

OUT00/672386 MO:TF 01240

12th October, 2000

Mr M Osborne

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee
On Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

RE: SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO THE NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING

Please find attached a submission on Aboriginal communities within Kalgoorlie-Boulder. I hope this assists you into the inquiry into the needs of country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Yours faithfully

Mal Osborne
Director
COMMUNITY AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Aboriginal Communities within Kalgoorlie-Boulder

There are presently two aboriginal communities within the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. There are however many visitors who come to Kalgoorlie-Boulder from the outlying communities for cultural ceremonies and functions, medical services and funerals.

It is important from the outset to mention a camp/community set-up over 10 years ago as a town reserve community known as Nanny Goat Hill. Set up by Homeswest in conjunction with Aboriginal Affairs Department, Nanny Goat Hill fell into a state of disrepair through vandalism and a lack of maintenance and was demolished recently when the ground below became unstable due to a series of mine shafts. The occupants were relocated to a small camp known as Half Way Camp which adjoins Silver City and the Ninga Mia Town Community and were there for only a short time before a death occurred and it has again become vacant.

Coonana (Upurl Upurlila Ngurratja) which is situated approximately 186 kilometres east of Kalgoorlie, and in the municipal district of the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, of the Trans Railway line.

The community commenced as a rations depot in 1939 known as Cunderlee and around 1950 was established as an Australian Evangelical Mission.

Coonana is situated in the Western Desert ATSIC Region.

The mission left the community in the 1970's and in 1976 became incorporated and took over it's own administration in 1979.

Due to a severe shortage of drinking water at Cunderlee the Government, between 1979 and 1983, sought to purchase the Coonana station. The station was purchased and people from Cunderlee moved to the present area where Coonana Community is located. This was despite some water problems at the new location. During a visit by the Council Health staff in February 1999 the water capacity remaining was estimated to be less than 35 days supply.

The majority of the Coonana people lived a traditional lifestyle until early in the 1960's and were moved into the area following United Kingdom nuclear weapons testing carried out in the 1950's.

The first test was code-named Buffalo and was carried out at One Tree Maralinga on 27 Sept 1956 and three further tests were carried out in October 1956 and in September and October 1957 two further tests were carried out at Maralinga. Maralinga is Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal dialect for "Field of Thunder".

The people of Coonana are traditionally associated with country on either side of the South Australian border, north to the Central Reserves and south to the Railway.

The community population fluctuates greatly and there is frequent travel to outlying communities and areas. People known to have been resident at Maralinga at the time of the bomb testing were later residents of Cunderlee and are known to be resident at

the Oak Valley Community and, like many from the area, are attracted to Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

It is common knowledge that the population from aboriginal communities situated in the Western Desert areas at Wingellina, Warburton, Blackstone, Warakurna, Jamieson and Wanarn in Western Australia and Yalata in South Australia have strong ties back to the Kalgoorlie-Boulder district. Similarly there are skin and family ties between the people from the above-mentioned communities and the Tjuntjuntjarra Community, Coonana Community and Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

Population figures vary greatly between 100 – 250 people at any one time. Population for the 1997 Environmental Health Needs Survey put the population at > 100. Last available figures for the community in respect of housing puts the number of houses at between 46-50 and the standard of housing is best described as bordering on sub-standard.

There is a reticulated water supply, a school, a police outstation, sewerage scheme, sanitary landfill waste disposal site, community hall, community store and a health clinic.

Ninga Mia

The Ninga Mia Community was set up in 1983 as temporary accommodation on the outskirts of Kalgoorlie-Boulder township and over the years it has been developed into a Township Community providing permanent accommodation.

Presently there are 24 houses and the associated infrastructure which goes along with the community.

The community is well run and there is a set of rules in place and it operates effectively.

Tjuntjuntjarra

Tjuntjuntjarra was established in the mid 1980's when there was some movement by community elders from Coonana to the traditional homelands and it is a community which forms part of a pattern of traditional ceremonial movement throughout the area.

Tjuntjuntjarra is situated in the Western Desert ATSIC Region.

Situated in the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku and 305 nautical miles from Kalgoorlie and north of the Trans Line the population for the 1997 Environmental Health Needs survey was put at < 100 the community has strong ties to Kalgoorlie-Boulder. The population at Tjuntjuntjarra can fluctuate anywhere between zero and 500.

There are approximately 10 houses, a community hall, store, medical clinic and a school.

Central Desert People.

The people from the aboriginal communities situated in the Central Desert areas at Wingellina, Warburton, Blackstone, Warakurna, Jamieson and Wanarn frequently visit the city for cultural and a variety of other reasons.

