills, receive health services and would live according to a structured routine e.g. up early do exercise, shower, literacy, hands-on activities.

A team should be engaged to intervene when children and/or parents swear and abuse teachers which advises the subject of the school's high standards and that this behaviour is not acceptable. Well-behaved kids must be separated from misbehaving children so the learning of the well-behaved children is not interrupted.

### **Suspension strategy a failure**

Children must be kept in school during suspension and their teacher must set work for that child to complete before they are accepted back into their normal classroom. Counselling and other health strategies must be employed with the child to determine and address (e.g. to eradicate bullying, to deal with depression) the cause of their behaviours. The key to that child's interests must be found during this period so that they can be more effectively streamed into a learning setting that sparks their education achievement.

### **Try different learning settings**

Programs must be implemented that produce children that are able to learn. Classes could be located at Garule Wali for example and include cultural content. Well-behaved and badly behaved children would always be separated. All classes would need to accommodate the children's IEPs. Badly behaved children should be sent to the school's work farm where they are taught work life skills, ongoing routines, confidence building, work ethics, how to look after animals. Part of their program could incorporate looking after elders, making them cakes and listening to Elders as they need to learn compassion and respect.

### **Increase school health screenings and programs**

More in-school health screening and health promotions programs from an early age are required. Strategies to intervene with health issues need to be implemented by teachers (e.g. using hearing loops) and visiting health workers. In particular the need for more counselling and other social and emotional wellbeing services for children was identified repeatedly. Depression and bullying were two issues that must be addressed in order to help children be ready for learning. Programs for troubled kids – either from domestic violence or other problems affecting their wellbeing and readiness to learn must be introduced. These would include programs that would give children tactics and skills to build resilience and keep themselves safe and aware of risky situations.

### **Increased involvement of parents<sup>22</sup>**

The workshops discussed many times that parents need greater understandings of their child's learning needs and increased involvement in strategies designed to address health and other interventions to ensure their effectiveness. Strategies to promote these aims would start simply with the school leadership. The principal should be introduced to parents each year, and be more welcoming to parents throughout the year. Staff would regularly visit parents with troubled children. Teachers would work with parents on their child's Individual Learning Plan so parents are aware of their child's achievements and the extra supports they might need to catch up with the benchmarks. Parents would be taught to understand that their child's early years are the formative years, the importance of reading and being around books and to find the time to read to their children at night and support children to do their homework. Programs should support cultural change and set "norms" re school and home behaviours that promote learning. Parents need to be taught how to teach a child if they are to be suspended and at home (although in-school suspension is

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<sup>21</sup> 1.1, 2.1 Output: Activities and supports within the school that enhance our children's overall wellbeing and readiness to learn

<sup>22</sup> 1.2, 2.2 Output: Parents/caregivers have access to support that will empower their children to engage and be happy at school

recommended). A training and development day for carers and parents to understand the syllabus and benchmarks for their child's performance and learning was another helpful suggestion made.

Programs are needed to empower and educate parents regarding parenting, including to educate parents about parental responsibility and the appropriate uses of discipline. Programs are also required for parents and children that encourage more respect for women in the community, stop children using abusive language, and that counter the influence of America Rap and raunch culture. We need to "drum in to children that they must respect their culture and elders".

**Programs that teach respect and understanding for culture, identity and elders**<sup>23</sup>

The DEG's Elders and Youth camps were cited as a worthwhile strategy that has been trialled in the past successfully to provide part of a strategy to encourage Elders and families to enforce respect in their children of Elders and cultural identity.

**Develop multi-agency long-term strategy to close the gaps in education training and employment**<sup>24</sup>

The need for a multi-agency approach was cited in the workshops, and such a strategy would develop benchmarks for the performance of organisations to produce the Strategy's planned outcomes. In addition the proposed Walgett Aboriginal Employment Strategy when implemented, would target children in schools, assist them to try out a range of different types of work experience and provide mentoring when they are employed.

**Services to support kids to remain at school and transition to work or further study**<sup>25</sup>

The workshop participants agreed that just attendance at school alone should not count as an education outcome and that real education outcomes need to be achieved by the students and measured. Therefore strategies that assist students to remain at school must support the production of real education outcomes for these students. It was also noted by participants that social benefits schemes like Abstudy, Newstart and family benefits need to be examined to reduce disincentives for staying at school.

Strategies to support the aim of students staying at school included to improve the relevance of attending school for students; provide more experienced teachers who earn more respect from their greater authority. Reversing the failure of school suspensions would also assist, as would countering the peer pressure and negative view of education that may be impacting on the students from their parents. Impacts of substance abuse and other family and health problems may also need addressing in order for the student to remain at school. Careers advisors based in the school should work in regular class time with students to promote information about the study and skills they will need to achieve the careers they are planning. This would give school more relevance and more focus. This careers program should begin in the first years of high school so that students can experience and try different jobs and further study and these career programs should be linked firmly with local enterprises and tertiary institutions so that clear career study paths become more achievable. They should also be linked to the economic participating strategies recommended above<sup>26</sup>.

**Blockages to women continuing at school identified**<sup>27</sup>

According to workshop participants control and abuse is imposed on women and girls which restrict their freedom to make their own life choices. Therefore for women to stay at school strategies have to be engaged that assist young Walgett Aboriginal women to have more information about their possible life-futures and the freedom and self-confidence to make their own choices. Family expectations, peer pressure and the pressures to begin a family are part of this control of young girls. Strategies that can be employed to alleviate these pressures include an examination of why the young mothers' crèche trialled in 2003 in the high school wasn't supported and redesigning that program to succeed. A community promotion campaign to change community attitudes about the

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<sup>23</sup> 1.3, 2.3 Output: School and its environment welcomes and celebrates diversity of culture and abilities

<sup>24</sup> 1.4, 2.4 Output: Community embraces education and the local schools

<sup>25</sup> 3.1 Output: Access to supports and services for kids to remain in schools and then transition to work or further study

<sup>26</sup> 3.1 Output: Access to supports and services for kids to remain in schools and then transition to work or further study

<sup>27</sup> 3.1 Output: Access to supports and services for kids to remain in schools and then transition to work or further study

value of staying at school would assist, as would programs that provide girls with confidence and independent thinking. Another recommendation was that girls should be provided with more training in the later stages of school to get them used to work and improve their skills in readiness for work<sup>28</sup>. The introduction of more creative ways to deliver literacy and numeracy should be implemented, including more sports-oriented programs and women's sports activities. School programs should include more life skills teaching e.g budgeting, setting up bank accounts, clean house, saving for an event like the show, literacy etc. Service providers should be brought into the schools to deliver these specific programs with teachers and it was recommended that programs delivered by Aboriginal healthworkers should target young girls from Years 5 and 6 to prevent early pregnancy and to understand the responsibilities and implications of pregnancy<sup>29</sup>.

## Safe Communities

### **Must reduce incidence of sexual assaults<sup>30</sup>**

The "Safer Community for Women" workshop agreed that priority must be given to reduce sexual assaults in Walgett which are unacceptably high.

### **Under-reporting of sexual assault<sup>31</sup>**

All agreed that rape is under-reported and we must find ways to encourage the reporting by women and children of rapes.

A blockage that must be recognised and cleared was that women are reluctant to report domestic violence ("DV") because DoCs get involved and there is a likelihood their children will be taken away from them. Another blockage to reporting is the lack of local sexual assault examiners. Children are not reporting SA because they think it's their fault - it's complicated because usually close family member, shame etc. The community needs to understand who perpetrators of child sexual assault are in order to reduce offences in the current environment where assaults are seriously underreported.

Strategies recommended to encourage reporting include providing more pay phones around town; providing females who women can report to (instead of male police), and providing local sexual assault examiners so victims are no longer required to travel long hours, often with male police, without a shower, for forensic examinations. If travel is required the victim must be accompanied by a female. Other strategies recommended include providing more counselling for SA victims, providing more support for families of victims in order to support the victim, and providing more protection for females and children when matters are heard in court. Programs are required that create the situation where victims (including children) aren't afraid to report incidences and ask for help either because it is a close family member, or because the victims think it's their fault.

### **Strategies recommended for reducing sexual assault and its associated harms<sup>32, 33 34</sup>**

Overcrowded housing was identified as a major factor influencing the incidence of sexual assault. Another factor is the lack of understanding of loving relationships and when sex becomes assault. Backyard parties were identified as a risk for children. Adults are supplying children at these parties with alcohol, marihuana, ecstasy, speed, morphine, and valium. Kids are assaulted when the parents are asleep.

Strategies recommended at the workshops include the introduction of programs for men and women and youth and children (delivering age appropriate content) that educate about loving

<sup>28</sup> 3.2 Output: Children have access to courses and training that meets their interests and enhances their skills

<sup>29</sup> 2.5 Output: Young people have access to programs that provide education on pregnancy choices and build life skills

<sup>30</sup> 1.1 Output: Develop a plan which includes a coordinated approach to addressing community safety by building on the Walgett Shire Council's Safety Precinct Plan as well as national, state, regional and local frameworks and plans to develop a coordinated, whole of community, Walgett Community Safety Plan

<sup>31</sup> As above

<sup>32</sup> As above

<sup>33</sup> 3.1 Output: Access to services and supports that prevent child sexual assault and for victims of child sexual assault

<sup>34</sup> 4.2 Output: Reduce youth substance abuse

relationships and when sex becomes assault. Local counselling services must be supplied for victims and their families and perpetrators. DoCS must provide more workers to deal with all cases of SA and respond to the needs of the victims. Programs are needed that provide support for families to stand up and say sexual assault is not acceptable in our family, support families to take strong measures to sort out a perpetrator in their family and to not cover up sexual assault. Information could be provided about who to be aware of e.g. an on-line perpetrators list. More protection is required for female and child when matters are in court. Services in the community should be mapped and information about them fed back to the community including information about the accessibility of local and regional outreach services, what triggers a response from JIRT etc.

