
Submission

To:

Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

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Preamble

This paper is drawn from the report *“Pre-Evaluation Study into Government Coordination & its Development in Three Indigenous Communities”* (Palm Island, Doomadgee and Mornington Island) conducted in late 2007 for the Queensland Government Coordinator, Indigenous Service Delivery.

The model presented here is based on those findings, survey responses and interviews with some 100 service managers, staff and community members conducted by independent consultants [Chris Chappell](#) and Peter Le Grand.

A Place-based Development Model for Indigenous Communities

One of the striking things you notice when talking to people who live on and/or deliver services to Indigenous communities (in Queensland at least) is that, almost to a person, they share a deep desire for change on their communities – change that delivers strong, positive and viable places with real and vibrant futures.

The reality of course is far different.

‘Dysfunctional, divided, corrupt, going nowhere fast’ are terms often bandied about - not only by outsiders but by community members and leaders themselves. A shared despair at the lack of real change on communities over the decades seems as universal as the shared desire to create a positive future.

The Study similarly identified unanimity of agreement about:

- the continuing inadequate levels of Government investment and infrastructure on communities,
- the demonstrated (and ongoing) inadequacy of models of service planning, funding and delivery models used on communities, and
- the need to transform the way governments and service providers do business in order to achieve real change.

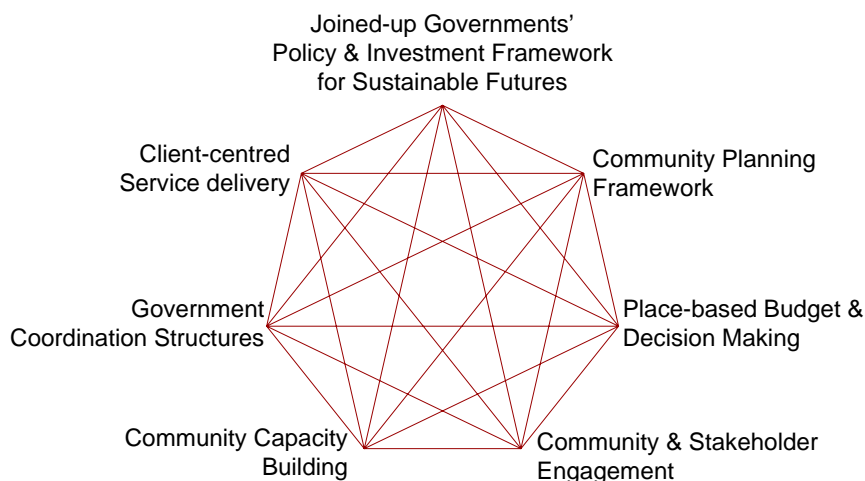
Key blockages to change identified during the Study include:

- a) The lack of clear commitment and investment by Governments to building sustainable futures for communities.
- b) Centrally designed, managed and allocated programs and program budgets too often resulting in ad hoc, short-term, disjointed and even inappropriate responses to local circumstances, needs and priorities.
- c) Centrally initiated activities/interventions “imposed” on communities outside of the established and agreed coordination and planning structures and processes.
- d) A lack of consensus within communities about direction and priorities; who the leaders are; and, who speaks for the community.
- e) The lack of full engagement of all levels of Government in a joined-up direction and process – blame shifting, functional rigidities and patch protection are no more obvious than at the local level
- f) The lack of capacity on Communities - particularly in local government but also in community based NGOs. Self-governance in any small community is problematic as the economies of scale and the available skill base make effective self governance extremely difficult. In poor, uneducated, geographically isolated communities it becomes a virtually impossible ask and ensures the “setup to fail” reality.
- g) Inadequate development of a new generation of leaders within communities

The Study concludes that in order to overcome these blockages, a more comprehensive and intensive approach is required – one that ratchets-up investment, service delivery and the government coordination/whole of government agenda to achieve meaningful change on and for the communities. Importantly, that change initiative has to be sufficiently flexible to respond to the different needs, circumstances and aspirations of individual communities while providing the “One Plan – One Direction” sought for those communities.

The following sketches seven core components of such an approach - a truly joined-up Commonwealth and State policy for, and approach to, creating real change that builds positive futures for remote Indigenous communities.

The approach proposed would build on existing Government and community coordination and planning structures and processes.



Component 1: Future Focused, Place-based Policy and Investment Framework

Establish a coherent, future focused Commonwealth and State policy and investment framework which explicitly commits to investing in, building the viability of, and creating a positive future for communities.

This cornerstone initiative will require a quite radical shift from the implicit policy attitude that has prevailed over the decades (and in fact, since white settlement) that assumed (or sought) the demise of communities as community members (and the newer generations in particular) drifted to the major regional population centres.

It requires an overt commitment to and investment in the future of these communities – if not in recognition of the right of indigenous peoples to live on their country, then certainly in recognition of the strategic importance of these communities – both now in national security terms and in the future as the nation’s climate changes and the North of Australia becomes more intensively settled and farmed over coming decades.

