

CAPACITY BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Submission by the Department of Transport and Regional Services

Deadline: 30 August 2002

(Negotiated an extended deadline with the Committee Secretary to 13 September.)

Summary

- The Federal Government's policy statement on regional development, *Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia*, provides a framework for fostering development of Australia's regions through the next decade. A key principle of this policy is the partnership approach, which aims to support self-reliant regions and communities, including Indigenous communities, in developing their own plans and aspirations.
- In 1999, the Commonwealth Government's Regional Women's Advisory Council was asked to identify and report on the critical success factors for communities managing change in rural and regional Australia. The Council established a national action research project *The Success Factors: managing change in regional and rural Australia*. The major finding of the project and key to community building is that the way people feel about their community determines the strength and ability of that community to manage change. For example communities that have a positive outlook are supportive and can deal with adversity, whereas communities with a negative outlook are less cohesive and are less able to adapt to change.
- A range of initiatives provided by DOTARS contribute to the development of community capacity in regional Australia. These are outlined in the body of this submission.

Signature

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

Submission from the Department of Transport and Regional Services

September 2002

This submission from the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities describes the DOTARS programmes and activities currently available to enhance Indigenous community capacity in regional Australia.

The submission has been prepared from a regional perspective and covers:

- A. Community Capacity;
- B. Current Situation – Policies and Government Response;
- C. Terms of Reference; and
- D. Next Steps and Recommendations.

The identification and definition of regions depends on who is identifying a region and for what purpose. For this submission, regions refer to both non-metropolitan and metropolitan regions unless otherwise stated. Regional Australia refers to those places outside of capital cities.

Responses to the *Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities Terms of Reference* are made at the end of this paper.

A. COMMUNITY CAPACITY

This submission will use the definition of community as agreed to under the Framework for Co-operation of the Regional Development Council. The Regional Development Council (RDC) is a Ministerial Council formed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) which aims to facilitate more effective cooperation across all spheres of government in order to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes for regional Australia. The RDC, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon John Anderson MP, comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers responsible for regional development in their jurisdiction, and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The Standing Committee on Regional Development (SCORD), the committee of senior officials that supports the RDC, is developing an Indigenous Action Plan to consider the needs and aspirations of Indigenous communities and influence improved outcomes for Indigenous people.

According to this definition communities include the people, families, businesses, local industries, non-government organisations, educational institutions, and economic and social networks that make up Australia's regions.

Community capacity, according to the House of Representatives Standing Committee's terms of reference, is defined as helping individuals and organisations within communities to gain the skills and tools to achieve, or successfully engage others to help achieve community or regional goals.

Community capacity will mean different things to different regions, reflecting the diverse nature of regional Australia. Policy makers may also have a different interpretation of what community capacity building means, reflecting in part their own skills and particular areas of interest.

In 1999, the Commonwealth Government's Regional Women's Advisory Council was asked to identify and report on the critical success factors for communities managing change in rural and regional Australia. The Council established a national action research project *The Success Factors: managing change in regional and rural Australia*. The project involved seven communities across Australia including Denmark WA, Griffith NSW, Ceduna SA, Devonport Tas, Hamilton Vic, Tennant Creek NT and Cloncurry Qld. The project objectives included community building and research.

The major finding of the project and key to community building is that the way people **feel** about their community determines the strength and ability of that community to manage change. For example communities that have a positive outlook are supportive and can deal with adversity, whereas communities with a negative outlook are less cohesive and are less able to adapt to change.

B. CURRENT SITUATION – POLICIES and GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Federal Government's policy statement on regional development, *Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia*, (August 2001) provides a framework for developing Australia's regions through the next decade. A key idea in this policy is the Government's partnership approach with regional communities. The partnership approach aims to support self-reliant regions and support communities, including Indigenous communities, in developing their own plans and aspirations.

Council of Australian Governments – Indigenous Action Plans

In November 2000 the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers of all States and Territories and the President of the Australian Local Government Association, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), agreed on a framework to advance reconciliation. Recognising that concerted action across jurisdictions and the commitment of the highest leadership in Australia are necessary to advance reconciliation, COAG requested that all relevant ministerial councils prepare an Indigenous Action Plan, including benchmarks and performance reporting strategies.