Overcrowded housing must be addressed by ensuring that there is enough affordable housing in Walgett for the needs of the population into the future. More flats are required for young people and housing for young families in order to reduce the conflicts and risks that arise in overcrowded housing. Governments must recognise that houses will only be destroyed if they remain overcrowded. More housing will ensure that the existing stock last longer.

A Goodooga strategy to reduce the harms of backyard parties was cited whereby party-organisers ring the police and notify them of their backyard party. Others believed backyard parties should be stopped as children just shouldn't be placed at that risk. Education programs are required for children and parents to raise an awareness of the risks, to give information about safety strategies and promote greater parental child protection. There should be a support program for the temporary (overnight or a few nights) community carers of children by providing them with food vouchers and washing machines, bedding; and children should know who they are. An Aboriginal Long Day Care Centre for 0-5 yrs is required so families can put their child in a safe environment when they have to deal with family issues. A refuge (other than the hospital) should be provided for children from 10 to 18 years where children feel free to stay if they feel threatened, if they have to escape their home environment.

The Aboriginal Legal Service should be more involved in crime prevention programs.

Ways need to be found for women to separate from their partners safely, and cooling-off places and programs need to be supplied for men.

#### **Improve relationship between police and community<sup>35</sup>**

The workshop participants agreed that more support is required from police for victims of domestic violence including sexual assault.

Unhelpful blockages to the relationship include women victims being told 'they are not a taxi service' by police; the inaccessibility of the single DVLO police officer who is often on leave or not available when a DVLO is needed indicating that numbers alone would prove the need for more than one DVLO; police currently not communicating with WAMS and other DV and SA client support services since Tim Preston left.

Strategies identified that would improve the relationship with the police included that police provide more DVLOs and involve ACLOS in DV and SA as well, and liaise and case manage DV and SA victims in partnership with WAMS and Thiyamali and Barwon Cottage and other agencies. Police must provide females who women can report sexual assault and domestic violence to (instead of male police), ensure the provision of local sexual assault examiners so no need to travel long hours for forensic examinations, and if travel required, supply a female to accompany the victim. Police should provide consistent information to parents re their children's safety on the streets, and provide a child sex offenders list on-line so community aware of who to beware. Parents would appreciate if police or others took on a policy to bring children home from the streets "strongly". Police should introduce a party safety program which would incorporate strategies for notifying police about backyard parties and controlling the presence of children at parties after a certain hour. Police should tighten controls of liquor and cigarette suppliers, so that kids can't go up to the bottle shop, Chinese Café, Hon Doo, IGA and fish and chip shop and buy grog and /or smokes, and make sure

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<sup>35</sup> [2.1 Output: Increase positive relationship between community and police](#)

displays are covered up etc. Control must be tightened over the taxi service supplying grog to minors.

#### **Reducing risks for youth<sup>36, 37</sup>**

The Safer Community for Women workshop highlighted the need to reduce the incidence of children being in risky situations. This means the need to reduce the incidence of school suspensions and the need to stop the supply of drugs to children from a criminal element, as well as reducing the risks of sexual assault and family violence as discussed above.

As highlighted above, programs that provide support for the temporary overnight care of children are needed, as is a refuge where children feel free to stay if they feel threatened, if they have to escape home environment. Programs that educate children and parents and reduce risks from overcrowding and backyard parties have also been discussed and recommended above.

Other strategies suggested that will reduce risks to children included that girls and boys should have the opportunity to attend a camp like Tukundi in Narrandera where they are taught lifeskills and culture; the greater involvement of parents in any interaction between police and juvenile offenders; programs that provide support for juveniles returning to their community after juvenile detention; and programs that reduce drug use and depression in youth. Good strategies previously tried which should be repeated include camps for girls which give them an opportunity to open up and maybe report more and gain more confidence; greater use of Garule Wali which was set up as a location near Walgett where camps can be held for programs such as these, so children are taught to respect elders and parents in hands-on ways; and a community circle sentencing program for young people / children.

More youth sporting activities should be provided for girls e.g. netball, mixed basketball, tackle football. An indoor/outdoor Community Sports Centre that will attract teenage girls and isn't locked into the school, should be provided. More security at bore baths – e.g. a caretaker, would assist the bore baths to be opened for longer hours.

#### **Troubled children including bullying behaviour<sup>38, 39</sup>**

Workshop participants believe that bullying behaviours are learnt from TV and DV situation at home from a pre-school age. They believe that parents need to feel more in control of their children and to be able to give appropriate discipline. Elders need to feel safe and free from abuse and harassment. Participants expressed the need to reduce the numbers of Walgett youth being suspended from school and "to drum in to children that they must respect their culture and elders". They also said that the numbers of Walgett youth committing crime and in juvenile detention must be reduced; and that young people in detention need to come home for funerals and have more contact with their family, be provided with more education and counselling in detention centres.

A program is needed that attacks the reasons why children want to be suspended from school i.e. they are bullied by students and teachers. This program should particularly target parent's involvement in pre-schools and playgroups and schools<sup>40</sup>. More information about support services for parents should be made available. There should be programs designed for kids troubled by domestic violence or other problems that gives them greater skills to keep them safe, build resilience and awareness of risky situations. There should be a greater concentration of counselling services available for children in the schools.

Another suggested strategy included regular community information sessions from DoCS and police regarding parental responsibility and control of children, in order to empower parents to enforce family discipline once again.

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<sup>36</sup> 4.1 Output: Youth diversionary activities

<sup>37</sup> 4.2 Output: Reduce youth substance abuse

<sup>38</sup> 4.3 Output: Address supports to juvenile offenders

<sup>39</sup> 4.1 Output: Youth diversionary activities, 4.2 Output: Reduce youth substance abuse

<sup>40</sup> 5.1 Output: Families are strong (family of victims and offenders)



Programs are needed that empower and educate parents re parenting, that encourage more respect for women in the community, that discourage children and men using abusive language and that counter the influence of America Rap and raunch culture are needed. Such programs would work to encourage Elders and families to enforce respect in children of their elders. Elders and youth culture camps<sup>41</sup> that teach respect and understanding for culture, identity and elders were cited as a strategy that has worked in the past. Culture camps that provide support and cultural learning for women returning from jail<sup>42</sup> would also be of benefit<sup>43</sup>. A youth circle sentencing program was also cited as a strategy elders supported in the past.<sup>44, 45</sup>

#### **More family support services<sup>46</sup>**

Family support strategies to increase community safety recommended by workshop participants include providing follow-up counselling, including grief and loss counselling, and other support services for victims of sexual assault and their families to help cope with the trauma, and for perpetrators.

#### **More services for men<sup>47</sup>**

The workshop stressed the need for Walgett to reduce the numbers of people going to jail from Walgett and returning there. The subsequent harms to children from witnessing the violent way their father is taken away and harms from losing a father to jail need to be reduced.

Reducing domestic violence and sexual assault would drastically reduce the numbers of men being taken to jail. Apart from the many strategies cited above, workshop participants recommended that a cooling-off place for men and another place for women is required. It should be located on a property out of town and provide counselling to teach men how their violent behaviours affect their families. Young men 13 – 18 should be housed separately to the older men and respected mentors be made available to counsel the men. Specific strategies need to be implemented to combat men's depression. For a start Probation and Parole need a locally-based service. The effectiveness of sentencing options need to be reviewed and alternative sentencing options made available in Walgett. Organisations should be funded and trained to provide programs for men re DV, mental health, anger management, drivers licence training and support for men once they come back to Walgett from goal to divert from boredom and violence and reduce recidivism. We need programs that work harder to find employment for men with convictions and records. Men need training in jail and in the community after returning from jail. If "they get bored and drink, there's not much unskilled work (e.g. cotton chipping) around, they feel useless. Men are depressed and drink." More jobs will lead to less violence. One woman suggested a program "to teach men to build homes for the homeless or their own homes" which apparently works well in Kenya.

#### **Need for women to actively progress these recommendations with government**

The view was expressed that government needs to be more realistic if it truly wants to improve community safety for women in Walgett. "They need to come here and see what is really going on and not jump to conclusions". Women participating in the workshops wanted to be informed as to whether government listened to these recommendations, and receive from and give feedback on a regular basis to government about these important matters.

Suggested strategies for achieving this objective included that the women wanted to elect their representatives to attend the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party<sup>48</sup> and follow through workshop recommendations with government.