This policy and investment framework would:

- commit to a rolling 10-year horizon with intensive 5-year reviews and assessments
- demonstrate the key objective of developing positive and sustainable futures for communities
- simultaneously address both short and medium-term priorities together with the long-term development of communities, their people, infrastructure, economies and service systems
- mandate a place-based approach that includes: community capacity building; government service delivery coordination and collaboration; and the sustainable and integrated resourcing of initiatives.

Component 2: Community Planning Framework

For each Community, fully fund the establishment of a 10-20 year Vision Plan and 3-5 year Strategic Plan to support and provide an agreed framework and direction for Community Budgets and annual Local Action Plans (see Component 3 below).

While this type of planning is standard practice in local government and towns across mainstream Australia¹, Indigenous community Councils neither have the capacity nor resources to undertake such planning initiatives.

To be truly effective, implementation must be jointly funded by State and Federal Governments (thus addressing the capacity deficiency but also sending a clear signal that Governments are committed to the long-term future of communities), auspiced by local Councils BUT facilitated by skilled, independent, culturally competent and experienced community planners.

Component 3: Place Based Budget and Program Decision Making

The pooling (across Governments and agencies) of program/budget funds to create a Community Budget linked to the aspirations and targets established from the Community Planning Framework and with local flexibility to determine how the Budget targets and outcomes are pursued and met.

Although significant work is required on designing the detail of this approach, it is envisaged that:

- All three levels of Government would be captured under the Community Budget
- The Community Budget would be for a rolling 3-5 year timeframe, supported by an annual budget and Local Action Plan cycle.
- The Director, Government Coordination (see Component 6 below) would have the key reporting responsibility– effectively fulfilling the role of Community Budget Manager.
- Existing regional level Government Coordination structures (eg Regional Manager's Coordination Network, Regional Manager's Forum) would have a critical role in monitoring, first response and reporting on the performance of individual Government agencies against their Community Budget (or related) targets and performance measures.
- Either as part of or as an adjunct to the Community Budget, Departments' staff housing and office accommodation budgets would be pooled at the Community level to provide a rationalised approach to meeting agencies' accommodation needs while also facilitating the development of local construction and maintenance enterprises.

Component 4: Community and Stakeholder Engagement Model

Establish a three tiered coordination and engagement structure on communities in conjunction with the Community Planning model recommended above:

- **Community Planning Forum** open to all community members and organisations to discuss, negotiate and agree community issues and priorities.
- **Community Action Working Group** representative of all key stakeholders, responsible for the implementation of the Community Budget and Negotiation Table agreements and reporting to and receiving feedback from the regular Community Planning Forum
- **Negotiation Table** (or similar) with Senior Government Champions (preferably State and Federal) to deal with issues unresolved locally or at the regional level, and to endorse, monitor and report on the Local Action Plan.

¹ It is interesting to note that indigenous settlements seem to be exclusively termed as communities rather than towns. Community generally refers to current populations while the term Town implies settlement into the future.

Component 5: Community Capacity Building Investment Strategy

As a component of the proposed 3-5 year Community Budget, establish a Community Capacity Building Investment Strategy that includes a focus on:

- Building the service delivery and management capacity of community based staff and NGOs (inc. Community Training Plans to establish locals in service delivery roles)
- Significantly lifting resourcing of Councils to build the capacity staff and elected members to manage and deliver the services and roles required/expected of them.
- Community leadership development and succession planning

Component 6: Government Coordination Structures

Establish a position of Director, Government Coordination (or similar) for each Community, staffed at the Regional Manager level (or higher) and located in the most appropriate Regional Centre with a Senior Project Officer located in the community and working from a Government Coordination Centre (the Palm Island Model).

The Director's role would include key reporting responsibility for the Community Budget, monitoring and reporting to Commonwealth and State Governments and negotiating across Departments to resolve blockages.

The Community based Project Officer would have responsibility for facilitating community engagement and local coordination structures and plans

The Government Coordination Centre (GCC) in each community would provide a shared service centre for visiting service providers.

Component 7: Client-centred Service Intervention Models

Current service delivery models are not effecting sufficient real change in the lives of community members and particularly those with complex (and often acute) needs.

The evidence of the effectiveness of client-centred service intervention models (such as Integrated Case Management) in managing and affecting change in the lives of clients (individuals, families or households) with complex needs warrants the trialling of the approach on communities.

One approach for such a trial would be to attach or second a case coordinator to the GCC (i.e. independent of any one service agency) to drive the development of the integrated local practices, manage early cases and negotiate agency buy-in to the ICM approach.

Conversely, locating that case coordinator with a community based NGO would also be worthy of trialling – particularly for its capacity building spin-offs for the NGO involved.

Conclusion

The components of the development model outlined here will necessarily require both 'finessing' and a staged implementation. In particular, the 'finessing' phase will need to address and overcome territorial imperatives and pre-existing 'silos' within and between State and Federal bureaucracies.

Nonetheless, the model, drawn from empirical evidence, demonstrates an approach which would build on existing successful initiatives, structures, practices and processes while ramping-up the effort to create real change for these communities and the people who live and work in them.

As such, it represents a radical shift in the way Governments, service delivery agencies and communities do business – one that will require all stakeholders' commitment to, and investment in, building a positive and viable future for remote Indigenous communities.

