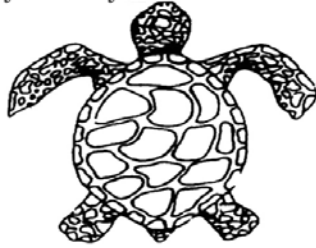


DJARINDJIN ABORIGINAL



CORPORATION

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Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
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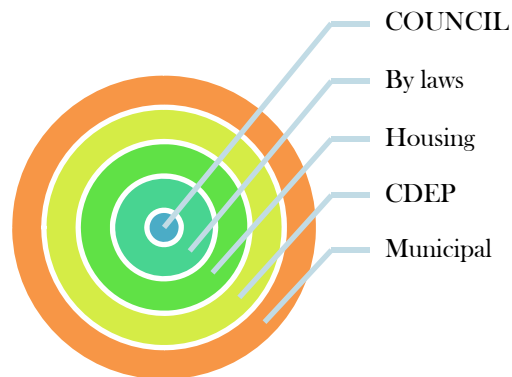
Introduction

Djarindjin is a community of 320 residents located on the tip of the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome, Western Australia. Additionally 6 outstations utilize Djarindjin as a service centre for fuel, food, banking, schooling, etc.

Submission

Our experience of the implementation of recent government policy has not been very positive. The two key experiences are a) of the corrosion of the community's ability to govern itself and b) of an authoritarian and unilateral approach by some government bureaucrats.

A)



“Old” system

Council used to deliver services in the community and through control of CDEP and Housing (for example) was able to require that community members participate constructively in communal life.



Normalised system

The new system that is being implemented under the Commonwealth / State bilateral funding arrangements is known as normalisation or regularisation. There are two hazards present in the normalised system. Firstly, community governance has been severely corroded which greatly diminishes local control, coordination and the insistence on normative behaviour. Secondly, there is a very strong risk that welfare dependency will be promoted. We take issue with the Centre for Independent Studies definition of CDEP as passive welfare, *CDEP was part time employment*. Under normalisation community members are becoming unemployed, losing their social roles and discovering that they are now living in a public housing estate instead of being people who live in a community with a Council that can “boss them” if they muck up, and having social roles that include part time employment.

We state our real concern to you that these two hazards are creating a situation that exacerbates previous social problems to a far greater extent than any benefit provided by technical improvements in service delivery. It is of note that chronic underfunding of Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation – not malfeasance – has caused the poor infrastructure, including housing, currently present in the community.

B}

Our experience of the ***process*** of normalisation has been very variable. Whilst the move to regularized energy has proved expensive for individual users and has cost the community itself around \$60 000 in unbudgeted costs to meet Office of Safety regulations for staff housing and community assets, the process was well managed and respectful. Contrarily the approach of the Department of Housing and Works (DHW) and of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FHCSIA) has been authoritarian and unilateral. We have serious concerns that our rights as expressed in the UN Treaty on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples have been – and continue to be – breached. Indeed the type of contract negotiation practices employed by both organisations would be of dubious legality in normal civil proceedings.

We give two examples;

- Djarindjin was advised that it would not be funded to manage its housing after 20 years of successfully doing so and that DHW would take over this role. Djarindjin community members, including head tenants, were advised of this decision by Djarindjin Council and its administration wrote to tenants advising them that it

would forward repair and maintenance requests to DHW in Broome. DHW advised that this process of hand over was not adequate, that the community *must request* that DHW take over all housing services otherwise all funds would be withdrawn for repairs or maintenance and a \$600 000 upgrade program planned to start on January 1st would be withdrawn. At a community meeting head tenants stated they did not want DHW to take over – they are happy with community management and it is their preferred option – if DHW were to take over housing management it must recognize that it did so under its own authority not at the community's behest. As a result of this community decision DHW has withdrawn all funds for housing management, repairs and maintenance and the upgrade program. The community is managing and funding its own works at present.

- Djarindjin was advised by FACHSIA that after 20 years of successfully managing its own Municipal Services delivery it would no longer be funded to do so, all funds would be provided to Ardyaloon community – some 25 kms away – who would then manage the delivery of municipal services in Djarindjin. Council stated in writing to FACHSIA, and to the Minister, that it was not happy with this development. Council was advised that they could either accept this decision or else all funds for Municipal Services in Djarindjin would be withdrawn, the community would be cut adrift.

Both of these examples involved the core funding for keeping the community's Office open so that other services such as fuel sales, banking, post office, reception, book keeping and executive support could continue. The approach by Government representatives on these occasions was felt personally, by Councillors and community members, as belligerent and oppressive.

Conclusion

The community does have a successful development model it is working to implement which should harmonise very well with our understanding of the stated policy objectives of the Governments of Australia and Western Australia. The approach is called "Development with Identity & Dignity" and is briefly described in the attached brochure.

We ask that you a) consider the real hazards implicit in the current government policy direction and b) insist that government officials display a more sophisticated, reciprocal and respectful approach toward remote indigenous Australians – and their elected representatives – than is often being displayed.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Lee
CHAIR