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<sup>41</sup> 7.3 Output: Elders are provided opportunities to increase their capacity to work with their community

<sup>42</sup> 6.2 Output: Women are provided opportunities to tell their story, 6.3 Output: Provide opportunities to strengthen the bond between mothers and daughters, 6.1 Output: Women have access to Women's Gatherings and Yarn-Ups

<sup>43</sup> 6.4 Output: Elders are provided opportunities to increase their capacity to work with their community

<sup>44</sup> As above ie output 6.4

<sup>45</sup> 7.3 Output: Elders are provided opportunities to increase their capacity to work with their community

<sup>46</sup> 5.1 Output: Families are strong (family of victims and offenders)

<sup>47</sup> 7.1 Output: Structure for men's gathering is established (healing strategies), 7.2 Output: Men are provided opportunities to get back to land

<sup>48</sup> 7.4 Output: Opportunities are provided for men and women to get together to move forward with regards to domestic violence

They also wanted to start a representative group and attract resources to be able to convene workshops with women to feedback progress on recommendations through the Walgett Local Implementation Plan for the RSD project (“LIP”). Their organisation would also deliver some of the strategies discussed during the workshops including to provide a centre and advocacy service for Aboriginal women, working with girls to build self esteem, confidence and respect; provide healing for women – recognizing the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder amongst domestic violence victims; provide services to help women succeed in education and generally work to support men and keep them in Walgett and out of jail<sup>49</sup>.

## Leadership and Governance

### **An Aboriginal women’s representative organisation<sup>50</sup>**

As discussed above, the women attending all workshops expressed the need to actively know the progress of their workshops’ output with government and the RSD project. The last workshop captured the women’s ideas for the aims and purpose of such an organisation and provided information about how it might be structured. The women want to form an organisation that provides a centre, advocacy and other services (including some of the strategies outlined above) for women and works actively with elders, men and the men’s group.

### **Elders’ cultural leadership and teaching role<sup>51</sup>**

In each of the workshops the need for healing and counselling, Elders’ cultural leadership and teaching role was identified. Some strategies specifically relating to Elders were suggested and have been discussed above. Yundiboo magazine was raised in the Health workshop as an effective community media outlet that should be used by Health departments to promote information about health campaigns and services to the Walgett Aboriginal community.<sup>52</sup> This gave the Dharriwaa Elders Group the opportunity to explain that after 11 years of monthly production, the funding for this magazine had been stopped but it could be revived again with regular sponsorship income from government community information campaigns.

### **The need for men’s, youth, children’s, families and health services and programs<sup>53</sup>**

Many strategies were identified by the workshops that would most appropriately be undertaken by a Walgett Aboriginal men’s service. Most of the strategies that were developed by the workshops could be delivered most effectively by existing Walgett Aboriginal community and other non-government agencies if they are given the human and other resources (including supervisory resources) needed to undertake them. The link now has to be made so that these organisations and agencies can set about planning how their services could be given the capacity by the RSD project to undertake many of these important tasks.

## Health

The women’s “Health” workshop helpfully provided lists of perceived barriers to the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Rural and Remote Medical Service and the Greater Western Area Health Service<sup>54</sup>.

### **Barriers to using RARMS**

- You have to wait a long time

<sup>49</sup> 7.4 Output: Opportunities are provided for men and women to get together to move forward with regards to domestic violence

<sup>50</sup> 2.3 Output: Support targeted community groups, 1.3 Output: Aboriginal agencies have access to supports to increase their capacity to operate efficiently and effectively

<sup>51</sup> 2.1 Output: Support the critical role of Elders in the community, 2.3 Output: Support targeted community groups, 1.3 Output: Aboriginal agencies have access to supports to increase their capacity to operate efficiently and effectively

<sup>52</sup> 2.4 Output: Celebrate good news stories

<sup>53</sup> 2.3 Output: Support targeted community groups, 1.3 Output: Aboriginal agencies have access to supports to increase their capacity to operate efficiently and effectively, 2.2 Output: Young people have access to leadership capacity building opportunities, 2.3 Output: Support targeted community groups

<sup>54</sup> 1.1 Output: Planned approach, collaboration and coordination across the Walgett Health Service System

- Takes too long for an appointment - by the time you get in you're better
- Medication is not free through Vlad's
- Receptionist very rude

#### **Barriers to using WAMS**

- Staff don't treat patients with respect
- Long waiting time – sometimes waiting for hours just to see a healthworker let alone doctor, however some people on 3 month health plan may get through the system a bit quicker – this good
- Can't access WAMS doctors if admitted to hospital
- More friendly environment in reception needed
- Could offer prescription appointments only
- May have to walk to WAMS

#### **Barriers to using GWAHS**

- Sometimes they come to the DEG health program and sometimes they don't turn up
- We don't know what GWAHS offers as a health service
- Do they do home visits to Elders? I've asked and they haven't visited
- More interaction between Aboriginal healthworkers with patients when they are in hospital and when they return home
- Communications skills training for hospital staff needed re manners with Aboriginal clients

#### **Need for co-ordination and collaboration across the health system<sup>55</sup>**

Women in hospital would prefer to see their own doctor.

Women expressed the need for doctors and other health personnel to access medication lists and health records immediately regardless of their location as patients need to regularly skip between doctors and many other health professionals and often can't keep up their own knowledge re medications and memory re treatments etc. Some patients have experienced trouble with new doctors trying new medication when unaware of the patient's health history. They discussed the possibilities of **E health** – i.e. that medical health records should be available anywhere. Some concerns were expressed about confidentiality but all thought these concerns would be allayed with community promotion and good design of program. It was suggested that E-health would be good for referrals and getting second opinions and reducing risks for penicillin alerts and allergy sufferers.

**Better discharge planning** is needed particularly when patients have just returned home after major surgery and need some follow up at home.

The need for **better access to specialist services** and the recent loss of Dr Cranswick heart specialist was cited, as was the current requirement to travel to consult heart, renal, respiratory, hearing, ophthalmologist specialists and alcohol services.

Solutions suggested were **better patient transport resourcing** for RARMS and WAMS locally and anywhere (including Sydney); and increased use of video conferencing between remote specialists and allied health professionals and locally-based GPs and AHWs<sup>56</sup>.

Women expressed the **need for more community awareness of existing services** and how to access them. For example they would like to know when the dentists and doctors and other services are in town.

Strategies suggested to address this need included to **promote more awareness of health programs and services** through a community calendar, better information flow between the Interagency and CWP, and more networking between services themselves and community. The employment of a facilitator position who would work with agencies to get message out to community

<sup>55</sup> 1.1 Output: Planned approach, collaboration and coordination across the Walgett Health Service System

<sup>56</sup> 1.3 Output: WAMS has access to additional funds to respond to internal capacity building

about services, was suggested. This person would get around the community and have cups of teas with families to tell them about the services. The use and support of local community media was recommended e.g. Yundiboo magazine should be used for community health promotions and information dissemination via community noticeboards in town, Gingie and Namoi was called for. The women suggested that a more personalised approach should be used and that regular informal chats in people's houses or out in Gingie Shed should be implemented. Family Fun Days and BBQs were not considered effective community promotions as they communicate very little information about programs – just provide a good day out.

The women thought **a more personalised service from Aboriginal Health Workers<sup>57</sup>** is required, that health workers should be out and about visiting people in the community "like they use to" as the sick and elderly and their carers often cannot get to them. **Young carers need more information and support.**

More regular and better access to **permanent doctors and dentists<sup>58</sup>** is needed, and **a triage strategy** was suggested so that priority can be given to more urgent cases and waiting hours reduced. Script only days were also seen to be an effective way to cut down waiting times too.

An **emergency dental service** should be provided by doctors and nurses when there is no dentist available locally, and some dentists need to be taught how to work with children more appropriately.

An Elders' Health program that visits homes, provides information and access to other services, patient transport, follow up after returning from hospital and home delivered prescriptions is needed.

**More access to allied health services is required<sup>59, 60</sup>**

Grief and loss counselling, more understanding of dementia and palliative care services, knowledge about ACAT and support for carers were identified as needs for Elders and their families by the women present. Faster receipt of glasses from Eye Health programs was also mentioned.

Drinking water quality and water fluoridation were mentioned as important environmental health concerns. The over-chlorination causing diarrhoea and vomiting was cited.

**Need retention of health workers in Walgett.<sup>61</sup>**

The huge costs to bring in outside allied health people should be spent to train up, professionally develop and keep local people in these roles e.g. in podiatry, counselling, midwifery. Strategies suggested to implement this aim included making the hospital and WAMS friendlier workplaces and providing greater incentives for healthworkers who do work in Walgett. Traineeships should be offered by WAMS and the hospital to attract young school-leavers. One of the reasons young local people leave Walgett is because they want to be independent from their families but the housing shortage prevents their independence. Housing and a good salary should be provided to keep health workers in Walgett.

**More alcohol services needed in Walgett<sup>62</sup>**

More dry-out and other services including counselling for alcoholics are required in Walgett and the effectiveness of existing services needs to be improved. Drunks need support services when returning from dry-out and rehab, otherwise dry-out centres and rehab services are wasted. Alcohol programs need to address extreme depression in clients who self-medicate to cope. The combination of grog and marihuana needs to be addressed.

