

# Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

## Inquiry into Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

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*Submission by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional  
Development and Local Government*

*February 2009*

## Overview

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (the Department) contributes to the well-being of all Australians through the following three outcomes:

*Outcome 1: Assisting the Government to provide, evaluate, plan and invest in infrastructure across industry sectors.*

*Outcome 2: Fostering an efficient, sustainable, competitive, safe and secure transport system.*

*Outcome 3: Assisting regions and local government to develop and manage their futures.*

Through its three outcomes, the Department is responsible for providing policy advice, for delivering programs and for regulation according to the following outputs:

- Infrastructure investment policy and programs;
- Infrastructure investment coordination;
- Transport safety investigations;
- Transport security policy, programs and regulation;
- Surface transport policy, programs and regulation;
- Road safety and vehicle policy, programs and regulation;
- Aviation and airports policy, programs and regulation;
- Regional development policy and programs; and
- Local Government policy and programs.

The Terms of Reference of the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities are broad and touch on a range of programs delivered by this Department.

The Department delivers national mainstream programs and initiatives and does not have a direct role in service delivery to Indigenous people or communities. Indigenous people and communities can benefit from a range of mainstream Departmental programs or initiatives in the following ways:

- an Indigenous Council meets the program criteria;
- some Departmental programs have specific provisions for Indigenous communities;  
or
- there is a significant Indigenous population in the location where program funding is provided.

This submission is made to the Committee to set the scene in the context of the Department's outcomes and by identifying and explaining those programs and initiatives provided by the Department that impact directly, or indirectly, on regional and remote Indigenous communities.

## **Key programs of benefit to rural and remote Indigenous communities**

### **Infrastructure Australia Audit and Priority**

Infrastructure Australia (IA), the body established to provide advice to the Commonwealth Government on infrastructure issues, has completed a national audit of infrastructure which will form the basis for an infrastructure priority list. The priority list will provide guidance to investment by governments on critical infrastructure, including allocations from the Building Australia Fund. In December 2008, IA reported to Government on the audit and provided an interim priority list of 94 projects which will require further analysis. A final priority list will be provided to Government in March 2009.

Improving the delivery of essential services to Indigenous communities was among seven themes identified in IA's audit to meet Australia's infrastructure challenges. Additionally, IA noted that infrastructure needs and shortfalls in Indigenous communities are not well quantified and funding is often not delivered in a coordinated manner. Among recommendations IA made were that Indigenous Australians be included in planning processes to address their infrastructure needs and that infrastructure provision in Indigenous communities needs to be well planned and coordinated across all spheres of government.

The COAG Infrastructure Working Group (IWG) has been working with the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform (WGIR) to identify ways in which they might work together to address Indigenous disadvantage. On 29 November 2008 COAG agreed that under the new National Indigenous Reform Agreement a National Partnership agreement be developed on the infrastructure needs of 26 remote Indigenous locations for consideration at the Closing the Gap COAG in 2009. The October WGIR agenda paper to COAG, sought agreement that:

“the WGIR develop a reform proposal in consultation with the Infrastructure Working Group in relation to the infrastructure needs of agreed locations for consideration by COAG in early 2009”.

As part of this consultation process, the WGIR Infrastructure Subgroup and the IWG Indigenous Subgroup will be meeting in early 2009 to begin identifying infrastructure requirements in 26 Indigenous communities.

### **Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme**

The Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme (RAAS) subsidises weekly passenger and freight air transportation to communities who would otherwise have no regular access to transport. In 2007-08 the scheme provided services to approximately 9 000 people in 239 remote communities, comprising 74 Indigenous communities and 165 cattle and sheep stations in 10 remote regions across the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. Funding of \$11.7 million is available in 2008-09 to support this program.

