

CONFERENCE: BUILDING EFFECTIVE INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE
The Way Forward for Northern Territory Regions and Communities

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(Day 3, Session 7 Leadership for Governance –
Stephen Hunter and Neil Westbury
“The COAG Trial: The Leadership Challenge for Governments in
Supporting Indigenous Governance)

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The Indigenous Community Coordination Pilots Coordination (COAG): The Leadership Challenge for Governments in Supporting Indigenous Governance

- I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this country, the Mirrar people and thank them for their welcome .
- The Department of Family and Community Services is the Australian Government's lead agency for the Indigenous Communities Coordination Pilot site of Wadeye in the NT. We share this responsibility with the Office of Indigenous Policy within the Northern Territory Department of the Chief Minister . I am pleased to be here sharing this session with the Executive Director of this office, my colleague Neil Westbury
- This morning I wish to focus on what we are learning from the ICCP process at Wadeye.In particular the very practical lessons for leadership that are coming our way.
- Under the Council of Australian Governments ICCP initiative the Australian, State and Territory governments agreed that both **outcomes** and **management** processes in indigenous policy and service delivery need to be improved .We agreed the way to do that was by:
 - (a) Governments **working together** better at all levels and across all departments and agencies; and
 - (b) Indigenous communities and governments **working in partnership and sharing responsibility** for achieving outcomes and for building the capacity of people in communities to manage their own affairs

- Wadeye residents and Thamarrurr have decided that they want all government agencies working together better and sharing responsibility with them in improving outcomes in three key areas. These areas are:
 - (a) Women and Families
 - (b) Construction and Housing and
 - (c) Youth
- Interestingly, quite a few years before the ICCP initiative began, Wadeye residents were already advocating for a partnership approach. They described it as follows:

”A change in the direction of a whole of community approach coupled with a whole of government approach to re-establish each person’s self esteem and their knowledge of their place and role within family units to a point where disintegration of the community and the subsequent loss of social values is brought to a stop” (Historical Overview of Traditional and Contemporary Management Development at Wadeye – December 1999)

- While governments talk about **outcomes and management processes**, it is clear Wadeye residents talk about **the personal, the family and the community**.
- This underlines two challenges for agencies.
- Firstly, agencies and their personnel have to make the leap from the theoretical, utilitarian framework to the personal. We have to ensure that everyone involved, from the field officers to the Secretaries and our Ministers understand, that this initiative whilst being about governments coordinating activity better is actually about people and their lives.

- This places particular demands on the ways in which we respond to the people of Wadeye.
- Careful thought has to be given to how we provide information and engage with the community. For example, discussions have occurred with the Wadeye community around the development of an Economic Education/Money management project. This has been done by;
 - (a) Ensuring the idea is communicated or discussed with all key stakeholders in the community
 - (b) Discussing the idea using concepts and language that is known to residents of Wadeye
 - (c) Developing a pictorial representation of what this project could look like and using this picture as a tool to further explore how the project will evolve on the ground
 - (d) Using only one way of reporting and talking about the project to all parties.
 - (e) Familiar concepts, traditional practices and some language was used to explain and explore contemporary issues.
- The pilot has also revealed a need for a deliberate approach to the fostering of community development, and community capacity building skills across government agencies. FaCS is attempting to get this issue on the national agenda.
- This need and issue is also being worked on at the local level, through regular networking meetings with Australian government field officers and through coordination of joint visits by agencies
- Moving onto governance, you would have heard from the Thamarrurr (Tam-a-roor) representatives here at the conference, that the

governing body at Wadeye is the Thamarrurr (Tam-a-roor) Regional Council. It comprises representatives of 20 land-owning groups and covers an area of 5,000 square kilometres.