Women stated that alcohol counsellors should be interacting daily with and embedded wherever people are most comfortable for example with the Dharriwaa Elders Group for Elders, with the

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<sup>57</sup> 1.3 Output: WAMS has access to additional funds to respond to internal capacity building

<sup>58</sup> 1.3 Output: WAMS has access to additional funds to respond to internal capacity building

<sup>59</sup> 1.2 Output: Allied health services identified

<sup>60</sup> 1.3 Output: WAMS has access to additional funds to respond to internal capacity building

<sup>61</sup> 2.1 Output: Workforce is supported and given professional development opportunities resulting in retention of staff

<sup>62</sup> 3.1 Output: Increased access to drug and alcohol detox and rehabilitation

Community Centre for youth, the GGAMG for men. Other workers in these services should be provided with mental health first aid skills and referral pathways for their clients to counselling and other support services.

Programs are needed for young mothers to **reduce the incidence of foetal alcohol syndrome** and smoking foetal damage. More effective community awareness needs to be promoted to young people about these harms and young mothers need self-esteem building so they are strong enough to ask the midwife for help to give up drinking and smoking. Family understandings need to be developed so the families of young mothers can support them to give up grog and cigarettes during pregnancy.

**Need increased access to mental health services and knowledge<sup>63</sup>**

Improved community awareness of available mental health services and mental health issues especially depression and grief and loss counselling is required. Vulnerable families and children need help to develop coping skills when a death in the family or if they have a disabled child. More health workers are needed to provide outreach services for domestic violence and mental health.

**A full dialysis service is required in Walgett<sup>64</sup>** so those who cannot implement their own dialysis at home can receive dialysis in Walgett.

**Important health issues to teach in schools<sup>65</sup>**

Workshop participants were asked to prioritise a single health message to be delivered in schools but the women stated that they couldn't prioritise health issues as they are equally important. They listed issues they would like taught in schools by healthworkers to include drugs & alcohol, safe protected sex, the way your hormones work, hygiene, domestic violence in the home, sexual assault and rights of the child to say no, nutrition, food additives, sugar, eating healthy, prevention of pregnancy, having babies, POHPE, depression, mental health.

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<sup>63</sup> 3.2 Output: Increased access to mental health services

<sup>64</sup> 3.3 Output: Increased access to renal services

<sup>65</sup> 4.1 Output: That health strategies are incorporated into Early Childhood, 4.2 Output: That health strategies are incorporated into Schooling

## **Appendix 1: Workshop #1 Notes**

### **“Safer Community for Women” Aboriginal Women’s Workshop #1**

Held: 9.30 am 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2010, Walgett RSL Hall.  
Facilitator: Wendy Spencer  
Scribe: Leigh Leslie, Wendy Spencer and workshop participants.  
Attendance: 31 Aboriginal women, 1 non-Aboriginal Facilitator.

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Welcome: Aunty Gladys Walford welcomed women to the workshop and explained how it was organised by the Dharriwaa Elders Group Women’s Group.

Introduction: Wendy Spencer explained that the aim of the Dharriwaa Elders Group of these workshops is to capture information that the Aboriginal women of Walgett want to tell the Government about how they want to make their community safe through the RSD project. She read out the Six COAG Targets of the Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage: Remote Service Delivery Project, and outlined the four workshops which the DEG hopes many community women attend: A Safer Community for Women, Women’s Health, Schooling, Jobs and Training, Information for those wanting to set up an Aboriginal Women’s Group.

She explained how beadmaking gear had been supplied if women want to make themselves an item of jewellery to take home, while they are talking, and how butchers paper is supplied on each table for notetaking, as well as projected notes scribed by Leigh Leslie. She explained how at the final workshop the notes from the previous three workshops will be checked by the women before they are then sent to the Walgett Community Working Party for endorsement into the Walgett Local Implementation Plan of the RSD project.

After this introduction a series of questions were asked of the participants and following are their responses including the responses that introduce new subject areas.

#### **What is community safety for you and your family in Walgett?**

- More support from the police for victims
- Women get told “we are not a taxi service” by police

#### **What is a safe home for you and your family?**

- More pay phones around town
- More flats for young people
- Need more housing for younger generation therefore less conflict at home – currently 3 to 4 families in houses.
- Women too frightened to go home if a violent man
- Need teenage shelter. There is no safe house for boys under 18 or girls under 18. Need does start from early teenage years, starts at 10, and 15 years old.
- Need more support for elders that get stood over by their children and grandchildren

#### **Are liaison officers trying to connect to victims of DV?**

- There should be more DV officers; they only have one in Walgett and she’s often not available e.g. leave, rostered day off, etc
- Women are reluctant to report DV because DoCS get involved and there is a likelihood their children will be taken away from them
- More support needed from services for families; currently victims get their support from their family
- Victims of sexual assault have to return to the community and there is no follow-up counselling when it occurs, especially for males;

- There is a need for counselling services for victims and their families to help cope with the trauma.

#### **When do women first start to experience sexual assault and violence?**

Starts at a young age 10 years of age – backyard parties are a risk for kids – there should be more control – young kids are getting drunk and at risk from drunks.

Adults are supplying children alcohol and drugs e.g. ecstasy, speed, morphine, valium

#### **Some solutions**

- At Goodooga they have to ring up police and tell them they are having a backyard party
- Kids can go up to the bottle shop and buy grog and smokes – they don't ask for ID
- Some outlets still don't have their cigs covered up – it is known that a 16 yr old has bought smokes from Chinese Café – Hoon Doo and fish and chip shop
- Stop backyard parties – solution is to put a time limit on young kids being there
- Police should enforce the law more stringently
- IGA is an offender for cigs
- More payphones, more public housing; more public flats for single people
- Feel safer at home if less overcrowded – overcrowding causes conflicts – women are too frightened to go home if there are violent male in the house. Sometimes there are three to four families living in a house
- Taxi service picks up grog and delivers to the house; sometime underage people are ordering grog and the taxi delivers; Taxi driver should ask for ID
- Government needs to set aside money for new housing; patching up the houses does not solve the problem. The house gets wrecked because the same amount of people living the house
- Department of Housing are should buy new houses, and stop selling off stock
- Tenants only see the DoH every two weeks and need better DoH workers as current ones “full of lies”
- Prospective tenants are told they will get a house in two weeks and are still waiting 3 months later
- R&M e.g. grab rails have been asked to be installed for elder person and haven't been installed 1 year later

#### **Are there Walgett children at risk of sexual assault?**

- Need children's safe house; where children feel free to stay if they feel threatened
- Need education programs to protect children and make them safe e.g. teach about parties at home, parents need to be aware of where their kids are, kids are assaulted when parents are asleep; parties going on while kids are trying to sleep; kids escaping the home environment because they don't feel safe
- Need more support for temporary (overnight or a few nights) carers e.g. food vouchers and washing machines, bedding. Need o'night service Wed – Sun every week. 24 hours
- Need more counsellors at schools
- Kids intentionally get suspended from school e.g. when they return to school the next day they try and get expelled again. Need to stop silly suspensions at school and kids being on street where they are at risk
- Kids want to get expelled from school because they are getting bullied by students and teachers
- They are learning bullying from TV and DV situation at home
- Bullying even starts at pre-school – can we try for parents to have more involvement at pre-schools?
- Aboriginal Long Day Care centre – so they can put their child in a safe environment so they can deal with their other issues – they use to be one but it folded; 0-5 yrs
- Mothers should be more involved in pre-schools
- There is a playgroup up at Euragai but some people living at Namoi and Gingie have not transport the access it; some women have 5 kids and no transport.

- Library has a playgroup one day a week with mothers and bubs; why isn't it happening in the schools?
- Inland Mission have a paint and play playgroup
- Gingie wants playgroup 3 times a week;
- Needs more information on Parent Support services
- Suggest mudmap of services

**How can we reduce the number of people getting sent to jail (and returning to jail) in Walgett?**

- Reduce domestic violence
- Probation and Parole only visit once per week; use to have men's DV, mental health, anger management etc., but has folded; case load is overloaded for people to do community hours; there is no monitoring for people doing community hours
- Need drivers licence training
- There is no support once they come back to Walgett from goal so nothing to do but bash women
- Men with convictions and criminal records find it difficult to get a job
- There is training and education in goal; the environment in goal is better than in the community
- More support programs for men before they go into goal; they get bored and drink; not much unskilled work (e.g. cotton chipping) around; feel useless; men are depressed and drink
- Teach men to build homes for the homeless or their own homes e.g. in Kenya the program works well
- Men need programs when they are released from jail. Men need jobs when return from jail
- Need more programs for men before they go into jail, and more support when they return from jail
- More jobs will lead to less violence

**Is it better for women when the males are in jail?**

- Young women use AVO's to have their partners locked up so they can have some freedom or to keep them away
- Affects children re losing father and the violent way their father is taken away

**What are some of the needs of young people in detention?**

- Coming home for funerals
- More family contact for young people in detention
- More education in detention centres and jails
- Need more counsellors

**Do you think that fewer kids would be sent to detention if they did better at school?**

- Some kids are in the street at night as young as 9 yr olds; where are the parents?
- 14 yr olds kids can walk out of the house and parents can't do anything about it
- Police tell people that Walgett is safe and their kids are safe going out at night, next thing they are bring kids home and tell parents that they will have their children taken off them if they are out at night
- There are a lot of troubled kids – not just from domestic violence
- Kids need education at school – then less would be in trouble
- Something needs to be done to get kids off street

**How can police, DoCS, legal system support families?**

- Kids can say they are bashed when they aren't e.g. my parents punched me
- No ½ way house; going to people's houses for a feed; why would we want a safe house when all parents want is for their kids to come home?