Regional Development Council

The Regional Development Council will provide advice to COAG about where gaps in services exist and where further action can be taken to improve outcomes for Indigenous communities in regional Australia..

Local Government

The Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council is also charged with developing an Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan. An Officials Group comprising officers from the Commonwealth, States, Territories and the Australian Local Government Association has prepared a draft action plan that is currently with jurisdictions for comment and for consultation. The Action Plan is to be considered at the first meeting of the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council.

Australian Transport Council

The Australian Transport Council (ATC) approved an Indigenous Action Plan at its meeting in Auckland on 8 August that will be implemented by Commonwealth, State and Territory government transport agencies. The Deputy Prime Minister in his capacity as Chair of the ATC has since

forwarded copies of the plan to all COAG members in accordance with an earlier request received from the Prime Minister

Council Of Australian Governments Indigenous Trials– DOTARS Secretary sponsorship

On 5 April 2002 COAG agreed to trial a whole of government approach in up to 10 Indigenous communities or regions. The aim of the trials is to improve the way governments interact with each other and with communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians. The approach will be flexible in order to reflect the needs of specific communities, build on existing work and improve the compatibility of different State, Territory and Commonwealth approaches to achieve better outcomes.

It is expected that lessons learned from these cooperative approaches will provide a framework for other initiatives that adopt a whole of government response to Indigenous communities or regions.

The Secretaries Group on Indigenous Issues is coordinating the Commonwealth input to the trials with each member of the Secretaries Group expected to sponsor a community or region. This sponsorship will involve:

- leadership of 'whole of government' activity in the region.
- a visit prior to the commencement and active interest throughout the trial.
- advice back to the Secretaries Group.

C. DOTARS PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES AS THEY RELATE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference of this Inquiry are:

The Committee will inquire into and report on strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, the Committee will consider building the capacities of:

- (a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities;
- (b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way; and
- (c) Government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

DOTARS has a number of programmes that enhance capacity building in regional communities. This section of the submission will address those programmes that assist in building Indigenous community capacity according to the House of Representatives Standing Committee's terms of reference. A more detailed description of the relevant DOTARS programmes and activities can be found at Appendix A.

(a) community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities

- The Sustainable Regions Programme helps identify the regional priorities and determine funding opportunities for communities within the eight identified Sustainable Regions to build

their economic base, strengthen their social structures and sustain the environment. Some of these regions have already flagged Indigenous issues as priorities.

Funding for the Sustainable Regions Programme totals \$100.5M. Assistance will initially be provided to eight 'prototype' regions: Atherton Tablelands (QLD), Wide Bay Burnett (QLD), Far North East NSW, Campbelltown/Camden (NSW), Gippsland (VIC), North West & West Coast Tasmania, Playford/Salisbury (SA), and Kimberley (WA).

The Sustainable Regions Programme will help identify the regional priorities and determine funding opportunities for communities within the region to build their economic base, strengthen their social structures and sustain the environment. Local Advisory Committees are being established in each region, enabling strong relationships between the Programme and Indigenous organisations and communities in regions such as the Kimberley and the Atherton Tablelands.

- The Regional Solutions Programme (RSP) is a flexible assistance programme that targets communities in regional, rural and remote areas. Although Indigenous communities are not specifically targeted by RSP, a large proportion of the Indigenous population lives in the targeted areas and these communities would be expected to be beneficiaries of the programme. Factors considered in the assessment of projects include levels of disadvantage and/or need in the community. RSP has funded a number of projects of direct benefit to Indigenous people.
- DOTARS administers the National Awards for Local Government each year. This year a Special Award for Strengthening Indigenous Communities is being sponsored by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. The Award will be announced in November 2002. The Special Award for Strengthening Indigenous Communities aims to highlight initiatives by Local Government and Community Councils that are demonstrating innovation and/or excellence in their approach to increasing opportunities for engagement and participation by Indigenous people in the affairs of the local community. It will also aim to highlight improving community governance and service delivery arrangements for Indigenous people. This may be demonstrated by, but not be limited to, councils who are:
 - engaging with local leaders on a regular basis about improving governance and service delivery arrangements with Indigenous people;
 - investing in community leadership initiatives;
 - partnering with Indigenous communities and organisations to build capacity and strength to encourage self reliance and greater social and economic participation; and
 - implementation of significant development through increased participation by Indigenous people in the community.