- We see this Council as the legitimate governance body for Wadeye, there to **make decisions** and **direct business** within the region.
- People of Wadeye see Thamarrurr as something much more than this. Thamarrurr describes their **way of life** where:
 - i. their older people are the source of leadership
 - ii. their older people have a responsibility for family life
 - iii. an individual's identity comes from relationship to family and land
 - iv. ceremonial life creates knowledge and respect for culture
- The challenge for us in government is to fully comprehend this quite different understanding of Thamarrurr and translate that comprehension into actions and behaviours that are both respectful and effective .
- Much has been written about the need for Indigenous governance bodies to have strong, and well functioning management structures in order for them to operate successfully.
- In recognition of this all agencies involved with the ICCP process are being asked to focus all activity on building the capacity of Thamarrurr to deal with contemporary issues
- Mention here of course must be made of the considerable time and effort that Wadeye residents and the NT Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs have already dedicated to the reestablishment and strengthening of Thamarrurr, before the ICCP

process was even thought of. It has been seven or more years of bringing this concept together.

- Examples of current ICCP activity that aim to build the capacity of Thamarrurr include:
 - The DEWR funded 'Local Jobs for Local Plan' will form the blueprint for all future training and employment activity at Wadeye. There are plans underway to establish a Community Education Information Unit which will aim to educate and inform Thamarrurr and Wadeye residents in a range of contemporary issues that impact on their daily lives
 - The Economic Education project will provide information and resources to Thamarrurr on a range of issues that will assist them to understand economic and money matters that impact on their daily lives
 - The Youth Priority Working Group focusing on Education matters is working on development opportunities for the local school senior leadership team to increase their capacity to manage and input into the functioning of the school
- The development of the women members of the Thamarrurr Regional Council is also being looked at through the relationship with the Women's Association and shared opportunities to develop skills
- Some critics of the ICCP process state that much of the activity around the ICCP process really only involves coordinating one meeting after another. Yes, there are a fair few meetings and structures. Our experience, however, is that by building a foundation of good governance and fluid communication then we can build the trust in each other to move ahead together more instinctively.

- Through the regular coordination meetings, the development of action plans, the defining of responsibilities, roles, activities and tasks of agencies, **agencies have become more transparent to a greater number of people**. Agencies no longer simply have a relationship with the governing body at Wadeye where they can do their work in isolation and behind their agency door so to speak. Agencies within both the Australian and Northern Territory Govts now have relationships and obligations with and to all other agencies within the Northern Territory. This is a relatively new phenomenon.
- A significant barrier to making business happen in a coordinated and manageable manner is the complex nature of funding arrangements and agreements on Indigenous communities. The array of funding agreements in relation to service delivery actually works against a coordinated community development approach and it takes up enormous resources in managing, accounting for and reporting against the myriad of funding agreements communities have.
- While some work is being done around this issue I believe it must be a priority at the national level to seek alternative and new ways of delivering funding to Indigenous communities so they are able to get on with the business. I am aware that Neil has some pretty definite views on how we actually do this. Maybe we will be hearing from him around this matter.
- Furthermore, if we look at a typical funding agreement, it usually defines very well all the requirements the funding recipient must meet. Outcomes, outputs, performance indicators, financial acquittals and so on. There is very little within these agreements that spell out what the agencies' responsibilities are and what obligations they must meet.
- The Shared Responsibility Agreement between the three partners at Wadeye **does** contain this information.

- Finally, the last issue I would like to discuss is that of evaluation. We have a national evaluation framework established to measure outcomes for all sites. We are developing baseline data and databases to capture information and to measure changes. And in the NT we have the demographic profile being developed and measuring outcomes will hopefully be firmly based on the priorities and action plans developed at the community level. Most of this analysis, and evaluation is looking at measuring change or improvements at the community level. This is a positive thing.
- A responsibility for agencies such as FaCS and the NT Chief Minister's Department as lead agencies however, is also seeking to evaluate how government agencies have gone about doing the ICCP business. The focus of this evaluation will be on how business was done and what changes if any have occurred within agencies because of the pilots. It will give us an opportunity to look at ourselves.
- In conclusion, I would like to say that while there are many challenges for government agencies in being a part of the Shared Responsibility approach, there are many rewards too. Like all partnerships and relationships there are ebbs and flows. However on behalf of FaCS I would sincerely like to thank the people of Wadeye for engaging and embracing this partnership approach in a very real and meaningful way. You have shown much leadership and a willingness to meet as equals. We have still much to learn and probably a long way to go, but I believe the foundations of a positive relationship are in place.