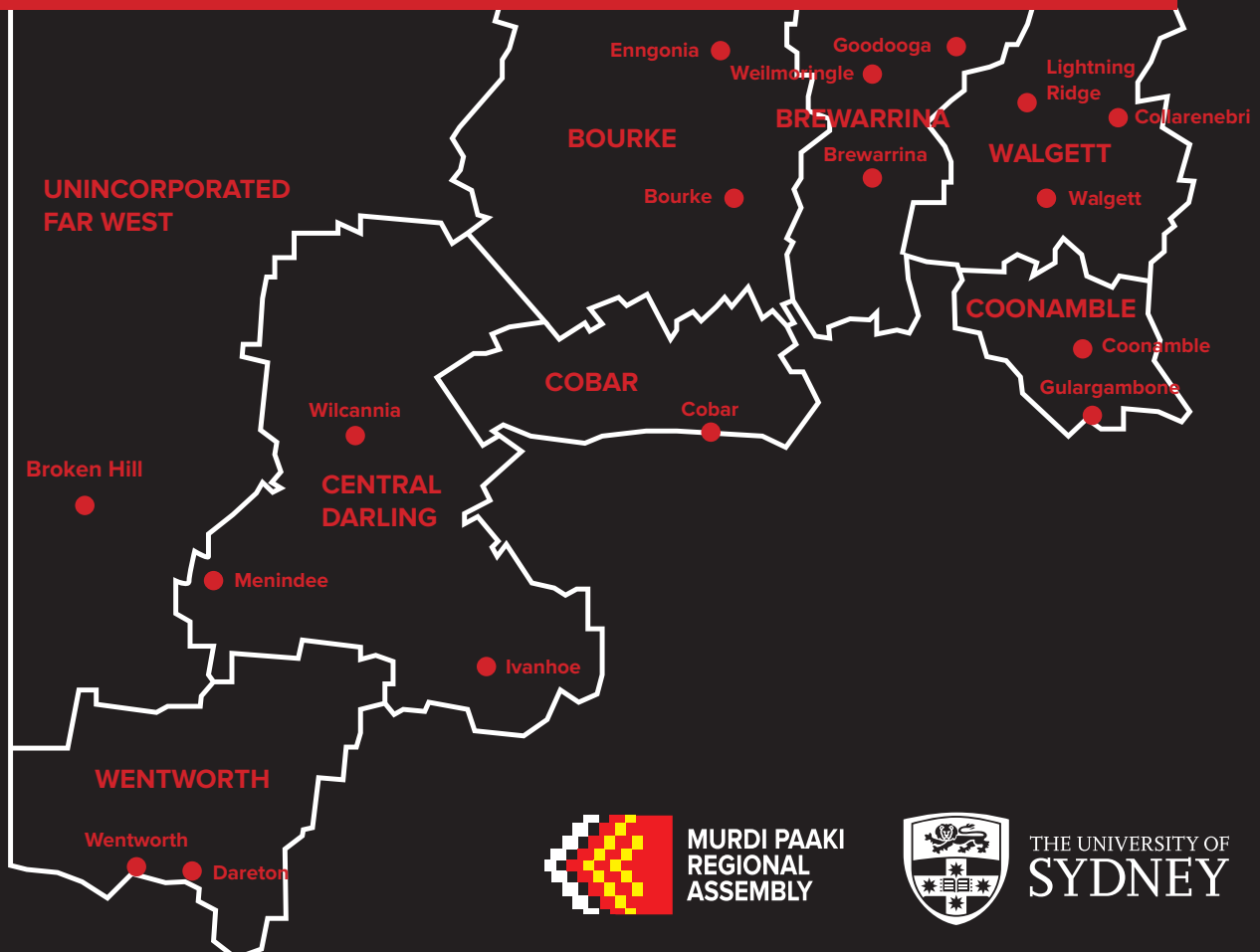


# MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL ASSEMBLY & UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

