

Local Decision Making

Introduction

4.1 A finding of the previous chapter was that government services will meet the needs of a community more effectively if the community is involved in the planning, prioritising and delivery of the services. That finding presupposes a functional community with a degree of social cohesion. It also presupposes that the individuals, families and organisations of a community have the capacity and inclination to seek solutions to problems, take advantage of opportunities and enter into effective partnerships with governments. However, not all Indigenous communities have that capacity - as the Youth Coalition of the ACT explained:

One of the significant issues for the ACT Indigenous community is a lack of community capacity to manage those sorts of programs and run those sorts of programs. We often struggle to find people or organisations to take on board new strategies, new ideas and new programs, because we have really only got a handful, and even that handful is really only two community based Indigenous organisations who are constantly expected to take on new programs and new responsibilities.¹

4.2 This chapter examines strategies to extend the involvement of urban Indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities. It begins by examining some of the subtleties of community consultation before examining strategies to extend the involvement of Indigenous people in the decision making that affects their community.

1 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Transcripts*, p. 491.

The Nature of Indigenous Urban Communities

Who to Consult

- 4.3 In large urban areas particularly, it is often difficult to get agreement on a clear definition of a 'community' and who makes it up. As described in chapter one, Indigenous communities in an urban context may be a network of family relations and organisational memberships geographically dispersed and intermixed. The complexity was acknowledged by an ATSIC state office:

One of the problems we have in Perth – and you will find that it is probably the same issue in all the major cities - is that it is really hard to define the Aboriginal community... Is it Armadale? Is it North Bridge? Is it Balga? It is very hard to get that sense of community in Perth because the level of dispossession in the metropolitan area is far higher than anywhere else in the state.²

- 4.4 This, in turn, makes it difficult for agencies to know who to consult when seeking to extend the involvement of urban Indigenous people in decision making. One Indigenous organisation cautioned agencies to:

be aware that there are a large number of organisations. It is not a criticism... but a warning to outside people coming in trying to negotiate with the community to be aware of this wide variety and not to fall into the trap of thinking that if you consult one organisation you have consulted everybody in town.³

with advice that:

Misinformed approaches when seeking community consultation or attempts at establishing bilateral agreements within this environment may be, or be seen to be, meddling in local Aboriginal political and community processes.⁴

- 4.5 It can get more complex still. Agencies may rely on advice from self-nominated spokespeople who do not have community authority. Even more legitimate participants in consultation processes may be unsure for whom they can speak and on what issues. The problem can be exacerbated when organisations compete for resources by each claiming to

2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Western Australian State Office, *Transcripts*, p. 83.

3 Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC), *Transcripts*, p. 448. See also Burns Aldis Community Development Consultants, *Submissions*, p. S361.

4 CAAC, *Transcripts*, p. 443.

represent 'the' Indigenous community in an area.⁵ In practice, agencies tend to set up their own consultative networks that rely on community groups formed to address single issues (such as housing, health, or youth). The resulting risk is that agencies receive different and possibly conflicting advice.⁶

Perceptions of Token Consultation

- 4.6 On the other hand, the Committee has been told that a major frustration for Indigenous participants on agency consultative committees is that they often perceive their involvement as token. Community based planning and prioritising requires agencies to devolve decision making to the local level. This may require the agencies to loosen what has been called their 'passion for control'.⁷ One local Indigenous group complained that consultative committees in its region 'have no real legitimacy in the eyes of senior managers of government agencies', while another spoke of agencies that establish consultative committees and then 'ignore what they say or by-passing the committees during the process of policy development or service delivery'.⁸
- 4.7 These criticisms strike at the core of the new program reform processes. It is not enough to simply inform Indigenous people about policies; use consultation processes to ratify decisions already made; or even allow Indigenous modification of programs but only within narrow, predetermined parameters. 'Full' consultation or negotiation implies that Indigenous people have a direct say in deciding final outcomes and can negotiate as equal partners with agencies.
- 4.8 The criticisms outlined above indicate the need for behavioural changes amongst some agency managers and Indigenous representatives either to ensure that they do, in fact, consult appropriately or to ensure that their consulting processes are seen as genuine and representative. To effect such changes will require time, an agency wide and Indigenous commitment to the importance of genuine consultation.⁹

5 Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1297; ATSIC Binaal Billa Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1097.