The Croc Festival is an innovative event that builds partnerships in regional and remote communities by celebrating youth culture. Involving young Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in visual and performing arts, sports clinics and careers markets in a 100 per cent drug and alcohol free environment, the festivals promote health, education and employment in a spirit of reconciliation.

- The Croc Festivals provide an opportunity for school communities in rural and remote areas of the nation to participate in activities to improve their social and emotional well being. Over three days of the festival students have the opportunity to perform on a professional stage, attend goal setting and self esteem building activities, sporting clinics and health and career expos.

DOTARS gives financial support to the CROC Festivals as this provides:

- an opportunity to communicate Government messages to regional Australia;
 - an opportunity to become involved in cross-portfolio support of events that bring a range of benefits and opportunities to regional communities; and
 - an opportunity for school communities in rural and remote areas to improve their social and emotional wellbeing while addressing social and cultural issues.
- The Rural Transaction Centres Programme (RTCP) provides access to basic services such as banking and postal services, Centrelink and Medicare easyclaim. A strategy to improve the access of Indigenous people and communities to the RTC Programme is being developed.
 - DOTARS is involved in a whole of government activity in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) Lands. This work builds on the Council of Australian Governments' Reconciliation Framework and aims to improve the lives of Indigenous community members by addressing social and economic disadvantage (including life expectancy) and improving governance and service delivery arrangements with Indigenous people.
 - DOTARS is seeking to improve the environmental health of Indigenous communities through active participation in the Commonwealth Working Group on Indigenous Environmental Health. This will have a direct impact on the well being of community members. This initiative encompasses all the measures necessary to deal with issues such as environmental degradation and climate change, hazards including contaminated water and food, and chemical exposure.
 - DOTARS has recently agreed to provide sponsorship for an Indigenous person to attend the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC) Diploma course and funding for another candidate to attend the AILC Certificate course. These courses will help create a critical mass of Indigenous leaders with the knowledge, skills, confidence and vision needed to contribute to Australia's shared future.
 - The Department's National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010 recognises that Indigenous road safety is a particular issue of concern. The estimated road death rate for the Indigenous population is three times higher than that of the non-Indigenous population. (Australian Transport Safety Bureau Report OR22, Estimating road trauma in the Australian Indigenous population, Jan. 2000).

This strategy will have a direct impact on community members and deliver better outcomes for individuals by aiming for a 40% reduction in the fatality rate per population by 2010 and a continual reduction in the casualty rates for Indigenous and other groups with particular road safety concerns.

(b) Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way

- The Roads to Recovery Programme provides funding to both Local and Aboriginal Councils to improve the standard of local roads throughout Australia. With improved infrastructure, local communities are in a better position to maximise regional opportunities. By allowing local communities to help themselves and design local solutions to remedy local problems, this programme indirectly builds community capacity and also allows Indigenous organisations to better deliver effective services.

Under this programme, responsibility for decisions on the works to be undertaken is in the hands of individual Councils and the range of works undertaken by Aboriginal councils can be significant. As examples, some councils have used the money to seal streets in their local communities to reduce the dust hazard, others have graded or sealed routes which give access to adjacent main roads and airstrips, or have concreted fords to give all weather access to their communities.

- The Local Government Financial Assistance Grants (FAGs) are untied grants given to councils to assist in providing a wide range of services. FAGs are provided to Indigenous local governing bodies to deliver services and, like the Roads to Recovery Programme, indirectly build community capacity by allowing local organisations to allocate grant monies according to the priorities of the community

In 2001–02, 99 Indigenous bodies received financial assistance grants under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*. These comprised:

- 3 councils established under State local government legislation;
- 63 bodies established under separate State legislation; and
- 33 bodies declared by the Federal Minister to be local governing bodies so that they could receive funding.