### **Remote Aerodrome Safety Program**

The Remote Aerodrome Safety Program (RASP) assists in funding the upgrade of airstrips in remote and isolated communities across Australia. Projects funded under the program help

improve the accessibility of airstrips and facilitate the provision of non-commercial essential community air services including delivery of food supplies, community mail, passenger transport services, medical supplies and medical care. Funding of \$6.6 million is available in 2008-09 to support this program.

### **Roads to Recovery**

The Roads to Recovery program provides funding direct to local councils for road works chosen by the councils and to states and territories for roads in unincorporated areas. Each funding recipient has a set life of program allocation for the period 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2009.

Each funding recipient also received a Supplementary Roads to Recovery grant in June 2006 equal to one quarter of their life of program allocation under the main program. (Note that this was a one off grant to be spent before 30 June 2009 and is not part of the new program.)

The program has been extended for the period 2009-10 to 2013-14 with funding increased from \$307.5 million to \$350 million per annum. Individual council allocations for the new program will be determined closer to the commencement of the new program.

In Western Australia, \$4.2 million of Roads to Recovery funds under the current program are reserved for Aboriginal access roads projects. Funding for Aboriginal access roads is expected to continue under the new program but the amount of funding to be reserved for any such projects is yet to be determined.

### **Black Spot Program**

The program provides funding for safety works such as roundabouts, crash barriers and street lights at places where there have been serious crashes or where serious crashes are likely.

Funding of \$114.7 million is available in 2008-09 (this includes the additional \$60 million announced in December 2008 as part of the Nation Building Package). Funding of \$59.5 million per year is available from 2009-10 to 2011-12. Each state/territory has a set annual allocation based on their proportion of population and number of fatal crashes. State/territory allocations have recently been revised and the new allocations apply from 2009-10.

Funding has been provided for around 20 projects in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory since the program commenced in 1996-97.

### **Indigenous Road Safety Working Group**

Road trauma among Indigenous people results from a number of factors that need to be considered in the development of specific road safety policies, strategies and programs. As part of its coordination role under the National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010, the Department chairs and convenes the Indigenous Road Safety Working Group (IRSWG). Membership of IRSWG comprises stakeholders from road transport authorities, police, community groups, local councils, health departments, educational and research institutions, and a Northern Territory mining company. Its role is to:

- monitor the nature and extent of the involvement of Indigenous people in road trauma;
- promote the involvement of Indigenous people and agencies at all levels of road safety management;
- investigate initiatives for Indigenous road safety;
- share best practice and information about road safety research and measures undertaken in jurisdictions;
- convene national road safety forums; and
- report progress on recommended actions from the forums.

### **Indigenous Road Safety Information and Grants**

As a part of its coordination role under the National Road Safety Strategy, the Department has supported collaboration among jurisdictions on Indigenous road safety issues by:

- convening biennial Indigenous road safety forums.
  - The last Forum was held in Cairns in October 2008 and the next is scheduled for 2010 in New South Wales.
  - The Hon Anthony Albanese MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, announced at the Cairns Forum a grant of \$30,000 for initiatives to address Indigenous road safety. Applications are currently open until 27 March 2009 and application details are available from the Department's website at [www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety) ;
- releasing a comprehensive statistical report in May 2007 on transport-related injury of Indigenous people, covering a five-year period to 2004.
  - An update was released in September 2008 and is available at: [http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/indigenous\\_road\\_safety/files/Stats\\_Profile\\_08\\_final.pdf](http://www.infrastructure.gov.au/roads/safety/indigenous_road_safety/files/Stats_Profile_08_final.pdf);
- jointly funding the HealthInfoNet Indigenous Road Safety website at [www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au) to provide people who are involved in Indigenous road safety with information and resources about how to prevent and manage Indigenous road injury; and
- producing an educational DVD on initiatives in Indigenous Communities around Australia that address road safety issues, including seatbelt wearing, drink driving, and driver licensing.

### **Young driver training program**

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$17 million over five years to support the *keys2drive* education program being developed by the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) and state motoring clubs. *Keys2drive* will provide young learner drivers accompanied by a supervisor with a free professional driving lesson and other educational materials.