6 Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1297.

7 Burns Aldis Community Development Consultants, *Submissions*, p. S361. See also Bourke Shire Council, *Submissions*, p. S213.

8 Binaal Billa Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1098; Grannies Group, *Submissions*, p. S136.

9 For an earlier discussion on this issue see: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, *Our Future Our Selves: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Control Management and Resources*, August 1990, pp. 47-60.

Stresses within Communities

- 4.9 The Committee acknowledges that in many instances it is a 'great strength' of Indigenous communities that they have established community controlled organisations that fulfil a wide range of functions.¹⁰ The Committee also recognises the work done by community leaders and volunteers. However, there is also social dysfunction in some Indigenous urban communities where:
- clan allegiances and loyalties, together with the history of unresolved family disputes is a recipe for disaster and causes great disruption and distrust today within mixed Aboriginal communities, especially in regional urban areas.¹¹
- 4.10 The dysfunction seems most pronounced where families or individuals move into existing communities or are forced together over time, creating distinctions between locals and 'outsiders'.¹² The results can be two fold:
- services that are monopolised by particular family groups; and
 - nepotism where family loyalties lead to the appointment of untrained and unsuitable people to positions of power.¹³
- 4.11 ATSIC too has noted the need to 'have a pretty strong grasp of the structure of communities and their politics' in order to bring in changes at the community level.¹⁴
- 4.12 The Committee has taken sufficient evidence to suggest that strategies are needed to deal with these issues, particularly where public expenditure is involved.¹⁵

Better Consultation Processes

- 4.13 The result of the practical issues described above is that it is difficult for agencies to be confident that they have consulted appropriately or reached all those in the Indigenous community who should be consulted.
- 4.14 As a strategy to help ensure that its consultation processes are comprehensive, the South Australian Department of State Aboriginal

10 Indigenous Land Corporation, *Submissions*, p. S254.

11 National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council (NAHHC), *Submissions*, p. S429.

12 See Stephanie Jarrett, *Reconciliation Breaking Point: Stories in Black and White*, Doctorate, Departments of Politics and Geography, Adelaide University, 2000, pp. 129-56.

13 See ATSIC, Binaal Billa Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1097.

14 ATSIC, *Transcripts*, p. 181.

15 ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S1549; Anaconda Nickel Ltd, *Submissions*, p. S1502; NAHHC, *Submissions*, p. S429; Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S360; City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, *Submissions*, pp. S229, S231; Grannies Group, *Transcripts*, 348.

Affairs, distinguishes between three groups in Indigenous communities: community leaders; opinion leaders; and the relevant client group. Community leaders are those who have been elected or appointed to formal structures, boards or consultative positions and act or speak on behalf of a community. Opinion leaders are those who have influence in communities without necessarily being in formal positions of leadership – including community elders, local Indigenous business people and members of community groups. It may be more difficult for some agencies to identify opinion leaders as they may not see their primary role as being community advocates. Finally, there are clients who use or may use the services in question. The Department endeavours to obtain the views of all categories when seeking community input.¹⁶

16 South Australian Government, *Transcripts*, pp. 302-03.

ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council

The ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council negotiated a regional agreement with the New South Wales Government for the provision of housing and infrastructure services. The Council developed Community Working Parties (CWPs) as a mechanism to ensure that the local Aboriginal people were involved in the decisions made under the agreement:

- CWPs were established in most towns within the Council region;
- Council's approach is to fund communities and not organisations. Organisations are often service providers and may only represent a small section of the communities;
- a CWP typically includes 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 New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs; New South Wales Health; and other state and Commonwealth agencies as relevant – agency representatives do not have voting rights;
- the representation on each CWP is designed to avoid undue influence by particular sectional interests; and
- 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.

Other agencies now seek advice from the CWPs about a range of issues affecting their communities.¹⁷

- 4.15 When establishing consultative mechanisms, government agencies must ensure that those mechanisms have a broad representational basis. The goal is to tap the broadest cross section of the community and not just community organisations. Ideally, local government should also be represented, along with representatives of other appropriate Commonwealth and state agencies.

17 See ATSIC, Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1049; Bourke Shire Council, *Submissions*, p. S212; Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement, Implementation Manual*, 2nd Edition, pp. 28-31.