In 2001–02, these local governing bodies received \$18.77 million in untied financial assistance grants from the Commonwealth comprising \$12.02 million in general purpose grants and \$6.75 million in local roads grants.

- Under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*, the Federal Government is required to report to Parliament each year on the operation of the Act. This includes an assessment, based on comparable national data, of the performance by local governing bodies of their functions, including the services they provide to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. All States, the Commonwealth and the Australian Local Government Association have been providing progress reports on local government service provision to Indigenous communities since 1996. When the State reports are examined, it is evident that there are different priorities across the jurisdictions and varied progress. In some jurisdictions there is considerable energy and commitment with a range of positive developments. The States' reports have been published each year in an appendix of the Local Government National Report (available at http://www.nolg.gov.au/publications/national_report/00_01/chapter6/index.htm).
- Local Government Incentive Programme – this programme ceased in 2000-01 but provided some assistance to Indigenous Councils to implement a range of issues such as road management systems and tourism enterprises.

(c) government agencies so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people

- Under the recently announced COAG Indigenous whole-of-government activity, DOTARS has agreed to work closely with State and Territory Governments in a number of Indigenous communities and regions to provide programmes and services in a more coordinated and flexible way based on priorities agreed with communities.
- The Local Advisory Committees of the Sustainable Regions Programme are being established in each of the eight regions to which the programmes applies. The purpose of the Local Advisory Committees is to

build strong relationships with the programme and Indigenous organisations and communities in regions such as the Kimberley and the Atherton Tablelands. This will allow government access to relevant information from which to base policy directions and management structures so that the needs of the regions, including Indigenous communities can be met.

- DOTARS manages 56 Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) that allow the Regional Assistance Programme (RAP) to identify and endorse projects for funding. The ACCs throughout Australia play a vital role in working with Government to build cohesive, active and strong local communities. A number of ACCs operate in areas with significant Indigenous populations. A priority for all ACCs for 2002-03 is fostering a partnership approach with Indigenous communities to bring whole of government solutions to Indigenous disadvantage.

E. NEXT STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To further enhance the capacity of Indigenous communities in regional Australia, the Department will seek to:

- work through SCORD and RDC to promote cooperation across the levels of government in relation to addressing the needs of Indigenous people, adopting the basic principle that the best results will be achieved when communities identify and pursue their own strategies for development;
- work with other Commonwealth agencies to provide more consolidated services to assist communities; and
- administer DOTARS programmes to support these objectives by:
 - implementing a priority for all ACCs in 2002-03 to foster a partnership approach with Indigenous communities to bring whole of government solutions to assist Indigenous communities;
 - enhancing the content of Departmental information provided to regional communities so that it is more culturally relevant to Indigenous people;
 - examining the application rates and success rates of Indigenous groups applying for DOTARS programme grants; and
 - participate in the whole of government trials which aim to enhance service delivery and promote capacity building in Indigenous communities.

APPENDIX A: DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES PROGRAMMES RELATING TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE – AS AT SEPTEMBER 2002

Sustainable Regions Programme

The Sustainable Regions Programme is the major initiative under the 'Stronger Regions, A Stronger Australia' Statement announced by Minister Anderson on 29 August 2001. Funding for the Sustainable Regions Programme totals \$100.5M of which \$95.4M is available for designated regions. Assistance will initially be provided to eight 'prototype' regions: Atherton Tablelands (QLD), Wide Bay Burnett (QLD), Far North East NSW, Campbelltown/Camden (NSW), Gippsland (VIC), North West & West Coast Tasmania, Playford/Salisbury (SA), and Kimberley (WA).

The Sustainable Regions Programme will help identify the regional priorities and determine funding opportunities for communities within the region to build their economic base, strengthen their social structures and sustain the environment. Local Advisory Committees are being established in each region, enabling strong relationships between the Programme and Indigenous organisations and communities in regions such as the Kimberley and the Atherton Tablelands.

COAG Whole of Government Trials

On 5 April 2002 COAG agreed to trial a whole of government approach in up to 10 communities or regions. The aim of the trials is to improve the way governments interact with each other and communities to deliver more effective responses to the needs of Indigenous Australians. The lessons learnt from these cooperative approaches will be able to be applied more broadly. This approach will be flexible in order to reflect the needs of specific communities, build on existing work and improve the compatibility of different State, Territory and Commonwealth approaches to achieve better outcomes.

