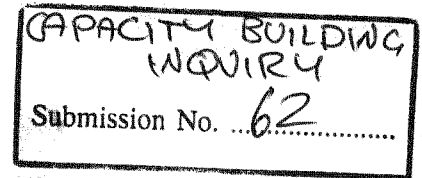
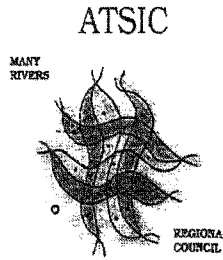


Tabled by Andrew
Riley - ATSIIC - 7/4/03



**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING
COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
AFFAIRS**

INQUIRY INTO CAPACITY BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

SUBMISSION BY THE MANY RIVERS REGIONAL COUNCIL

Introduction:

This submission is put forward on behalf of the Many Rivers Regional Council and will focus upon the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

By way of introduction I would like to say that it is refreshing to note that in the documentation forwarded to me there now seems to be a realisation within government that unless Indigenous people have a central role in the design and delivery of government policies, programs and service delivery as it applies to Indigenous peoples then the optimum impact will never be achieved. I believe that this applies not only to services delivered by Indigenous organisations and other providers delivering Indigenous specific services, but equally to what is commonly referred to as "mainstream services".

For too long Indigenous people have been shunted between mainstream service providers to Indigenous specific programs and services. Notwithstanding their status as First Peoples of this country, Indigenous people are part of Australian society and should have equitable access to services available to non Indigenous Australians. This issue was specifically raised by the Commonwealth Grants Commission recently¹ I and my fellow Regional Councillors look forward to the day where the need for Indigenous specific programs passes however given the level of disadvantage facing our people and the failure of many government agencies from all tiers over a long period of time I am afraid this time is still someway off, and Indigenous peoples will still need to make a choice about what is most appropriate: mainstream or Indigenous specific services.

To return to my initial comment with regard to Indigenous participation in program/service design and delivery the Commonwealth Grants Commission

¹ Commonwealth Grants Commission Report on Indigenous Funding 2001 Main Findings 8 (ii), 9, 10, 12

comments that the Commonwealth can achieve influence over the way State governments enable Indigenous people with a greater role in making decisions that effect them² This process has been facilitated in NSW by the signing of the NSW Service Delivery Partnership Agreement involving the NSW Government, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council and ATSIC. The Many Rivers Regional Council believe that Indigenous participation is intrinsically linked to capacity building.

A Regional Perspective:

This submission will provide a "regional perspective" on the issue of capacity building in Indigenous community and will seek to address the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry by outlining the approach of the Many Rivers Regional Council. The submission will use as the definition of capacity building that which is incorporated in the Many Rivers Regional Plan, which states:

"Capacity building means activities that enhance the ability of individuals, organisations and communities to determine and address their needs. It includes the ability to manage resources in a sustainable manner, to locate and analyse information, to determine priorities and implement actions. Capacity building also incorporates accountability issues in relation to outcomes produced.

Capacity Building in the context of this Plan will focus primarily on the capacity of communities to form cohesive representative forums through which to engage and partner with government and non government organisations and improving the capacity of community service delivery organisations³.

The Regional Council also acknowledge the definition of capacity building in Indigenous communities that has been adopted by the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in September 2002. That definition is:

"The knowledge, ability and commitment of individuals, families, groups and organisations to:

- 1. Maintain their cultural identity;***
- 2. Interact confidently and effectively with the dominant Australian society;***
- 3. Identify goals;***
- 4. Determine strategies to achieve their goals;***
- 5. Work effectively with government and the private sector to access the resources necessary to implement those strategies"***

² Ibid Main Findings 16.

³ Many Rivers Regional Plan 2003-2005 Glossary of Terms

The submission reflects the position taken by ATSIC in relation to the need to view capacity building in not only the context of Indigenous communities (individuals, families and organisations) but also that required of government.

Capacity building within government would result in agencies having the ability to provide flexible service delivery across coordinated agencies in all jurisdictions. Such a whole of government approach to service delivery would enable Indigenous communities to deal with agencies in a structured planning environment as an equal partner⁴. Community participation is fundamental to the process and aligns with the MCATSIA definition of capacity building as outlined above.