Recommendation 11

4.16 When planning and establishing Indigenous community consultative structures, Commonwealth government agencies take into account the following principles:

- **seek participation by Indigenous people, where appropriate by public advertisement;**
- **ensure broad representation of community interests, including representatives of local Aboriginal community controlled organisations; non affiliated community members, possibly representing relevant sectional interests (youth, the elderly, clients etc); the ATSIC regional council; and local government;**
- **invite representatives of appropriate and affected Commonwealth and state government agencies with observer status;**
- **provide flexible funding arrangements if the consultative structures are to prioritise or allocate expenditure so as to allow the community to tailor solutions to the local needs;**
- **nomination of agency community liaison officer(s) with a mandate to work alongside the community groups/members in the consultative structure;**
- **provide funding to cover participants' costs and, where appropriate, to cover some forms of capacity building;**
- **ensure that written information provided to consultative groups is written in plain English and, if necessary, assistance is provided to those in the groups who cannot read or write English;**
- **recognise that consultative processes for Indigenous participants will require time;**
- **hold meetings in public and maintain a public record of decisions; and**
- **ensure impediments are always identified and ensure strategies are developed and introduced to tackle the impediments.**

Community Capacity Building

- 4.17 The expectation by governments that Indigenous communities will become more involved in agency processes can place an unequal burden on the comparatively small number of individuals who have the skills and confidence to participate. As the Committee was told:

Many Indigenous people are burnt out by the level of their unpaid involvement in relevant governance arrangements, so all levels of governments must be aware that Indigenous leaders and their skills are neither unlimited nor without social or financial costs.¹⁸

- 4.18 It is not enough, or likely to be successful, for governments to suddenly give communities the power to determine priorities and make funding decisions without also giving them the training and resources to do so. What is needed is to build the capacity of communities to manage their interaction with government agencies and gain access to funding sources, rather than rely on a few overworked individuals. As one group described:

We have got a lot of people, who are willing, and probably able, but could use some coaching around organisational skills, around governance, around financial managements ... in the interests of enabling the community – which has a lot of will, but often not the skills – to participate.¹⁹

Stronger Families and Communities Strategy

- 4.19 The need for capacity building does not confront the Indigenous community alone and there is similar need in other sectors of the community suffering stress and disadvantage. However, governments cannot adopt a passive role in community capacity building and need to play a facilitator role.
- 4.20 In recognition of this need, the Commonwealth Government announced a broad strategy to help strengthen all families and communities with funding in the 1999-2000 budget. The strategy, entitled the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, is underpinned by the belief that strong family relationships are the vital building blocks of strong

18 ATSIIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p. S585. See also Council of the City of Wagga Wagga, *Submissions*, p. S370; Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, *Submissions*, p. S1470.

19 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Transcripts*, p. 491.

communities. In turn, it is only strong communities that have the capacity to truly engage families in economic and community life.²⁰

- 4.21 The strategy aims, among other things, to strengthen communities through investing in community capacity to solve problems and grasp opportunities. It will support:
- communities to find local solutions to local problems (the ‘Local Solutions to Local Problems’ initiative);
 - develop community leadership (through the ‘Potential Leadership in Local Communities’ initiative),
 - promote best practice communities (the ‘Can Do Community’ initiative); and
 - support volunteers to develop skills (the ‘Skills Development Program for Volunteers’).
- 4.22 The Committee sees the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy as a significant initiative that can underpin Indigenous specific approaches to develop community capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Community Capacity Roundtable

- 4.23 In October 2000, the Commonwealth’s Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs convened the ‘Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable’ to discuss ways to strengthen Indigenous families and communities. Membership of the Roundtable included Indigenous and community leaders, industry and church representatives, academics and individuals with recognised expertise in working with Indigenous families and communities. The Roundtable agreed, among other things, that a government priority should be to target the needs of younger people, including in the areas of leadership training and self esteem.²¹
- 4.24 Principles developed by the Roundtable are being used to assess projects under the \$20 million component of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy provided for Indigenous specific projects. To date,

20 Commonwealth Government, J Newman & J Howard, *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*, April 2000.

21 See Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, *Submissions*, pp. S1668-71; FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S451; Senator Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services, *Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable 24 October 2000 – Old Parliament House, Canberra, Communique*, 24 October 2000.