The Remote Aerodrome Inspection Programme

An aerodrome inspection service was funded by a special allocation in the Federal Budget. Aerodrome inspections of this type would normally be the responsibility of the aerodrome owner/operator but require specialised technical expertise not readily available in remote communities. The Government funded service is seen as a practical way of assisting the communities who are reliant on air services.

DOTARS has assumed responsibility for arranging the inspection services from 1 July 1997. DOTARS has engaged, under contract, Australian Airport Consulting and Technical Services Pty Ltd, based in Darwin. This company comprises suitable technically qualified aerodrome inspectors. It is undertaking aerodrome safety inspections including aerodrome survey and inspection services, and providing ad hoc technical advice as, and when, required at 59 aerodromes located across the whole of northern Australia.

Roads to Recovery Programme

The Roads to Recovery Programme will provide funding of \$1.2 billion over four years for local roads throughout Australia to improve their standard. The Programme commenced operation in February 2001. By 1 September 2002 \$532m was provided to 724 councils and more than 7,000 projects have been listed for funding. Most of the funds are being used for basic road works such as reconstruction, rehabilitation and widening, which accounts for 46% by value of all works listed in work schedules, sealing (13%) and resealing (10%).

Like other councils, Aboriginal Councils receive Roads to Recovery funds. There are just over 100 such bodies in the NT, Queensland and SA, which are entitled to receive \$12.3m over the course of the Programme. To date, they have received \$6.4m. In WA, where there are no Aboriginal Councils as such, \$4.2m is set aside for roads serving Aboriginal communities. For instance, Derby West Kimberley Shire Council receives \$1,604,288 plus \$239,000 for Aboriginal access roads over 2001-4 and Wyndham East Kimberley Shire Council receives \$1,626,481 plus \$560,000 for Aboriginal access roads over 2001-4.

The Programme Guidelines allow small Councils to receive their allocation in full to enable them to manage projects within a realistic timeframe.

Under this Programme, responsibility for decisions on the works to be undertaken in the hands of individual Councils and the range of works undertaken by Aboriginal councils can be significant. As examples, some councils have used the money to seal streets in their local communities to reduce the dust hazard, others have graded or sealed routes which give access to adjacent main roads and airstrips, or have concreted fords to give all weather access to their communities. Others have fixed drainage problems so that water can run away rather than lying all through the wet season.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010

The National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010 recognises that Indigenous road safety is a particular issue of concern. The estimated road death rate for the Indigenous population is three times higher than that of the non-Indigenous population. (Australian Transport Safety Bureau Report OR22, Estimating road trauma in the Australian Indigenous population, Jan. 2000).

The target of the Strategy is a 40% reduction in the fatality rate per population by 2010 and a continual reduction in the casualty rates for Indigenous and other groups with particular road safety concerns. The associated National Road Safety Action Plan 2001-2002 provides a range of measures jurisdictions may choose from to achieve these targets. Of specific relevance to Indigenous people are:

- developing and implementing appropriate measures arising from the Aboriginal Road Safety Working Group;
- conducting an annual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Road Safety Forum;
- investigating the feasibility of formally recording road safety outcomes for Indigenous people to enable development of more effective programmes (at present only three jurisdictions attempt to identify Indigenous people in road safety statistics); and
- developing culturally appropriate road safety programmes.

The Indigenous Road Safety Working Group, chaired by the ATSB, met on 21 November 2001 and agreed on the need for an Indigenous Road Safety Forum to be held in mid-2002. The ATSB has commissioned research to provide an updated picture of Indigenous road safety and to identify successful Indigenous road safety initiatives and the outcome of the research will be presented at the Forum. The Indigenous Road Safety Working Group will meet after the Forum to consider its outcomes and identify possible measures for inclusion in the National Road Safety Action Plan 2003-2004.