To realise the objective of flexible, and coordinated service delivery a major cultural shift is required from most government agencies as it is clear that bureaucracies exercise great power over the design and delivery of policies, programs and services to Indigenous communities. An observation of the Many Rivers Regional Council, supports that of the Commonwealth Grants Commission that the State agencies are responsible for most service provision to Indigenous communities⁵.

The Many Rivers Regional Plan 2002-2005:

The Many Rivers Regional Council has recently reviewed their Regional Plan. One of the priority areas of the Plan is capacity building. The Council have identified two focus areas within this priority area, the establishment of community representative groups and building on the capacity of Indigenous organisations/service deliverers.

Council will seek to add the third strand of improving capacity by negotiating regional agreements with strategic State agencies that provides a framework for partnership arrangements between government agencies and the community via their representative structures.

This strategy will form a major part of the Implementation Plan that is being developed and guided by the newly reviewed Regional Plan.

Individual Capacity:

Individual capacity is closely linked to a person's social, economic and emotional wellbeing so there needs to be strategies to develop the capacities of the most marginalised and poverty stricken. Any measure of these indicators in Australia clearly shows that Indigenous people are the most disadvantaged group in the country. The health, employment, educational and housing outcomes for Indigenous people is appalling when compared to that enjoyed by non Indigenous people. These key areas are closely linked and are almost like compass points within the cycle of poverty.

⁴ Draft ATSIC submission to HORSCOATSIA

⁵ Commonwealth Grants Commission Main Findings 13

A person's capacity to actively engage in many aspects of individual and community life is greatly impaired by this fact. Council believe the ability of government and its agencies to facilitate building the capacity of individuals will be enhanced by addressing the key components of capacity building outlined below and documented in the Regional Plan.

Organisational Capacity:

There are many Indigenous organisations in the Many Rivers Region that have been established to provide services for their members and community. Many of these organisations were established in order to meet government requirements to access resources ie be an incorporated body with a certain number of members.

Many of these organisations have evolved into efficient and effective service delivery agents whose operations are underpinned by dedicated Boards and staff. Equally there are many organisations whose capacity is not as developed and these organisations are continually overlooked by funding agencies which sometimes results in sectors of the community not being able to access services.

This results in divisiveness and friction within communities and has led to a lack of cohesion amongst many communities. This situation has built up over the past three decades and will take time to address as there is no "quick fix" to these problems.

One way this situation can be addressed is by:

- building the capacity of organisations to deliver services to all sectors of the community. This again will take time and will inevitably require the allocation of additional resources to develop organisations and their staff and further resources to deliver services to more people.
- building the capacity of individuals, families and small groups to participate. This participation takes the form of articulating needs and aspirations, and devising local solutions.

Council believes that a different approach by some agencies in the delivery of services is required. Many agencies, particularly State agencies, deliver services directly which requires staff to be employed. Making those resources available to community organisations can quite often improve service delivery and enhance services already being delivered by the organisation who act as contracted service deliverers. This approach would be optimised by enabling such organisations to design the type and method of service deliver.

The Many Rivers Regional Council has identified a strategy in their Regional Plan to build on the capacity of organisations. This involves the development of a partnership with a registered training organisation/s in the region for the delivery of the Managing in Two Worlds/Indigenous Organisation Training project. This project has developed accredited competencies for people involved in the Boards and management of community organisations.

The Regional Council has already developed a partnership with the North Coast Institute of TAFE that will see the first module of the Governance Certificate IV (Roles and Responsibilities of Board members) delivered in four TAFE campuses within the region. This training will commence in semester two of 2003.

Community Representative Structures:

The Regional Council believe that services delivered by government agencies can readily be improved by significant involvement of Indigenous people. Under the provisions of S94 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act, 1989*, Regional Councils are obliged to plan for their communities. This planning process can provide the major linkages between individual communities and government agencies. Council believe that local Indigenous input into the design and delivery of government services would provide localised solutions that meet the needs of local communities. Even though issues may be similar, quite often solutions are different. This is quite reasonable given the diversity of situations that Indigenous communities find themselves in. There also seems to finally be recognition from government that there is no "one size fits all" solution to what may be common issues.

The Council also believes that the best manner for Indigenous people to have input into the design and delivery of services to their communities is via community representative structures. These structures need to be "owned" by communities and the models will vary from community to community. There are existing models of community representative structures that are focused on representation from organisations and other sectors of the community eg youth, elders and women. There is also a belief that basing such representative structures of more traditional family based groupings is more appropriate. Communities need to be given the responsibility and support to develop the representative structure that best meets their needs.