Feedback from participants at the Cairns Indigenous Road Safety Forum has been raised with the AAA on the need to consider how Indigenous communities may be able to access the benefits of the *keys2drive* program while recognising the difficulties this would involve.

## **Local Government**

Local Government Financial Assistance Grants (LGFAG) are provided under the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995 (the Act). They have a general purpose and an identified local road component, which are untied, allowing councils to spend the grants according to local priorities.

Local government grants commissions have been established in each State and the Northern Territory to recommend the distribution of the LGFAGs to local governing bodies in accordance with the Act and the National Principles for allocating grants. The 2008-09 total grant payment of \$1.891 billion is 7.1% or \$125.3 million more than the 2007-08 payment.

Details of funding to Indigenous councils from the LGFAGs and Roads to Recovery programs in 2008-09 are provided in a table at Attachment A. The definition of an Indigenous council area is one where the majority of its residents are Indigenous. It should be noted that none of the funding listed in the table is paid to councils on condition that it is spent on Indigenous needs, except for special roads works funding in the case of Western Australia's only Indigenous council. As well, none of the funding listed in the table is allocated to councils on the basis of Indigenous need, other than a slight portion of the general purpose financial assistance grant which varies between jurisdictions according to each jurisdiction's financial assistance grant allocation methodology.

## **Better Regions Program**

Under the Better Regions Program, the Government has committed to fund various projects throughout regional Australia. The Government is providing \$176 million over four years to assist regions build their strengths, improve liveability and create jobs. The funding is being used to help local communities deliver local infrastructure and other regional community projects.

The Better Regions program has two current projects from which Indigenous people will benefit through funding to the:

- Cook Shire Council for the Cooktown Community Events Centre which will provide a community hub for the region, providing sporting, drama, cultural, educational programs, and occasional child minding/craft activities; and the
- Alice Springs Town Council for a year-round indoor aquatic and leisure centre.

## **Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program**

The Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program is boosting local economic development and supporting jobs in communities around the country. It includes funding of \$250 million in 2008-09 for all councils and shires to address immediate critical infrastructure needs. Following the deadline of 30 January 2009, the Department is processing local councils' applications in order to confirm that funding can commence.

The Government has announced that it will provide an additional \$500 million over two years to expand the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program – Strategic Projects.

This program builds on the existing \$50 million fund so that \$550 million is now available for local government community infrastructure projects such as town halls, libraries, community centres and sport centres.

The expanded investment will mean more projects in the existing application process will receive funding. To this end, the Australian Government has given local councils and shires the opportunity to submit new or revised applications by 6 March 2009. After this, successful applicants will be required to commence their projects within six months.

### **East Kimberley Development Package, Western Australia**

Indigenous communities can expect to benefit from the significant injection of funds from the Commonwealth Government and Western Australian governments through the focus on the East Kimberley region. The Commonwealth Government is contributing \$195 million over 2008-09 and 2009-10 to support economic development in the East Kimberley region.

The investment package is part of the Commonwealth Government's \$4.7 billion Nation Building initiative and is to be matched by the Western Australian Government's investment in the Ord Expansion project.

The Commonwealth Government investments are being targeted to meet the current and future social and economic needs of the East Kimberley region, including infrastructure to support sustainable growth and improve productivity, productive employment opportunities, and investment in much needed social infrastructure. Scoping of the key social and economic needs in the East Kimberley region is currently underway and a report is due in March 2009.

### ***Response to Term of Reference (b) - the role of state and territory government policy***

Within the issues raised in its First Report 2008, the Committee raised concern about the level of responsibility between levels of government so that in their view, "...there is very little consistency between the separate agreements of each state and territory."

### **Respective roles of Australian governments in regional development**

The Commonwealth Government's approach to regional development is to work in partnership with regional communities to foster the development of self-reliant regions. Its role is to support community plans and aspirations and develop a climate of opportunity by reducing impediments to growth, building skills and infrastructure, and delivering targeted, well coordinated programs and services.