Croc Festivals

The Croc Festival is an innovative event that builds partnerships in regional and remote communities by celebrating youth culture. Involving young indigenous & non-indigenous Australians in visual and performing arts, sports clinics, careers markets in a 100 per cent drug and

alcohol free environment the festivals promote health, education and employment in a spirit of reconciliation.

The Croc Festivals provide an opportunity for school communities in rural and remote areas of the nation to participate in activities to improve their social and emotional well being. Over three days of the festival students have the opportunity to perform on a professional stage, attend goal setting and self esteem building activities, sporting clinics and health and career expos.

During the 2001 Federal election campaign, the Prime Minister committed \$1.2 million over four years from 2001-02 to the Croc Festivals (as part of the "Tough on Drugs" policy statement). The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has clarified that this is in addition to the funding already being provided each year by the range of Commonwealth portfolios supporting it.

DOTARS has contributed funding to Croc Festivals for the last three years and the Department has approved funding for the 2002 Croc Festival. This year's festivals (spanning July to September) will be staged at Weipa, Nhulunbuy, Kununurra, Kalgoorlie, Port Augusta, Swan Hill and Moree.

The Department sponsors the festivals for a range of reasons. These are:

- an opportunity for school communities in rural and remote areas to improve their social and emotional wellbeing while addressing social and cultural issues;
- an opportunity to become involved in cross-portfolio support of events that bring a range of benefits and opportunities to regional communities; and
- an opportunity to communicate Government messages to regional Australia.

Regional Solutions Programme

The Regional Solutions Programme (RSP) is a flexible assistance programme that targets communities in regional, rural and remote areas. Although Indigenous communities are not specifically targeted by RSP, a large proportion of the Indigenous population lives in the targeted areas and these communities would be expected to be beneficiaries of the programme. Factors considered in the assessment of projects include levels of disadvantage and/or need in the community. RSP has funded a number of projects of direct benefit to Indigenous people.

As part of routine programme management, DOTARS is seeking to improve our communication strategies with Indigenous communities to assist them in taking full advantage of the programme. RSP staff are undertaking field visits around Australia and recently held information sessions for a number of Indigenous communities in NT. DOTARS also believes there is merit in investigating how the Department's regional networks of state-based staff, Area Consultative Committees and field officers can assist Indigenous communities access RSP.

Rural Transaction Centres Programme

The Rural Transaction Centres Programme (RTCP) aims to assist people living in smaller rural and regional communities to improve access to basic services such as banking and postal services, Centrelink and Medicare easyclaim. A strategy to improve the access of Indigenous people and communities to the RTC Programme is being developed.

To assist in the formulation of this strategy DOTARS and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) are jointly convening a one-day workshop. The objectives of the workshop are to:

- bring key stakeholders together to inform and update them about the Programme;
- identify the needs and difficulties experienced by discrete Indigenous communities and those within broader rural and remote communities, in accessing RTCP funding and appropriate services; and
- identify practical solutions for addressing these needs or difficulties as a basis for drafting and implementing a strategy.

More Accessible Government and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands

Through the More Accessible Government (MAG) initiative DOTARS is involved in a whole of government activity in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) Lands through an Inter-government Inter-agency collaboration committee, and monitoring of a strategic planning project. This work links to the Council of Australian Governments' Reconciliation Framework to improve the lives of Indigenous people by addressing social and economic disadvantage (including life expectancy) and improving governance and service delivery arrangements with indigenous people.

The aims for the strategic plan for the AP Lands are:

- to map the assets and plan for development of an economic base and financial infrastructure; and
- encourage income streams that promote Anangu culture and knowledge of the environment – and the inter-relationship between these.

The strategic plan will dovetail with a Health Stores Project being funded by the Department of Family and Community Services that is developing a policy for providing the Anangu with access to affordable, quality foods. The strategic plan, which is expected to be finalised in September 2002, is being managed by the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Council with support from Nganampa Health Inc. who also have responsibility for the Health Stores project. In 2000 an Inter-Government Inter-Agency Collaboration Committee was set up to improve outcomes from the money invested by them in programmes and service delivery on the Lands.