The Many Rivers Regional Council has a strategy in their Regional Plan to establish a number of representative structures in communities throughout the region. This will take time and resource dedication (existing and new) to support the establishment and development of these groups. This work is already underway with the development of Terms of Reference for discussion with communities interested in establishing representative structures.

I believe that it needs to be acknowledged that this task has been made more difficult by the divisions that have developed in many communities due to the processes imposed by government in relation to accessing funding (see Organisational Capacity comments). There is a form of healing process to be undertaken.

Building Government Capacity:

Council believe that this is a critical aspect of the composite approach that is required to improve the delivery of services to Indigenous communities.

Historically government and its bureaucracies have maintained power and control over the design, delivery and outcomes to be achieved by the various services delivered to communities. This approach has led to the expending of much effort for very little impact. Council believe that the fundamental flaw to that approach is the lack of Indigenous ownership.

For government and its agencies to effectively engage and partner with Indigenous communities will require a significant cultural shift within government and subsequently its agencies. Agencies tend to operate in silos and this approach is often as a result of the appropriation processes within government. This silo approach presents barriers to cooperation and collaboration across agencies. The resultant loss of synergies is exacerbated by the collateral inability to cooperate and collaborate with communities.

This situation will only be resolved by the building of government capacity to truly understand Indigenous people and their communities and to develop flexible policies, processes and programs that enable the development of localised solutions. Government agencies will need to adopt risk management policies and practices and place greater control of service design and delivery in the hands of Indigenous people. This capacity development will complement the areas involving organisations and communities mentioned in previous sections of this submission.

To achieve success in this area there will have to be a shift in mindset from many agencies to move from a culture of control to that of shared responsibility. This, like other areas of capacity building will take time to develop. The real shift comes when governments move from needs based analysis (deficit model) to service delivery, designed to build on existing capacities of people in communities.

The Many Rivers Regional Plan has a strategy to develop regional agreements with key agencies in relation to service delivery. These agreements will seek to provide the framework that guides agency and community partnership development. These partnerships will focus on the delivery of services to the community and will influence not only Indigenous specific service delivery but will also seek to address issues of access and equity in relation to mainstream services. This work has already commenced between the Council, ATSIC and the NSW Premiers Department (North Coast).

Council believe that there is strong alignment within their Capacity Building objectives and strategies and believe that implementation is a shared responsibility by all stakeholders. The strategies of Council also align with the MCATSIA Implementation Plan and the NSW Service Delivery Partnership Agreement. The challenge is now for all stakeholders to rise to the challenges that face us all.

Conclusion:


As discussed in this paper, the Many Rivers Regional Council has a clear view and strategy in relation to building capacity in the region. It is a strategy that is coherent and interconnected with the core priority areas of the Plan.

ATSIC has a clear leadership role to play in capacity building across the country and the Many Rivers Regional Council believe that without a body such as ATSIC, the chances of success will be greatly diminished.

ATSIC is keen to play a far greater advisory and monitoring role with key agencies responsible for policies, programs and service, as outlined in the Objects and Functions of the ATSIC Act. The Commonwealth's whole of government trials is an important initiative, but there is a need to exert far greater influence on state agencies. More stringent reporting in relation to the design and delivery of Indigenous services and Indigenous access to those mainstream services, is required.

The Many Rivers Regional Council believes that building capacity of the various stakeholders referenced in this submission is fundamental to improving the outcomes for Indigenous people in the Region. The Council also believe that, as with most other community development objectives, that this will take time and a systematic approach. The Regional Council calls on the Commonwealth Government to adopt a long term approach to this important issue and seek bipartisan support for this approach from all jurisdictions. Council firmly believes that you cannot address the problems that besiege Indigenous communities, brought about by two hundred years of misguided effort, in the short term.

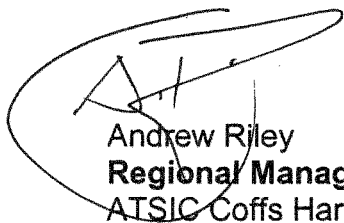
I thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this submission and have attached a copy of the Many Rivers Regional Plan 2003-2005 as an addendum to the submission.



Rick Griffiths
NSW Eastern Zone Commissioner



Steve Blunden
**Many Rivers Regional
Council Chairperson**



Andrew Riley
Regional Manager
ATSIC Coffs Harbour