State and territory governments have primary responsibility for regional development within their jurisdictions. Each government has a range of policies, programs and services that aim to enhance economic performance, business development and community development and capacity development, foster innovation and skills development, and improve access to services and the environmental quality of regions. There are significant differences in approach to the issues and in the delivery of programs and services, reflecting the wide

variety of circumstances facing regional communities and the comparative and competitive advantages experienced in different regions of Australia.

Local government participation is vital to the success of regional development initiatives, and local councils have long been at the forefront of such activity. Local government participates actively in intergovernmental approaches to economic, community and environmental development and will continue to foster progress through a range of local and regional functions and programs.

### **Regional Development Council**

The Commonwealth, and state, territory and local governments are committed to working together in a spirit of partnership to deliver government policies, programs and services tailored to the needs of regional communities.

The Regional Development Council (RDC) works to facilitate more effective cooperation across all spheres of government in order to achieve sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes for regional Australians. Its terms of reference are:

- to provide leadership to all areas of government, industry and the community in working collaboratively to achieve sustainable regional development; and
- to provide a forum for Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers and local government to consider and facilitate national strategic approaches to sustainable regional development.

Membership of the Council comprises Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers responsible for regional development and a representative from the Australian Local Government Association. The Commonwealth Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Local Government chairs the annual Council meetings. The Department provides secretariat support to the Council.

In view of the strategic importance of regional Australia and the structural and economic differences between the regions and major metropolitan areas, at its last meeting on 30 July 2008, the RDC agreed to a set of principles which will form the basis for further work or for closer alignment and integration of regional development activities and structures across all levels of government such as for integrated arrangements, common boundaries, cross membership, joint funding and co-location of services and facilities.

### **RDC Regional indicators project**

An example of the collaborative work of the RDC is Regional Indicators project, costs of which are shared between jurisdictions. The project is a single entry web-based product which provides information that can be used to compare regions in Australia. It uses material that is not available elsewhere on the Internet and provides nine regional indicators.

### **Regional Development Australia**

The Government is committed to engaging effectively with regional Australia. As part of its election commitment, the Australia Government has established Regional Development



Australia (RDA). RDA is about helping the Government to facilitate dialogue between the communities – often representing disparate heterogeneous stakeholders in a single group – with many ideas with one voice as a platform. The Commonwealth Government has asked RDA to provide advice about regional Australia and to continue to perform a range of functions including consultation and community engagement, regional planning, promoting and facilitating access to government programs and community development.

On 20 March 2008, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, announced in Parliament that the network of 54 Area Consultative Committee (ACC) would transition to become RDA committees, effective as of 1 January 2009.

At the 30 July 2008 meeting of the Regional Development Ministers' Council, which includes the Australian Local Government Association, Ministers agreed to work together to align RDA closely with state and territory regional development organisations and local government. Following this meeting, the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, the Hon Gary Gray AO MP, has been leading discussions with the states and territories about the practical opportunities for more closely aligning the RDA with their regional development organisations. Potential synergies between the work of other agencies and the RDA network are also being explored at bilateral discussions.

### **New regional partnership**

On 3 December 2008 the Parliamentary Secretary and the New South Wales Minister for Regional Development, Phillip Costa, announced their commitment to create a new joint Commonwealth-State regional development network to help guide economic growth across regional NSW by bringing together the existing NSW Government's 13 Regional Development Boards with the Commonwealth Government's 14 ACCs to establish a network of Regional Development Australia (RDA). This new joint Commonwealth-State regional development network will help guide economic growth across New South Wales.