- Community responsibility that used to be happening doesn't happen anymore because they might get into trouble with the law or the kids parents; people are afraid to discipline someone else's kids now.
- Parents do not feel in control of their children or able to properly discipline their kids because of the law and the threat of DoCs taking the kids away.
- "We can't handle it ourselves because the law and DoCS getting in the way preventing parenting."
- "When kids are out you worry"
- Kids need to be fed
- Kids need to be taken home strongly by police
- Why can't we stop the supply of drugs to the kids?

**What are some ways that people could show and/or encourage more respect for women?**

- Stop children from swearing and generally the way some men talk
- TV, music programs – American Rap culture have influenced the young people to behave disrespectfully

**Do you think that if kids were more proud of their own culture they would be less likely to follow American culture?**

- No respect for elders – use to be drummed into the older generation of kids – not happening now
- There should be cultural camps for kids; kids need to respect their culture and elders and be taught that their culture and identity, respect and understanding important
- Need to wack kids to instil respect for elders
- Youth Group camp didn't happen – kids disappointed

**Do you think sexual assault is an important issue in our community and why?**

- Yes
- A lot of unreported incidences
- People affected by sexual assault e.g. victims and family members are afraid to talk about it as shamed and also closely related usually to perpetrator
- Younger kids are too afraid to speak out because they think it was the victim's fault
- Male side of the community blame the female e.g. how she dresses, getting drunk
- Men are depressed
- Men are victims too
- Some victims carry the burden of guilt for years
- Kids are not given support to talk about their sexual assault. Kids need to be made comfortable enough to report sexual assault
- Need more houses at Gingie – current houses burnt due to poor building

**Will our issues be follow-up with government?**

- People want to be told what happens to this information when it goes to government – are they listening?
- Women's Group need to have representation on the CWP and other meetings to progress women's issues in Walgett
- .there needs to be follow up with women to see what happens from this

**What sort of support do families need?**

- Years ago, police and parents had community aid panel for youth e.g. circle sentencing;
- Police putting kids in hospital because there is no refuge for kids and they need to escape home environment

**What support is needed by families of men that go to jail?**

- Men get taken by police when they bash women. The police take the man to relative and then he goes back and bashes the women again
- An organisation should buy a property out of town – a cooling off place with counselling to teach men how their violent behaviour affects their family, male youths should also go to the property
- Separate place for young men 13 – 18 to be housed
- Respected mentor should be available for young men to talk to

**How do you feel if a known perpetrator has a leadership role in the community?**

- No one wants to break the silence, shame
- We need to know who are perpetrators
- Girls Camp: take girls on camps so they have an opportunity to open up
- boys should also have them e.g. Tukandi – for boys at risk where they are taught lifeskills and culture at Narrandera
- No support for kids when they return from juvenile institutions
- More services for people trying to give up drugs
- More for kids to do; nothing for them in Walgett they use drugs to escape depression
- Garule Wali was tried in the past – need a place where suspended kids could be taken so kids could be taught to respect elders and parents in hands-on ways
- Mercy Camps; women in goal come out to do cultural camps
- Need more sports activities – teenage girls like netball, mixed basketball, tackle football
- Community Sports Centre in Walgett with multi facility e.g. indoor outdoor venue that isn't locked into the school
- Offer more activities at the pool. Bore bath closes at 4:00pm – keep it open later
- Need more security at the Bore Bath – a caretaker.
- More awareness regarding sexual assault programs

**What prevents women reporting rape?**

- Have to report to male officer
- Have to leave town for examination

**Do the victims get harassed by the families?**

- Yes and they get labelled as promiscuous and will sleep with anybody
- Town turns a blind eye

**What will it take to have the community not turn a blind eye?**

- People who commit crimes and have done jail time are forgiven very quickly – but not forgotten
- Complicated for Aboriginal people to accept and tell the family that the same relative has reoffended
- Parents and family cover it up that's why a lot of things don't get dealt with
- Need support for families of victims to support the victim
- Need support for families to stand up and say this is not acceptable in our family
- Biggest problem with Aboriginal people; they can't voice their emotions
- Not much protection for the women or the child victims of sexual abuse. Need more protection for female and children when matters are in court. They have to live in the community after giving evidence
- A lot of families won't ostracise the offending relative
- More counselling for SA victims
- DoCs doesn't have enough workers to deal with all cases of SA and respond to the needs of the victims
- Mandatory reporting is online
- Need an offenders list on-line
- Should perpetrators be exiled? – wouldn't work

- Since DV officer with police left (i.e. Tim Preston) WAMS and other services have not been kept in the loop of police information regarding any SA. Poor communication with DV officer, police re DV services
- What would it take to report more assaults? – families need to deal with it internally
- DoCS and schools pass the buck for reporting an assault

#### **Have the sexual assault services improved?**

- At the moment only one female SA doctor in Orange can do forensic examinations, one male SA doctor in Dubbo
- Police are bettering their service where it goes to the person, to the hospital. Hospital still in negotiation regarding their responsibilities. All SA cases need to go through the hospital and examined by a qualified medical staff – only 7 days to report the rape for forensic evidence to be collected.
- Needs to be more local support – all victims want to do is have a shower
- 2 doctors have put their hands up to be trained in Bourke – Bourke is closest DNA
- Need SANE nurses and no police transport for SA victims

#### **Priority**

- Need more support for people from police and others in general for victims – i.e. women and children. Police always on leave – only 1 x DVLO
- Support for assault victims – grief and loss counselling
- Support for families of victims
- Support for families in general to prevent violence and provide support afterwards
- More education and awareness of what sexual assault is – when is it sexual assault?
- Map services in community and feedback to community
- Find out what brings outreach services for these programs if they do exist? What local and regional services exist, what triggers a response from JERT etc
- We want government to be more realistic, come here and see what is really going on and not jump to conclusions

## **Appendix 2: Workshop #2 Notes**

### **“Schooling, Jobs and Training” Aboriginal Women’s Workshop #2**

Held: 9.30 am 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2010, Walgett RSL Hall.  
Facilitator: Wendy Spencer  
Scribe: Leigh Leslie, Wendy Spencer and workshop participants.  
Attendance: 13 Aboriginal women, 2 non-Aboriginal women including Facilitator. Two guests from DEEWR and Australian Inland Employment Services were invited to attend to assist with information if required.

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Participants were welcomed and an introduction to the aims of the workshop was presented.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group is organising a series of 4 workshops and the aim of today is to end up with a list of programs in the area of education and training. We will collate the information and present to the last women’s workshop for checking and then the CWP for endorsement and to be entered into the LIP.

The fourth workshop is to provide information for those seeking to set up a Walgett representative Aboriginal women’s organisation, and to select a representative of Aboriginal women to sit at the CWP table. Hopefully the women present at the fourth workshop will follow through with today’s findings and in the future progress issues that the women of Walgett feel that are important through the CWP and provide information and feedback back to Walgett Aboriginal women.

She explained how beadmaking gear had been supplied if women want to make themselves an item of jewellery to take home, while they are talking, and how butchers paper is supplied on each table for notetaking, as well as projected notes scribed by Leigh Leslie.

After this introduction a series of questions were asked of the participants and following are their responses.

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#### **In an ideal world would you work? How would you be spending your time?**

We need to work to improve the conditions that we live in. Times have changed where traditionally women looked after the family, everyone had a role and everyone got fed, but now you have to work to adequately provide for your family. Aboriginal people are more disadvantaged, so we have to work harder.

#### **What do you want for your future?**

- Work to give kids a better lifestyle
- Further studies
- More support to stay at home to look after their families

This is a good start and we need to incorporate old world with the new.

#### **What are barriers to achieving this future?**

Some of the issues are around abuse, either young girls or women, and the control that is imposed on them i.e. women need the freedom to make their own choices. Some women feel like they can’t get out and work because of control, abuse.

If you look at Aboriginal men they have lost more in society - everything was taken away from them which has led to substance abuse, they are more likely to come into contact with the police, and so

men are less likely to be employed than women. It comes back to the women to earn for the family which disempowers men bringing about resentment.

#### **Strategies to breaking these barriers**

- Women need to educate young men early, and assist men to cope with the changes – i.e. to build resilience and to have hope.
- Educate Women not to put up with abuse. It's not acceptable to be abused
- School-based traineeships

#### **School-based traineeships**

Are there any school-based traineeships in Walgett? Would it be useful for women to have more training in the later stages of school to get them use to work and improve their skill set to work?

Not many opportunities for work experience, training

Strategy: Career education should start at year 7, so girls try different careers, try a few possibilities and make an informed decision about their career path. Gives them enough time to swap and change.

#### **What sort of jobs would you like there to be for women in Walgett in an ideal world?**

- Repairing the destruction of the rivers, Native vegetation around the rivers – not a lot of work around it. Carp eradication – dry them out and sell for fertiliser. Setting up a Caring for Country project to eradicate weeds keeping the rivers health. Doesn't have to be huge just a small group of people to do it.
- Wind farms & solar energy enterprises – addressing high cost of electricity

Barriers: CMA is in Tamworth and don't come to Walgett to ask us what we want. Anywhere in NSW you've got beautiful parks, picnic shelters and gardens. Its like areas of high Aboriginal population are out of sight out of mind. They get huge wages and don't come to Walgett – we need to make them accountable. Yet we are expected to do it voluntary all the time.