Terms of reference have been developed, which include:

- Improving Anangu Capacity to manage current and emergent issues.
- Ensuring that Anangu have access to services necessary to sustain life and well-being at a quality comparable with that enjoyed by other Australians.
- Designing and delivering services in a manner which respects, promotes, and sustains Anangu hopes and aspirations; and
- To monitor, evaluate and review the success of programmes and processes in light of the above.

The project will be developed in four stages:

1. Develop a data base and information framework using existing sources;
2. Check and validate the issues identified in Stage 1 through direct consultation with service providers and with the Aboriginal communities they serve;
3. Write a Service Improvement Plan for delivering negotiated solutions to the issues raised in Stage 1 and validated in Stage 2. Negotiate final approval of the Plan through the Committee and with Anangu through Anangu Pitjantjatjara Council (who have governing rights on the Lands); and
4. Commence implementation of the Service Improvement Plan

Regional Assistance Programme

The purpose of the Regional Assistance Programme (RAP) is to generate employment in metropolitan, regional and remote Australia by encouraging community action to boost business growth and create sustainable jobs. It provides seed funding for innovative, quality projects of value to the community.

Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) identify and endorse projects for funding under the RAP. There are 56 Area Consultative Committees throughout Australia and they provide a vital role in working with Government to build cohesive, active and strong local communities. A number of ACCs operate in areas with significant Indigenous populations, such as the Northern Territory. A Ministerial priority for all ACCs for 2002-03 is fostering a partnership approach with Indigenous communities to bring whole of government solutions to Indigenous disadvantage.

Since the 1999-2000 financial year to date approximately six percent of RAP projects have focused on activities for Indigenous people or communities. In the development of projects for Indigenous people RAP places a high priority on working with other Commonwealth, State and Territory government agencies providing services to Indigenous communities.

Natural Disaster Management Programme

Under the Natural Disaster Management (NDM) programme DOTARS administers the Regional Flood Mitigation Programme which provides funding to organisations that have a flood management responsibility. NDM is currently investigating ways to improve programmes access for eligible Indigenous organisations. A recent initiative has been to write to all Indigenous organisations inviting project Expressions of Interest.

Financial Assistance Grants

In 2001-02, 99 Indigenous bodies received financial assistance grants under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*. These comprised:

- 3 councils established under State local government legislation;
- 63 bodies established under separate State legislation; and
- 33 bodies declared by the Federal Minister to be local governing bodies so that they could receive funding.

In 2001-02, these local governing bodies received \$18.9 million in untied financial assistance grants from the Commonwealth comprising \$12.3 million in general purpose grants and \$6.9 million in local roads grants.

Under this Act, Local Government Grants Commissions established in each State determine the allocation of financial assistance grants among councils. As a condition of the grant, the Commonwealth requires Commissions to allocate the grants according to guidelines called the National Principles. One of these principles requires Commissions to allocate grants to Councils in a way that recognises the needs of Indigenous people within council boundaries.

The Act requires that a report be prepared annually on the operation of the Act and tabled in Parliament. That report must include an assessment of the performance of Councils in providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In support of this requirement, State and Territory

Ministers for Local Government provide progress reports on improvements to services in their jurisdictions. The latest report was tabled in Parliament on 12 March 2002.

The Local Government Ministers' Conference was asked to prepare a Reconciliation Action Plan in response to the COAG resolution of November 2000 on a Reconciliation framework. An officials group comprising officers from the Commonwealth, States, Territories and the Australian Local Government Association has prepared a draft action plan that is currently with jurisdictions for comment and for consultation. The action plan is to be considered at the first meeting of the Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council.

Indigenous Environmental Health

DOTARS is a member of the Commonwealth Working Group on Indigenous Environmental Health (CWGIEH) chaired by ATSIC that is endeavouring to coordinate a national response to improving Indigenous environmental health issues. Other portfolios participating in the working group include the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Health is defined, in the National Environmental Health Strategy, as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Environmental Health are those aspects of human health determined by physical, chemical, biological and social factors in the environment. It encompasses all the measures necessary to deal with issues such as environmental degradation and climate change, hazards including contaminated water and food, and chemical exposure.

The CWGIEH provides an opportunity to give greater consideration to ways of coordinating action and projects that straddle health and non-health disciplines, in order to improve the environment of, and the health of Indigenous people.