funding has been used for projects in relation to leadership, conflict resolution and strategies to increase social and economic opportunities.²²

- 4.25 The Roundtable also nominated a working group to provide ongoing advice to the department in relation to priorities and projects to be supported through the Strategy.
- 4.26 As part of the strategy, the Commonwealth is conducting pilot projects in several Indigenous communities to enable and support communities to take practical actions to address their own needs and priorities through building capacity.²³ The Committee understands that these pilots are intended to be restricted to remote and rural areas. The Committee believes, however, that the pilots could provide best practice examples of direct value to urban communities and recommends accordingly:

Recommendation 12

- 4.27 **The Indigenous Community Capacity Building Roundtable Working Group review the needs of urban as well as remote area Indigenous families and communities when considering funding priorities under the Indigenous component of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.**
- 4.28 Capacity building initiatives are not just taking place at the Commonwealth level. Queensland, for example, has established the 'Community Capacity Building Cluster Group'. This group, comprising senior officials from a broad cross section of Queensland government agencies is informing government officials about how they can work more flexibly and responsively with community representatives.²⁴

22 Commonwealth Government, *Our Path Together: Statement by the Honourable Philip Ruddock, MP Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal Affairs*, 22 May 2001, p. 15.

23 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S447.

24 Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1244.

Coalition of Aboriginal Agencies – Perth

In late 1999, the leaders of six community controlled agencies in Perth undertook a process of partnership development to formalise the Coalition of Aboriginal Agencies.

The organisations were Manguri Aboriginal Corporation, Nyoongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service, Aboriginal Legal Service, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, Yorganup Child Care Service and the Aboriginal Advancement Council.

The Coalition allows the agencies to better coordinate their own services, link resources and develop a coordinated casework approach to help Aboriginal extended families in Perth.

As a coalition, the agencies are also better able to work with State government agencies.²⁵

Community Consultation Mechanisms Already in Place

ATSIC Regional Councils

- 4.29 There are 35 ATSIC regional councils with locally elected representatives and regional support staff. The councils already provide local governance structures that can provide networks and processes for capacity building. The councils also have statutory obligations to consult with, advocate for and represent their communities and are encouraged by the ATSIC Board of Commissioners to enter into relationships with other government agencies to improve local service provision to their Indigenous constituents.²⁶
- 4.30 Many agencies also tend to establish their own consultative networks rather than use the regional council network which ‘inserts yet another layer of advisory bodies’.²⁷ Accordingly, where possible, regional councils and their offices should be involved in capacity building initiatives as the council structure already exists and is familiar to Indigenous people. However agencies and communities should be free to consult in their own way. ATSIC can promote its elected structures and communities may choose to use them.

25 ATSIC, *WA’s Aboriginal Groups Unite as One*, Media Release, 14 June 2001.

26 ATSIC, *Annual Report 1999-2000*, p. 4.

27 ATSIC, Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1053.

Recommendation 13

- 4.31 **All government agencies recognise and accept the important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) regional councils play as a vehicle for community capacity building and as a conduit into Indigenous communities. ATSIC should also be encouraged to offer regional council network services to the community.**

Regional Agreements

- 4.32 There are several models evolving to establish service delivery models at the local or regional level. These comprise regional agreements under which a range of service providers work in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations to provide better coordinated services. One goal of such agreements is to provide a framework under which the Indigenous communities have a central role in setting regional service priorities.²⁸ Examples of such agreements include the Murdi Paaki Regional Council Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement in western New South Wales and the Cape York Partnerships Project in far north Queensland.
- 4.33 The Agreements involve the establishment of consultative processes to bring service delivery agencies and communities together: in the Murdi Paaki agreement it is Community Working Parties; and in the Cape York project it is Community Negotiation Tables.²⁹
- 4.34 After an extensive consultation process ATSIC released a report on greater regional autonomy in June 2000.³⁰ The report recommended that ATSIC regional councils be given greater capacity to enter regional agreements with Indigenous organisations and communities and governments of all levels and their agencies for the coordinated provision of services to Indigenous people of the region.³¹ Granting the regional councils greater autonomy requires amendments to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission Act 1989*.
- 4.35 The Committee sees regional agreements as excellent mechanisms to allow Indigenous people to play a greater role in regional service delivery, particularly in rural areas. The Committee encourages their development.