Council is in the process of building a camp at Yarri Road which will provide these people with a stopping off point with facilities.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NEEDS SURVEY 1997

The 1997 Environmental Health Needs Survey recognised the problems associated with the lack of accommodation for the homeless and in Section 5.4.3 Wongatha Regional Council Comments interalia states:

Accommodation.

“A major problem for the Wongatha Regional Council has been the issue of indigenous itinerants who regularly visit Kalgoorlie/Boulder, and the health problems experienced as a result of their environment. These people ordinarily live in outlying communities, but often have nowhere to stay when visiting or passing through Kalgoorlie/Boulder. A number of these people end up living on the streets and suffering from alcohol abuse. The health implications of this situation is enormous, especially for those group of itinerants who have based themselves permanently in the Kalgoorlie/Boulder CBD area.

The lack of accommodation for homeless people in Kalgoorlie is a major concern. The Regional council would like to make more flats and hostels available for indigenous people, but is restricted by its housing and infrastructure budget and program guidelines. Even if funding was available for additional accommodation, there would also be the problem of countering the opposition of local residents to itinerants being accommodated within the town boundaries. Residents would prefer to see these people accommodated in communities out of town such as Ninga Mia.

The problem with taking those people who reside in the CBD to outlying communities is that no alcohol is available. These people will make their way straight back into town. One proposal is to put forward by ATSIC over the past few years to address this problem was the establishment of a ‘wet area’. A management plan was recently completed for an area where itinerants could drink during the day, but be regularly monitored by the local patrol, Police and the health service. The ‘wet area’ would allow a holistic approach to be undertaken, where these people could reside in relative safety, but also be provided with any necessary medical treatment. Although such an area would still not solve the problem of overnight accommodation.

Nonetheless, local residents are opposed to the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Shire Council approving the use of any land in the CBD area for use as a ‘wet area’. The Wongatha Regional Council would like consideration to be given to ATSIC purchasing the necessary land and funding the ongoing management of the ‘wet area’. However this would involve substantial funding that is not available through ATSIC.

Given the above problems with finding accommodation and the opposition of local residents, the Regional Council believes there needs to be a community established

properly from the beginning and should never be considered as a permanent community. There needs to be food, shelter and showers available as well as transport to take people back to the community from which they came from.”

The report having started off in identifying the problems of people coming into town, finished up identifying a second group of indigenous persons who are a problem and that it is the fringedweller who lives in the town and on the fringes of town.

However in the very next paragraph the report goes into a section titled Health Services and states:

Health Services

“ The health of indigenous people in the region is a major problem, such as a high percentage of alcohol abuse, diabetes, heart disease and ear and eye problems. The Bega Garribirringu Health Service Aboriginal corporation is working hard to provide a holistic approach to improving the health of indigenous people. While the regional Council no longer funds the health service, the health service still deserves the recognition for the enormous benefits it provides for indigenous people.

The health service not only provides treating doctors, but also employs health workers who can give thorough check-ups (including teeth, ears and eyes) and offer showers and clean clothes where necessary. The health service also provides counselling services; specialist eye, ear nose and throat services; immunisation child health care; specialist kidney services; a dietitian and a women’s health program. There is also a health promotions unit and a sobering up shelter to help combat the effects of alcohol abuse.”

KALGOORLIE- BOULDER LOCAL ISSUES

There are a number of local issues which have a direct bearing on the problems which face, the City Council, the Community and the Indigenous population in the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

HEALTH SERVICES

There are presently three Community Health Services who all provide a service to the indigenous population:

Njunytju Tjitic Pirni.

Njunytju Tjitic Pirni is one of the service providers and they are in the process of setting up a new aboriginal health unit/medical clinic to provide a larger and more efficient service at 459 Hannan Street Kalgoorlie and this service is funded with State, Federal and private monies. This is a maternal and child health screening service which essentially deals with women's and children's health issues for the whole community. When set up in their new premises the group will be providing education on a whole range of health issues and will become an immunisation provider and become actively involved in diabetes education and control.

Northern Goldfields Health Services.

The Health Department WA Northern Goldfields Health Services - Ware Street Kalgoorlie is a state funded health service and the range of services they provide also includes women's health and infant health services which are also available to the whole community.

Bega Garnbirringu Health Services.

Bega Garnbirringu Health Services provides what is probably the largest of the health services to the indigenous population in the city. The services provided by Bega have been mentioned in the 1997 Environmental Health Needs Survey. Their funding is administered through the Office of Aboriginal Health within the Health Department of W.A.. The services provided by Bega extends and covers the full range of community health services and associated programmes.