We need to form a group and meet with the CMA to make them accountable.

CMA came to Walgett and not many people turned up just a few DEG. They didn't plan/promote it properly. They just tick the boxes more genuine consultation needs to occur.

- Landscape parkland and town beautification projects. Beautification projects need to happen in Walgett long the river, community market garden, medicine garden, CDEP and other employment opportunities.
- A lot of young women ask for hairdressing traineeships big demand. Undertaker or funeral director, florist, beautician, deportment & grooming. Strategy: June Dally Watkins has visited to undertake self-esteem, grooming and deportment classes and this needs to happen again.
- kitchen work
- cleaning
- secretarial
- fashion
- WWW-based selling e.g. Ebay

Strategy: Create a pool of human resources e.g. typing, clerical, and secretarial, project management and submission writing.

TAFE: "We had these sorts of courses but no one turned up". This says more about the TAFE, not the people. Perhaps a training mentor is needed or mentoring team.

#### **What sort of training needs to happen to improve employment opportunities?**

TAFE have an Aboriginal employment strategy.

“There should be more Aboriginal people at the front desk of every government organisation in Walgett”. Should be mandatory for government staff to undertake cross cultural and cultural immersion training. Need better selection processes for all staff in Walgett organisations. Start in Shire front office.

Probably need a mentor to mentor women and girls through family etc., issues e.g. not giving up the job because you’ve had a few days off through family issues.

Support resources for Aboriginal support and training for employment are stretched. There is an urgent need for this support in Walgett.

Strategy: target people in school and help them to try out a few jobs. If they decide to get employment at the Shire mentoring should be in the induction package

Strategy: The Shire and other government departments in Walgett need to have an Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

Strategy: Cultural immersion program for all new non-Aboriginal people coming to work in Walgett

Strategy: Mentors in the workplace

#### **Are there any other barriers to employment?**

- Day Care is an issue for working women; although there is Aboriginal priority system in place at Coolabah Kids – but if a police officer comes to town they seem to be given a place straight away
- Organisations need to advertise how many Aboriginal priority placements there are
- Women can’t access Day Care because it’s full or too expensive
- Council was trying to setup a Day Care service but it folded
- Limited Day Care places mean that women can only work part-time. Women would like to work full time.
- Affordability of Day Care
- Application when written by the JSA does not match the person. Women need training to write the job application themselves
- More women need to be trained how to do well in interviews. They don’t turn up for interview - nervous because of interview yet application was great. They need to go through a mock interview because Aboriginal people don’t like talking about themselves. Need to be taught interview techniques and be mentored through process. This could be done at school.
- Selection panels need to be looked at e.g. the merit system needs to be overhauled. Selectors need to be aware that jobs are hard to fill in Walgett.
- Selection panels need to acknowledge conflicts of interest.
- Selection panels need to be sensitive to the factions in Walgett
- Sometimes on these selection panels the Aboriginal person is sitting on a panel with about 6 non Aboriginal people so Aboriginal person may be unable to participate effectively in selection process
- Criminal records are a problem – people don’t apply for jobs because they think they’ll be knocked back.
- Lack of drivers licence a barrier

**What sort of hours and working conditions would suit different women?** Women are different, young women don’t have the time because of family. Young mothers would like to work 8:30 to 3:00pm so that they can be with their children after school.

#### **What about when children are sick?**

- WAMS flexible work hours good for young mother - ideal

- Sometimes things like ABSTUDY restricts the hours of work because it pushes you over the threshold, and other disincentives to social benefits;
- Service providers need to deliver their services when required e.g. on the weekend or outside 9 - 5. Activity needs to be more targeted towards their clients and when they are needed e.g. Youth activities need to be in afternoon

#### **Are there anymore blockages for women working? Why do some not stay at work?**

- Women might leave work because they might have a work related issue and reluctant to talk up - might be harassment, intimidation, bullying.
- short-term projects e.g. pilot project
- looking after grandkids due to substance abuse, domestic violence
- Sometimes money is not worth it because benefits and subsidies are cut, childcare takes a big slice of income (e.g. \$55 day) only leaving say..\$50.00 take home pay.
- There is a need for public transport i.e. transport to get to job
- The biggest hurdle is white people's attitude to Aboriginal workers; they believe they are smarter. There are a lot of Aboriginal people sometimes smarter. They don't trust their Aboriginal workers – so Aboriginal people need other Aboriginal people to support them in their workplace
- They are pre-judged before they start the job

#### **Is on the job training important?**

- On-the-job training needed
- Cultural training should centre on non-Aboriginal culture e.g. where they come from – self awareness about their culture and attitudes. There should be two-way cultural awareness training for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
- On-the-job training would be good to develop skills in use of GPS, Software packages, typing, shorthand, literacy, information about what Walgett organisations have to offer, job specific literacy

#### **What about other types of support in your job?**

- Counselling in gambling, drugs and alcohol
- More Aboriginal counsellors at counselling services would make our women feel more comfortable;
- Need support mechanisms in place all the time e.g. have counselling services based in Walgett

#### **Skills and knowledge needed in life by women?**

- Budgeting, managing finances
- Confidence – public speaking
- Confidence speaking with a range of people. When too shy to attend meetings need a push
- Work/life balance – better organisational and time management skills to cope with work and home/family;
- Parenting skills are not the responsibility of grandparents. Need to teach parenting skills, work with young families to learn how to support their children

#### **School Years**

##### **Is there anything in particular that causes girls to leave school early?**

- Peer pressure e.g. boyfriend may not want them to go to school
- Drugs
- Home life
- Girls being suspended often

- Inexperienced teachers put kids off. More experienced teachers make it easier to stay at school because they are older there is more respect and authority figure
- School needs to be more relevant
- Parents need to understand that the early years are the formative years. Schools aren't relevant to the parent's life so they don't see the relevance of education and therefore their kids don't see its relevance
- Importance of reading and being around books. Parents need to find the time to read to their children at night and support children to do their homework.
- Working parents have a better appreciation of education
- Historically Aboriginal people were not able to access education so there were no 'norms' set
- Home and school require children to have different behaviour sets e.g. home-open discussion; school – to keep quiet and listen. Kids are taught not to ask questions at home and then are asked to be active in school. Many kids at home they are looking after kids and taking more responsibility - Young kids are responsible for their siblings which makes it hard for them at school
- Schools need to use their AEO better. Need to define the difference between AEOs and teacher at schools better. Need job description for AEO
- Do they have too many Aboriginal Education Officers at the school? No – they need to be utilised 'smarter,' and be more effective in their role.
- Young mothers bad experience at school gets carried over and instilled in their children

#### **Is there a way that we can help parents understand more the importance of school?**

- Getting the parents involved early so they understand their roles and responsibilities re parenting and education early. Parents should get involved in playgroups. Parents want to get away and leave the kids with grandparent. Parents need to be educated in the responsibilities of parenting
- Overcrowding and depression impacts

#### **Is there anything at schools to help student mothers?**

- There was a crèche at school but the problem was with the grandparents not wanting the grannies going to the crèche at the school. It was trialled in 2003 but stopped due to lack of support

#### **What could have been done differently?**

- The crèche worked OK – but no support from the parents
- Need Aboriginal healthworkers to support young girls about young pregnancy, before they get pregnant. Should start program year 5 – 6 to education the girls about prevention of pregnancy
- Need promotion in community to promote value of girls to stay at school

#### **Are there more young boys or young girls staying longer at school?**

- More young boys are staying at school because of ABSTUDY
- More boys achieve at school but are they learning? Just the numbers is not good enough for Closing the Gap. Just attendance alone does not count as an outcome; education outcomes need to be achieved by the student.
- Young girls when they get pregnant get social benefits
- Parents have to support kids until they are 25 before they get Newstart.
- Need careers advisors at school working with kids to look at what they need to do to get to where they want to go – this would give school more relevance and more focus
- More work needs to be done to understand the achievements of Aboriginal students. A lot of teaching is just babysitting. Support mechanisms needs to be in place for students to achieve outcomes – identifying the gap and then providing to support to close the gap.

Strategy: It would be good to follow stats of remote Aboriginal students as they move around to difference schools and communities and compare their achievement between schools.



Strategy: more work to be done to design how stats collected re education achievements

Need more support for literacy rather than behaviour programs. If a class is engaged then they will be literate. Relevance of teaching and adequate delivery needs to be examined.