28 See ATSIC Regional Autonomy Portfolio Commissioners Djerrkura OAM, Bedford and Williams, *Report on Greater Regional Autonomy*, ATSIC, May 2000, pp. 29-36.

29 See: Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement, Implementation Manual*, 2nd Edition, 1999; Queensland Government, *Submissions*, pp. S1250-51.

30 ATSIC, *Report on Greater Regional Autonomy*, ATSIC Regional Autonomy Portfolio Commissioners Djerrkura OAM, Bedford and Williams, 2000, ATSIC, Canberra.

31 ATSIC, *Report on Greater Regional Autonomy*, p 37.

Local Government

- 4.36 The Committee has mentioned that ATSIC's regional councils provide an existing mechanism for extending the involvement of urban Indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities. Other existing structures with community level planning and service delivery responsibilities are local governments.³²
- 4.37 Local governments can potentially play a significant role in extending the involvement of urban Indigenous people in decision making. This has become particularly so in the last 20 years as the role of local government has expanded. Councils, from principally providing physical services and infrastructure for ratepayers, now provide a broader range of services (often on behalf of other levels of government) to all residents within the council boundaries.

Councils Responding to the Needs of Indigenous People

- 4.38 A number of local government councils have made great strides in incorporating Indigenous people in their decision making processes, often through the establishment of Indigenous consultative committees. The committees act as a bridge between councils and Indigenous groups and provide an Indigenous perspective to councils. As an indication of the range of strategies available to councils, the Brisbane City Council has:
- employed Indigenous liaison officers;
 - created an Indigenous advisory group;
 - liaised directly with Indigenous community groups;
 - formed joint partnerships with Indigenous groups;
 - conducted Indigenous women's and men's safety seminars;
 - made Indigenous homelessness and usage of public space as the topics of monthly meetings with community agencies and council;
 - established Indigenous representation on funding bodies; and
 - signed a native title accord with the local land council.³³
- 4.39 The Committee commends and encourages those local governments who have taken initiatives to: fund full or part time Indigenous liaison officer positions; provide cultural awareness courses for staff; and target council cadetships and apprenticeships to Indigenous people.

32 ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S718.

33 Brisbane City Council, *Submissions*, pp. S1056-65.

- 4.40 Members note that local government does not extend to the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and that the ACT government undertakes local government functions. The Committee's comments regarding the roles being undertaken by local government apply equally to the ACT.

Partnerships

Council Recognition of Indigenous Rate Payers – Townsville, QLD

The Townsville City Council has introduced new ways to respond to the needs of Indigenous people. Council:

- employs a full time community development officer;
- hosted an Elders Dinner which 80 elders attended and also formed an Elders Advisory Committee;
- has employed 100 Indigenous trainees since 1982; and
- is helping to set up an Indigenous cultural centre.³⁴

Local Government Associations

- 4.41 As well as the efforts made by individual councils, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) has been promoting reconciliation and better cooperation between local governments and their Indigenous residents. The ALGA has established a National Indigenous Local Government Advisory Committee which provides advice to the ALGA. In consultation with ATSIC, the ALGA has also released guides for local governments seeking to enter agreements with Indigenous groups; distributed case studies of good practice relations with Indigenous people; and adopted a 'commitment statement'. In the latter, local government committed, among other things, to:
- take effective action on issues of social and economic concern (as identified in the 1992 COAG Communique) where they lie within the sphere of interest and responsibility of local government; and
 - develop strategies that improve the level of participation of Indigenous people in local government at all levels.³⁵

34 Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) & ATSIC, *Justice and Equity for All: Local Government and Indigenous Partnerships*, pp. 52-53.

35 *Local Government of Australia Reaffirms its Commitment to Maintaining a Culturally Diverse, Tolerant and Open Society, United by an Overriding Commitment to our Nation and its Democratic Institutions and Values*, Adopted, 24 February 2000, *Submissions*, p. S724.