COMMENT

There is anecdotal evidence that the funded service providers are not taking their services out into the community and/or that it is not reaching some areas within the indigenous population. It is those persons who are most in need of the service.

The City is continually working towards ensuring that the services provided are not only effective but reach all of those who will benefit most from the provision of a regular and reliable service.

Consequently there needs to be an urgent review of the services provided by all of the funded service providers to ensure that the programmes and services they provide are not only effective but that they do reach those who will benefit most from the service. Part of this review should also include recognition of the service and programmes provided and the need to provide funding for specialist services which are not duplicated. This issue of service availability is bound up with the problems of transport.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

There are transport problems which directly relate to the fringedwellers and visitors from outlying communities and they relate to the transient nature of the people who come into town and stayed or are left behind by the transport that brought them into town.

This adds to anti-social behaviour including incidents of car theft in the municipality, and many vehicles are found abandoned or burnt out on the Trans Access Road which leads directly to some of the outlying aboriginal communities.

The Council is continually involved in the impounding of vehicles which are in most cases best described as unregistered and derelict. The vehicles break down on road reserves and the drivers/owners transgress into areas where Council and the mining area have set aside for rehabilitation.

There have been a number of injuries and deaths associated with unregistered vehicles coming into Kalgoorlie-Boulder from Coonana and other outlying communities from as far away as Yalata in South Australia and Warburton in the Central Desert Region.

There are regular problems associated with;

- Unlicensed driving,
- Unregistered and unroadworthy motor vehicles.

Many of the persons who come into the city and stay are those who are receiving or require regular medical treatment or alternatively suffer injuries which are can be attributed to;

- cultural activities,
- alcohol and
- motor vehicles.

It is these people who are most in need of transport from the fringes of town to the hospital or health service and the big winners in the equation are the taxi services.

There have been problems with the Wunnagututu Patrol in respect to operating hours and the reliability of the service over the last couple of years.

STREET DRINKING

The Environmental Health Needs Survey 1997, in recognising the problems associated with the excessive consumption of alcohol at no stage suggested anything other than the provision of a 'wet area'. One alternative option could have been to carry out an education campaign designed to encourage responsible drinking within the community where they live and permit drinking under controlled conditions.

This would have the effect of people being prepared to stay in their outlying communities where the facilities are provided by the community purse.

The Kalgoorlie-Boulder community was very specific and gave the Council some clear directions in respect to setting up a 'wet area'. The community was opposed to the setting up of a 'wet area in the townsite. It is fair to suggest that the community had witnessed the problems of street drinking had gone unsupervised by the police and they could not be confident that the matter would be supervised in the manner that had been suggested.

Council's Health staff are well aware of the problems associated with drinking which results in persons becoming offensive and urinating and defecating in the streets in the town areas.

FRINGEDWELLER CAMPS

IN JUNE 1998 THE CITY OF KALGOORLIE-BOULDER COMMENCED WORK ON AN INITIATIVE TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF FRINGEDWELLERS LIVING IN THE TOWNSHIP OF BOULDER.

THE AIM WAS TO REMOVE THEM FROM THE STREETS, WHERE THEY WERE DRINKING BY DAY AND CAMPING BY NIGHT. THE ACTION WAS TAKEN FOLLOWING PRESSURE EXERTED BY THE COMMUNITY IN RESPECT OF PROBLEMS INVOLVING DRUNKENNESS, LAWLESSNESS, VANDALISM, STEALING, LITTERING, AND OTHER MATTERS OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR WHICH COMBINED WITH LIVING UNDER UNHYGIENIC SUB-STANDARD CONDITIONS ARE NOT CONDUCTIVE TO GOOD HEALTH AND A SENSE OF WELL-BEING.

Initially there was some scepticism among the police and aboriginal agencies and politicians following a proposal by Council to establish a fringedweller camp. Subsequently negotiations between Council staff and the aboriginal community saw the fringedwellers relocated to a 'protected area' where camping would be tolerated pending a more suitable outcome to the problem.

It soon became apparent to Council staff that the relocation pending a more permanent solution to matter of fringedweller accommodation was successful.

Bonds of trust were quickly established between the fringedweller community and Council staff and this is one of the major reasons why Council's relocation program pending an outcome was a major success.

Council approved and funded the establishment of a fringedweller camp at Zone 6 in Boulder after a period of consultation. Funds were also received from the Aboriginal Affairs Department, Safer WA, Red Cross and the mining industry and the establishment of a temporary transient camp commenced.