When students move schools they should be marked absent and not taken off roll unless they are enrolled elsewhere

**Do you think students should have to have clearer career paths to example ranger programs and the other enterprises and jobs you talked about wanting to see in Walgett earlier?**

- Need more linking between school careers programs and enterprises e.g. Caring for Country enterprise
- Should be more lifeskills e.g. budgeting, setting up bank accounts, clean house, saving for an event like the show, and other lifeskills.
- Literacy needs to be included into lifeskills
- Literacy should be more concentrated on as a lot of courses currently delivered leave kids not good enough to get into TAFE. Many illiterate kids in Year 9
- Needs to be an 'Individual Education Program,' developed by teacher for the child, to bring them into mainstream in conjunction with the parent, LST (Learning Support Team), student and teacher, which is an accepted methodology to learning. Parents can ask to meet with the child's LST. It's up to the LST to make sure that this IEP happens.
- Every child should have a personalised learning plan IEP and parents should ask for it.
- Why aren't the kids that turn up day after day learning? Need to focus on the ones that turn up at school as they are still illiterate
- If the IEP is implemented tutors can work with individuals but this doesn't happen in Walgett. Coonamble School has tutors to work one-on-one during school hours. Should be the teacher that prepares IEP – but you'll find the executive does it.
- Parents play a big role in education. Some kids can't sleep at night, kids take the fighting into the school from home
- service providers that deliver a specific service should be brought in to children's education and deliver specific programs and support teachers more

**Is there anything about the structure of the Community School that could be improved to help kids stay at school and achieve more?**

- Structure at top needs changing
- In some areas they could keep the family groups of students together
- The professional structure at the top e.g. the message from the top should be the same down the bottom e.g. with behaviour policy. Currently different instructions to primary and high school re behaviours - needs to be consistency in enforcing behaviour across both sites
- No teachers should put up with abuse from students or parents. School should have high expectations about behaviour and not accept any bad behaviour
- Children need to be talked to when they swear as there could be abuse going on at home, and they need to be told this is not acceptable
- Teachers, parents and students need to work together to work out how they want their education.
- Should have streams of well behaved kids and others for misbehaving children so good kids not disrupted
- Should be something like a work farm to teach work life skills e.g. work ethics, work experience to look after animals, look after elders, make cakes for elders, etc teach and help them learn compassion and respect. They know about respect because they show respect at funerals
- Location out of town e.g. investigate Warrengulla? They should be separated e.g. well behaved/bad behaved. Structure needs to accommodate the IEPs
- Teachers can't control kids on excursions
- Youth and Elders camp: after a week the attitude and confidence changed in some of the kids, could have a few nights out there.

- Need routines for kids and for it to be ongoing
- Teachers can be flexible, but it's no good teaching things if the kids are not listening
- Are dormitories the answer? A dormitory in community to learn living skills. It needs to be structured e.g. up early do exercise, shower, literacy, hands-on
- Parents need to be involved in the way education is delivered to their kids, in talking about the structure
- Sports program in schools and other creative ways to deliver literacy and numeracy education.
- Career program in schools
- Location of middle school at primary didn't work – teachers didn't want to look after kids
- Team Teaching should be delivered where the person with specific skill sets deliver those programs e.g. maths, science. But currently team teaching not working as teams of teachers don't work together well enough, and they mix different teaching styles. Primary school staff are currently teaching in secondary school within other key learning areas i.e. other subjects that they are not familiar with
- With the kids to teacher ratio the kids should be progressing
- Good energetic teachers are not being offered permanent jobs
- Long term experienced teachers tend to be tired and not innovative in their teaching methods
- Should teacher performance be linked to classroom educational outcomes? Strategy: Introduce a community ratings system tied to teachers performance
- Incentives are there to make teachers leave not stay. Long term local teachers need to be offered greener pastures
- Teachers benefits lurks and perks are good: Strategy: Reduce incentives to attract people who really want to be here and we might get better teachers
- Incentives should be examined and made more equitable across the board
- Need training and development day for carers and parents to understand the syllabus.
- Workers shouldn't be stretched over such a big area in area of biggest need. Need locally based services in Walgett
- Need women and girls sports organised
- Need benchmarks for the performance of organisations to produce these outcomes.
- Need multi-agency long-term strategy
- Boys could go to school in Bre, Girls in Walgett?

#### **Suspension and discipline**

- Currently suspension doesn't work. Some kids behave badly to get suspended – and to keep out of school and spend more time on streets.
- Keep kids at school when suspended – in-school suspension and find out what will interest kids
- During suspension teacher should be preparing work to accept child back into classroom. This doesn't happen. Also counselling for child doesn't happen. The idea of the IEP is to prepare work so that the child can re-enter to classroom.
- The school should also provide counselling and school work to do at school for suspended children
- The kids have eye and ear problems. More health programs should be delivered in the school at an early age. WAMS do have screening programs, but teachers are too stubborn and won't use the equipment to improve the child's hearing
- Parents should be ensuring the school work gets done at home. Parents need to know how to teach during suspension.

#### **How to involve parents more in child's schooling?**

- Principal should be more welcoming with parents – introduce Principal to parents each year
- Visit parents with problem children
- Teachers should have a IEP for each student so parents know where they are at
- the only way to make schools accountable is parents taking more control

Deidentify workshop comments. Present workshop notes as well as a more focussed report document

### **Appendix 3: Workshop #3 Notes**

#### **Walgett Aboriginal Women's Health Workshop #3**

Held: 9.30 20 November 2010, Walgett RSL Hall  
Facilitator: Wendy Spencer  
Scribe: Leigh Leslie, Wendy Spencer  
Attendance: 11 Aboriginal women plus Non-Aboriginal Facilitator.

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#### **Introduction**

The Facilitator explained why the DEG women's group organised this workshop and outlined the COAG health targets for Closing the Gap. She also explained how at the end of this workshop the DEG wants a list of ideas from Walgett Aboriginal Women about how we can improve access to health care and what gaps there are in services. The DEG wants to know from Walgett Aboriginal women how they believe health can be improved by the state and Commonwealth governments, working with the local organisations and other services, over the next ten years.

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#### **Are you happy with the current health services for women?**

"To be honest I don't even know what is offered. They are probably there but community women don't know about them".

#### **How can services let the community know more about the services that are available?**

"This comes back to the community calender and letting women know about the Interagency and CWP meetings" (and what information is being shared at them).

What about Yundiboo magazine? It a community magazine that had been distributed to schools and other organisations to tell the community what's on in the community. DEG has lost the funding to produce the newsletter. It would be good if the health department and other health agencies used Yundiboo for community health promotions. Revisit the funding for the magazine.

#### **What other things do you think the health services could be doing to let the community know of their services?**

A workshop with the community e.g. let them know and ask people if they can do it in their house e.g. in someone's house and let the neighbours come over and join in. More personalised approach. Informal chats in houses or out in Gingie Shed

What about Family Fun Days and BBQ's and jumping castles – do you think these are effective health promotions? No – not very effective unless more information given about the programs. No-one talks to the people at these health promotions. Most people would turn up just to entertain the kids and get a feed.

There needs to a lot more networking in the community so that everyone is on the same page. Not everyone has email.

We need to employ a person that can get around the community, have cups of teas with families to tell them about the services. That's what the old Community Facilitator's role did, also notice boards at the communities. A Facilitator needs to work with agencies to get message out to community about services.

Health workers should be out and about visiting people in the community like they use to. E.g. a very sick elder who AHWs should be going into home and checking. People sometimes can't get

out and about (i.e. young carers of family members who are sick or elderly) so the services need to go to those people to tell them how they can access services and let younger people know where they can get support and be provided information to help the elders of their family.

Need noticeboards in Gingie and Namoi.

Better discharge planning, particularly when they have just returned home after major surgery for some follow up at home. They have health workers at the hospital and they were supposed to come and see me 48 hours after I arrived home to see if I needed anything after returning from hospital – but I only got a phone call – two months later!

**What sort of health services do you access at the moment? Does everyone see a doctor?**

It takes 2 to 3 months to see a doctor – if it's an appointment day you can't get to see the doctor. There is no prioritising.

Can you get to see a dentist?

He visits the community – sometimes he is here for three months sometimes a week – we don't know how long he stays here and no one knows when he's here, some have to wait until January. Three present didn't know that currently a dentist in town as you have to go and physically find out. Some people have to go to Coonamble because you can't get in to see them (in Walgett). Different stories about emergency dental services – WAMS try and fit people in – 3 little children had to go to Bre, one had to go to Coonamble for emergency. Some have rung up when they had an abscess and got in straight away. There should be assessment for emergency cases – there needs to be assessment of how sick you are and priority given to the most urgent.

Walgett needs a permanent dentist.

Fluoridation should be in the water when they upgrade the water treatment plant.

Water purifier on domestic taps – sometimes there is too much chlorine in water which brings on diarrhoea and vomiting. Tap water quality OK except when chlorine added.

Water pressure in town is not sufficient e.g. Wee Waa St.

**What other health services do you use at the moment?**

We have lost a heart specialist Dr Cranswick. We have received letter informing us that the specialist will no longer be visiting Walgett; patients need to take the letter to GP so they can get referral to another specialist. We will have to travel away to access specialist

Need RENAL specialist in Walgett – we have to travel to Dubbo to see a renal specialist.

**What other specialists do you see at the moment?**

Optometrist: They have one at the AMS, but they take a long time before we receive the glasses back – there is an average of 6 to 8 weeks to get glasses – should be quicker. Lots of kids had to wait long time for glasses.

**What about hearing services?**

Use visiting Australian Hearing Service at hospital. Hearing specialists go to the school and lots of kids also have their eyes checked. A lot of children had hearing problems and needed to go away from town to see specialist.

Otitis media – RIBAC comes to the school, David Kennedy is in the process of being trained for Otitis Media

## **Birth**

The problem is with the girls going to Dubbo to give birth. They are without support and have to go there 2 weeks before they deliver. Everyone present thinks a birthing unit needs to be in Walgett.

### **What services do you have to travel to get that's not here?**

- Respiratory – I have to go to Dubbo yet nice new hospital here and nothing in it
- Renal services – have to go to Dubbo
- Alcohol rehab – no support services, better D&A services required.