- 4.42 Discussions for a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the ALGA and ATSIC are in progress as the inquiry was conducted and expected to be finalised in late 2001.
- 4.43 In the mid 1990s the Department of Transport and Regional Services and ATSIC jointly funded Aboriginal policy officer positions in state local government associations. Funding was withdrawn in 1999. However, ATSIC still continues to part fund a national policy officer position in the ALGA.³⁶ The Committee has taken evidence that various state wide local government initiatives regarding local government service delivery to Indigenous people have subsequently become 'moribund'.³⁷
- 4.44 The Committee believes that these positions facilitated partnerships between local governments and Indigenous communities at the local level and helped councils improve service delivery to Indigenous people. Accordingly, the Committee makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation 14

- 4.45 **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission develop with the National Office of Local Government a proposal to continue to part fund an Aboriginal policy officer position with the Australian Local Government Association with the view to providing advice to local government on ways of extending the involvement of Indigenous people in local government.**

Town Camps

- 4.46 The Committee has received evidence of Indigenous households not receiving municipal services in some circumstances, despite being ratepayers. This occurs most frequently where there are discrete Aboriginal communities ('town camps') within council boundaries.³⁸ In these cases, ATSIC and state departments of Aboriginal affairs are usually forced to step in to provide the necessary community infrastructures on behalf of quasi local government town camp organisations.
- 4.47 Historically, contact between town camps and councils has often been limited, accompanied by simmering disputes over the payment of rates and delivery of services. However, there are examples of councils and town camps working together to resolve issues of dispute and improve

36 At the time of the inquiry, the position was unfilled.

37 ATSIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, pp. S583-84.

38 See South Australian Governments, *Submissions*, p. S1209; Northern Territory Government, *Submissions*, pp. S1362-63.

relations.³⁹ The Committee wishes to encourage these initiatives and urges the National Office of Local Government, the states and Northern Territory agencies responsible for local government to take a leadership role in bringing councils and town camp organisations together.

Recommendation 15

4.48 The National Office of Local Government in conjunction with departments of local government in the states and Northern Territory take a leadership role in facilitating, where necessary, more cooperative arrangements between mainstream councils and separate and discrete Aboriginal communities within council boundaries ('town camps') as is being done in Bourke, New South Wales and in the Northern Territory between the Alice Springs and Tangentyere councils.

Indigenous Participation on Council

4.49 Another way for Indigenous people to extend their involvement in decision making that affects their local communities is to gain election to their local council.

4.50 As a general rule, Indigenous people, have not shown a great deal of interest in standing for election onto mainstream councils.⁴⁰ A consequence was that in 1999, for example, only 11 out of 1807 elected councillors in New South Wales were Indigenous.⁴¹ The low involvement has been attributed to poor understanding of the electoral processes and the role of councillors; a reaction to an assessment of the probability of success or a lack of interest.

4.51 There are a number of excellent state and Northern Territory based initiatives to encourage more Indigenous people to run for election. In NSW, for example, the Aboriginal Mentoring Program has been designed to give Aboriginal participants a greater insight into the operation of local government and encouragement to run for office. A person nominated by their community spends six months shadowing a councillor, attending council meetings, having access to council facilities and attending civic duties with their mentor.⁴²

4.52 In Alice Springs, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Tangentyere Council and the Alice Springs Town Council contains a

39 See Bourke Shire Council, *Submissions*, p. 214; Tangentyere Council, *Transcripts*, p. 440.

40 As distinct from those standing for local government where the ward population is all or nearly all Indigenous. Northern Territory, *Submissions*, p. S1383.

41 ALGA & ATSIC, *Justice and Equity: Local Government and Indigenous Partnerships*, 1999, p. 38.

42 ALGA & ATSIC, *Justice and Equity: Local Government and Indigenous Partnerships*, 1999, pp. 38-39.

commitment to seek a change in the voting system to proportional representation on the basis that it will give Indigenous people a greater chance of being elected.⁴³

- 4.53 ATSIIC too is encouraging Indigenous people to participate in local government. It has developed a guide to assist ATSIIC regional councillors who consider standing for election to become a local government councillor.⁴⁴
- 4.54 The Committee is very keen to encourage Indigenous people to run for local government. Members encourage the ALGA, the Northern Territory and state local government associations to continue efforts to increase the number of Indigenous people running for local government.

Conclusion

- 4.55 The Committee has already indicated that it sees that the contribution of Indigenous individuals, families and communities is vital to improving the effectiveness of programs and the relevance of community decision making.

43 Tangentyere Council, *Transcripts*, p. 440.

44 ATSIIC, *Making the Decision to Get Involved in Local Government*, 2001.