It was initially intended to set-up a second camp near Kalgoorlie at Lakewood for the visitors from outlying communities to camp while visiting the city. This project has not proceeded because of opposition from the tenement holders of the land.

Zone 6 Camp.

There is no doubt that the establishment of a camp by Council has achieved the desired results and removed the problems from the street to an area provided with basic facilities which includes scheme water, septic drop pit toilets, bough sheds, security fencing, solar panel showers and solar panel operated community lighting.

To date there has been very little vandalism except in respect of the external fencing into the adjoining rehabilitation bush areas.

The opposition to the establishment of a camp at Lakewood has not without some problems and resulted in visitors and fringedwellers occupying the same camp. The camp has been vacated twice because of the cultural problems associated with death.

Council has been providing firewood for the camp and Council's Aboriginal Community Facility Co-ordinator employed to liaise with the indigenous population is encouraging the occupants to accompany him into bush areas to collect their own wood.

There are individuals who will dispute the Council's claims, that the health of the occupants of the camp has improved.

Council acknowledges that there have been no measurable tests carried out by any of the health services designed and provided for the indigenous population.

The claims made in respect of health improvement of the population are based on visual observations, discussions with the people and noticeable improvements in the community's social fabric.

There are problems in respect of the provision of food and transport associated with the camp and Council staff often find themselves ferrying people into hospital for treatment.

A soup kitchen provided by Red Cross is a reliable source of nutrition for camp occupants on at least three days per week.

There is a direct correlation between the availability of a reliable food supply and the occupancy of the Zone 6 campsite.

When the provision of the soup kitchen service is reliable within the camp, it is noticeable that the occupants remain at 'home'

Yarri Road Camp.

In September, 2000 the City commenced construction of a second facility which will be known as Yarri Road Camp.

This camp will be provided with two solar panel shower blocks with adjoining drop pit septic toilets, a large shed with a secure compound for storage of equipment, a sink supplied with hot and cold running scheme water, 12 living quarters and 4 bough sheds for shelter.

This camp is being built specifically to cater for the people from the Central Desert Community when they come to the city for whatever reason.

The provision of this camp will alleviate many of the problems which are created when the people come to town and camp on the top edge of Hannan Street and the Central Business District.

The usual anti-social behaviour problems associated with alcohol are always evident at these areas when there is a large influx of people into the city.

COMMUNITY IN CRISIS.

One of the problems which results in a mass exodus from outlying communities is when the services or management structure breakdown and are in crisis, the problems related to community management, drugs, petrol sniffing and alcohol related problems often involve violence and other problems associated with lawlessness.

This places pressure on that particular community and the other communities where the residents move to escape the problems which threaten their safety, health, security and well-being.

A recent crisis at Coonana has seen elders move to Tjuntjuntjarra and others in the community overflow to the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and utilise existing town services with the result that the same services provided within the community that is experiencing crisis become unviable propositions.

The net result is that health nurses and teachers are reluctant to reside in the community and the service does not achieve the desired results.

Council's health staff carried out a full inspection of the Coonana Community in February 1999 and the standard of housing and facilities in the community were sub-standard due to vandalism and a lack of maintenance and mismanagement.

There have been recent problems at the Coonana Community and the people coming into Kalgoorlie-Boulder have advised Council staff that the store has no provisions.

There have been a number of unsubstantiated allegations of the funds being misappropriated as being the major reason why the store is not stocked. Recent information available suggests that a deficient of \$20,000 associated with the trading store has now been reduced to \$10,000.

It must be clearly stated that these allegations also suggest that the person or persons involved in any misappropriation have now left the community.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people;

SUBMISSION:

There has been a number of suggestions made that specific health services are not reaching the people most in need of the service and are selectively provided to family members.

There are suggestions that a section of the indigenous community will not go to Bega Health Services and this has resulted in services being provided by *Njunytju Tjitic Pirni* which duplicates services provided by Bega and the Health Department of W.A. at Northern Goldfields Community Health.

In respect of fringedwellers who come into town and stay in the Zone 6 Camp, there are claims that there is no regular visit by what the aboriginal population still refer to as AMS (Aboriginal Medical Service) and if they are able to make their way to the Bega Building for treatment etc there are reports that the Bega Bus will often drop the people back in Boulder township and they often have to find their own way back to the Zone 6 camp.

There are two soup patrols who provide sustenance to the population these are Red Cross and Bega Health Services. The Red Cross Service operates on a regular basis over the weekends and the service provided by Bega is not always available for whatever reason.