Needs to be full dialysis unit – can't believe stats only show one person in town needs dialysis. One woman reports has family that has to have dialysis and worried about returning to Walgett.

Discussion ensued regarding services and support for recovering substances abusers. Better alcohol detox services needed. Here there's only 1 person allowed at a time. Only one worker for the alcohol program who can't deal with whole problem. WAMS offers drug and alcohol rehab. Namoi House hasn't trained staff to work with drunks. Alcohol counsellor comes every fortnight – also need co-ordinator to co-ordinate activities of alcohol workers who needs to work with Men's Group, Community Centre. Community Centre needs qualifications re smart recovery and counselling and support. More support needed for alcoholics. Workshops should be held where people are comfortable. Alcohol counsellors should be going out with Men's Group on their trips.

Drunks are like mushrooms – you can pick them here and they just grow up somewhere else.

Need willpower and someone to support you through sobering up. Need support when returning from rehab, need follow-up when return to community. Alcoholics are sick people. Dry-out centres won't work - need support when you come back to the community, need follow-up. They see the same social group when they return. Many have extreme depression and self-medicate to cope. Drinking when pregnant; they should be advised by midwife, some are ashamed to say they have or are a drinking or smoking, needs to more education about foetal alcohol syndrome. Low self-esteem – that's where the family needs to come in. Is Imparja ad re foetal alcohol syndrome effective? Most had seen it.

### **What about other drugs?**

Marijuana and grog is a bad combination in Walgett.

## **Mental health**

When a child has depression is there anybody in town they can see?

There are counsellors at school that the students can see. School counsellor program working well. WAMS have a vesting counsellor that comes once a week/fortnight.

Did anyone know that there is someone you can go to for health and mental issues in town? Services not known about.

### **What services might you need which are not available in Walgett?**

Need services that help vulnerable families with coping skills. Some aware of Burnside – providing coping skills for families in the home e.g. when a death in the family – kids coping with grief. Dealing with grief – behaviours in the school yard. Showing families not coping with disabled children or grief and loss. One reports that Burnside going once a fortnight to convent school and once a month elsewhere.

**Is every one happy with visiting RARMS? Is there any reason why people are not accessing the service?**

- You have to wait a long time
- Takes too long for an appointment - By the time you get in you're better
- Medication is not free
- The WAMS doctors not allowed to visit their patients if admitted to hospital
- Some people alternate between the medical services e.g. if can't get into WAMS they go to Vlad and visa versa
- Receptionist very rude

**Is every one happy with visiting WAMS? Is there any reason why people are not accessing the service?**

- No problems accessing WAMS
- Staff don't treat patients with respect
- Long waiting time – sometimes waiting for hours just to see a healthworker let alone doctor
- More friendly environment in reception needed
- Could offer prescription appointments only
- Some people on 3 month health plan may get through the system a bit quicker – this good
- E-health
- Have home delivered prescriptions
- May have to walk to WAMS

**Is every one happy with using GWAHS? Is there any reason why people are not accessing the service?**

- Sometimes they come to the DEG health program and sometimes they don't turn up
- We don't know what GWAHS offers as a health service
- Do they do home visits to elders; I've asked 2 or 3 times and haven't visited

**VMO status**

- Would prefer to see own doctor in hospital but if they are away then would like to see the other doctor
- Needs to be access to medication lists between doctors. E health – medical health records should be available anywhere. Concern with confidential health information – current system not a good system. Dangerous now if doctor tries new medication when unaware of your health history. E-health also good for referrals, good for getting second opinions, for penicillin alerts and allergies

**What gaps are there in services, what types of services do you need that you cannot access?**

- Need more understanding of dementia, dementia services and support for carers
- Need more knowledge of palliative care services
- Not enough knowledge and info re how to access ACAT
- Need more health workers to provide outreach services for domestic violence and mental health

**Do you have transport to get to see a specialist in regional cities e.g. Dubbo, or to the local health service?**

- WAMS provide transport to their own patients but do not take Vlad's patients unless they are really sick
- What about if you are a patient of Dr Vlad's? – no transport, only by ambulance or air ambulance for hospital transfer – but once you are there if you're OK you have to find your own way back

- WAMS don't transport patients to Sydney – they should have the resources to take them anywhere
- Vlad's patients need to organise their own specialist appointments and then the patient has to negotiate with WAMS re transport
- Vlad provides Trish for local transport
- People who have no phone or car have to walk and wait at WAMS. Healthworkers should visit homes

**One area local Health Service Providers struggle with is recruitment and retaining local staff to their services, do you have any suggestions for incentives they could provide for our young people of Walgett to stay and work locally?**

Need more Incentives for health workers working in Walgett i.e.

- A decent home – people are sick of living with family so they move somewhere else to get a flat or house as private rental too dear in Walgett
- Kids are not independent – still living at home, (so potential local healthworkers often have to stay home to provide childcare for grandchildren)
- Good salary
- More of an effort to is needed to make it friendlier when they go and work in hospital. WAMS and hospital need to be more welcoming to young people
- Need big awareness days to promote services - Not enough communication about WAMS services and working at WAMS
- There is no incentive for training – need more paid traineeships at the hospital and WAMS when youth finish school so they can have a career in health.

**What do you consider to be the most important health topic that should be promoted to educate the students in our school system?**

Drugs & alcohol, safe protected sex, the way your hormones work, hygiene, domestic violence in the home, sexual assault and rights of the child to say no, nutrition, food additives, sugar, eating healthy, prevention of pregnancy, having babies, POHPE, depression, mental health.

Can't single out any priority – all equal.

**If you could change one thing about the way health services in Walgett are delivered what would it be?**

Health services should be networking amongst each other.

More allied health should be based locally so services don't need to travel. Need training for staff e.g. podiatry – huge savings could be made by training locally. Training in midwifery, more professional development in the workplace so locals can supply jobs. The huge costs of travel and accommodation costs to bring in outside allied health people could be spent on local people to be trained further.

#### Appendix 4: Workshop #4 Notes

##### “Where to Now” Walgett Aboriginal Women’s workshop #4

Held: 12.30 14 December 2010, Walgett RSL Hall.  
Facilitator: Wendy Spencer  
Scribe: Wendy Spencer  
Attendance: 17 Aboriginal women plus Non-Aboriginal Facilitator. Workshop starting time had to be changed at short notice, to be held in the afternoon as most participants attended a funeral in morning. Attendance numbers were affected by funeral and short notice change.

##### Legal advice regarding starting a non-profit organisation

Due to the floods, NSW Legal Aid could not attend the workshop as planned as the highway between Walgett and Gulargambone was closed. Instead, the Facilitator read out legal advice “*Starting an Organisation: Advice on Forms of Incorporation for Dharriwaa Elders Group 14 December 2010*” sent by Blakes Dawson for the workshop. Blakes Dawson offered pro bono advice in the future for Walgett Aboriginal women wishing to form a representative structure.

The document read to the workshop from Blakes Dawson first posed the question: “Do we need a legal structure for our organization?” and then extensively discussed the advantages and disadvantages of setting up an organisation with a legal structure. The document then discussed the suitability of different possible non-profit corporate structures, i.e. an Incorporated Association, Indigenous Corporation and Company Limited by Guarantee. A table was provided offering comparison between the three company structures.

##### Brainstorm on aims and objectives for new organisation

After considering the legal advice offered, and after a short break, the women present were asked to provide their recommendations for the aims and objectives (or Articles) of the organization.

Those present believe there are three groups of Aboriginal women in Walgett – grassroots, middle class workers and high achievers. A new representative Aboriginal women's organization would cater for all three groups, supporting them to “walk together”.

The new organization would:

- seek to break the barriers between the community factions
- work with girls in the school on building self esteem, confidence and respect
- provide healing for women – recognizing the incidence of post traumatic stress disorder amongst domestic violence victims including male victims
- teaching our children to support our men
- work to support men
- work to keep men in Walgett and not in jail and thereby keeping father figures in town
- work to prevent crime including re-offending by lobbying for increased counselling services etc
- provide a place/centre with open doors to Walgett Aboriginal women
- address single parent issues
- involve women elders
- find ways to work together with the Men's Group including healing rifts
- work to heal and repair divisions between community organizations so they can work more effectively together
- provide confidence-building activities so women can speak up
- provide governance training – so women can learn and understand about local, state and federal governments and community governance structures
- provide feedback to women about what is happening with the Walgett Gamilaraay Aboriginal Community Working Party
- deliver service to all women in Walgett
- help women to succeed with education



**Criteria for membership of new organization**

Aboriginal women who live in Walgett.

**Directors of women's organisation**

A DEG delegate from Namoi

A DEG delegate from Gingie

A DEG delegate from town

at least one younger woman of Namoi

at least one younger woman from Gingie

at least one younger woman from town

at least one younger woman 14 – 16 years old

**Preferred base for organisation**

The Foundation Hall

**Current representation of Walgett Aboriginal women**

All agreed that Kylie Kennedy remain the representative of Walgett Aboriginal women to the Community Working Party until new organization formed. Diane Walford will provide a back-up to Kylie. Camellia Boney will attend the February CWP meeting with Kylie when the women's workshops report is tabled.

**Appendix 4**

STARTING AN ORGANISATION: ADVICE ON FORMS OF INCORPORATION FOR DHARRIWAA ELDERS GROUP, advice supplied by Blakes Dawson 14 December 2010