### Funding to Indigenous councils under Local Government Financial Assistance Grants and Roads to Recovery Program

LGA Number	Council Name	Financial Year	State	General Purpose.	Roads.	Roads Special Works.	R2R	Total
70070	Barkly	2008/2009	NT	\$1,628,529	\$406,473	\$0	\$97,801	\$2,132,803
70011	Belyuen	2008/2009	NT	\$15,902	\$27,945	\$0	\$43,429	\$87,276
70071	Central Desert	2008/2009	NT	\$916,032	\$729,469	\$0	\$312,362	\$1,957,863
70072	MacDonnell	2008/2009	NT	\$1,013,114	\$690,969	\$0	\$209,685	\$1,913,768
70069	Roper Gulf	2008/2009	NT	\$1,346,322	\$817,106	\$0	\$632,351	\$2,795,779
97040	Tiwi Islands	2008/2009	NT	\$254,178	\$751,190	\$0	\$683,143	\$1,688,511
70051	Trust Account	2008/2009	NT	\$0	\$984,948	\$0	\$118,020	\$1,102,968
70068	Victoria - Daly	2008/2009	NT	\$1,151,987	\$1,296,217	\$0	\$392,355	\$2,840,559
70066	West Arnhem	2008/2009	NT	\$947,160	\$971,974	\$0	\$619,682	\$2,538,816
30250	Aurukun	2008/2009	QLD	\$1,137,776	\$92,465	\$0		\$1,230,241
30004	Cherbourg	2008/2009	QLD	\$241,144	\$43,259	\$0	\$104,534	\$388,937
30008	Doomadgee	2008/2009	QLD	\$568,110	\$68,001	\$0	\$82,201	\$718,312
30010	Hopevale	2008/2009	QLD	\$545,611	\$90,592	\$0	\$163,343	\$799,546
30012	Kowanyama	2008/2009	QLD	\$710,583	\$103,302	\$0	\$24,936	\$838,821
30014	Lockhart River	2008/2009	QLD	\$661,655	\$124,970	\$0		\$786,625
38000	Mapoon Aboriginal Council	2008/2009	QLD	\$572,687	\$18,119	\$0	\$42,208	\$633,014
35250	Mornington Island	2008/2009	QLD	\$1,284,362	\$259,857	\$0	\$397,112	\$1,941,331
30026	Napranum	2008/2009	QLD	\$454,629	\$17,907	\$0	\$41,024	\$513,560
30033	Northern Peninsula Area	2008/2009	QLD	\$2,013,862	\$182,300	\$0	\$408,067	\$2,604,229
30018	Palm Island	2008/2009	QLD	\$511,280	\$38,399	\$0	\$101,513	\$651,192
30019	Pormpuraaw	2008/2009	QLD	\$571,362	\$259,688	\$0	\$144,882	\$975,932
30032	Torres Strait Island	2008/2009	QLD	\$5,731,320	\$140,647	\$0	\$198,308	\$6,070,275
30027	Woorabinda	2008/2009	QLD	\$218,941	\$44,593	\$0		\$263,534
30028	Wujal Wujal	2008/2009	QLD	\$200,259	\$12,422	\$0	\$30,403	\$243,084
30030	Yarrabah	2008/2009	QLD	\$410,456	\$47,671	\$0	\$109,645	\$567,772
40008	Anangu Pitjantjatjara	2008/2009	SA	\$955,392	\$118,819	\$0		\$1,074,211
40007	Gerard	2008/2009	SA	\$37,286	\$15,831	\$0	\$50,076	\$103,193
40004	Maralinga	2008/2009	SA	\$77,908	\$42,511	\$0	\$114,475	\$234,894
40005	Nepabunna	2008/2009	SA	\$23,917	\$15,761	\$0	\$49,858	\$89,536
40006	Yalata	2008/2009	SA	\$134,207	\$34,226	\$0	\$108,266	\$276,699
56620	Ngaanyatjarraku (S)	2008/2009	WA	\$2,563,575	\$494,598	\$456,000	\$41,169	\$3,555,342
<b>Totals</b>				<b>\$26,899,546</b>	<b>\$8,942,229</b>	<b>\$456,000</b>	<b>\$5,320,848</b>	<b>\$41,618,623</b>