There needs to be a total review of the health services, transport and food services provided to the aboriginal community and the effectiveness of those services provided.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;

SUBMISSION:

Council has in the past facilitated meetings to extend the involvement of the people and government bodies who represent the aboriginal population.

This has resulted in a series of accusations and walkouts by representatives from a couple of organisations and allegations that Council has misappropriated funds provided by Safer WA, Council and the Mining Industry and has resulted in a meeting where Council has put the books on the table for scrutiny by all. This has not been a

reciprocal arrangement by the organisations who have accused Council of funding misappropriation.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);

SUBMISSION:

Many of the problems among the indigenous young, are related to the fact that the opportunity for employment is limited and this can in many ways be directly attributed to the standard of education of many of the young people and the fact that employers seem reluctant to employ indigenous persons.

Reasons for this are many and varied but in short those who are reliable, are let down by those who are unreliable in respect of performance of duties and attendance at the workplace on a regular basis to perform those duties.

The system which has been set-up in respect of payments for the unemployed does very little to improve the problems.

While not wanting to generalise, Council staff were advised in February 1998 while at the Coonana Community that there is a Sandalwood contract available to the community to supply 50 tonnes of sandalwood at \$5000 per tonne and they cannot get anyone to work on the contract.

This is directly related to the urban aboriginal problems and it is instances like this example which if true, need to be investigated and efforts channelled into ensuring that not only does the program work, but it is a reliable project which will provide a sense of worth to the young population who are slowly destroying themselves with drugs, alcohol and petrol sniffing.

On the matter of education particularly in respect of the indigenous environmental health worker, there is presently a proposal which may see the training of environmental health workers taken from Curtin University and handed over to Bega Garnbirringu Health Service.

There are presently numerous problems associated with the employment and training, accountability and availability of indigenous environmental health workers to the indigenous population in urban areas of the Goldfields.

There are problems in respect of the availability of environmental health worker assistance to the Council run camp Zone 6 and Council has been forced to commit ratepayer funds to the aboriginal health problems and employ an Aboriginal Communities Co-ordinator to oversee the camps set-up and run by Council.

The result of this is that pressure is then brought to bear because Bega Health Services who see that the Railway Mob Camp with which they are associated with as being neglected by Council.

Council is being required to provide services to those communities which have been set-up by other bodies.

There is an urgent need for a review of all of the services provided to the indigenous population and if necessary someone has to make the hard decisions and change management structures to overcome perceptions rightly or wrongly that a particular service is favouring a particular family structure.

There needs to be a review of the training, services and employment of aboriginal environmental health workers.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;

SUBMISSION:

Maintenance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas is encouraged by Council and the establishment of fringedweller camps by Council allows these people to live as they determine under conditions developed in conjunction with the community.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

5. Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas; and

SUBMISSION:

There are ample opportunities in the community for economic independence but there are many problems which revolve around the reliability of such services and the tenure and duration of funding which is initially provided to get the projects operational.

Other issues involve the lack of support provided in respect of operational procedures and supervision and the continuing support and education programs to ensure that the projects are ongoing.

Like the Coonana Community and the sandalwood project there is a project which will if properly managed, provide a remote community with economic independence and increase the self worth of those who live in the community. This may lead to them overcoming with help and support the problems directly related to alcohol and unemployment, problems which are both holding back progression of the indigenous population.

There needs to be a review of the opportunities available for economic independence and where available support given to ensure the viability of the project or service to be provided.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

6. Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

SUBMISSION:

There are many problems associated with the urban housing needs and these can be from the enforcement of rules where residents are required to pay their way for rent and meals and follow rules in respect of bans on the drinking of alcohol etc.

While it is desirable that drinking be not tolerated in many communities it also follows that education on responsible drinking and keeping these people busy are ways in which to reduce the personal harm they are causing to themselves and others.

Recently Aboriginal hostels made application to demolish and re-build a hostel - Trilby Cooper in Hannan Street Kalgoorlie, there was opposition to the re-development on the grounds of problems created in the past from persons who come and go from this hostel.

However if we disregard that aspect totally, it is regrettable that no arrangements were put into place for temporary accommodation of the people who occupied that hostel when they came into town for court appearances, medical reasons, cultural purposes, funerals etc.

This resulted in people literally being forced out onto the streets due to the shortage of suitable and available accommodation.

There needs to be a review and adequate funding provided for accommodation which is of:

- An appropriate design
- Provides for the assimilation of the indigenous population into the greater community and takes into consideration such things as the extended family and culture of the people.

**Prepared by the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder
11th October 2000**