## ENGAGEMENT MODEL



MURDI PAAKI  
REGIONAL  
ASSEMBLY



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY



**MURDI PAAKI  
REGIONAL  
ASSEMBLY**

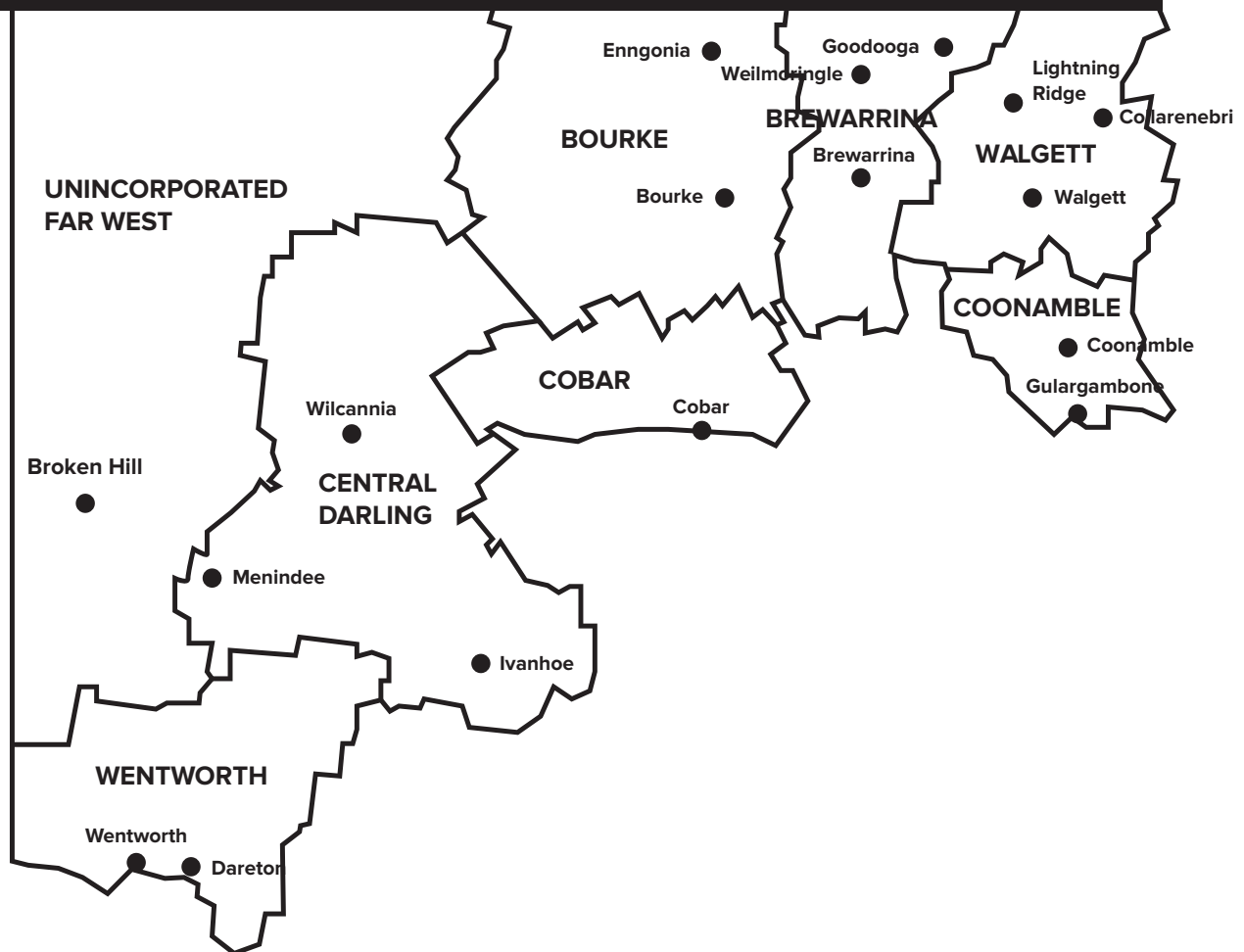


THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**



# MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL ASSEMBLY & UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

## ENGAGEMENT MODEL





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# GLOSSARY

AANSW	Aboriginal Affairs NSW
ACDP	Aboriginal Communities Development Project
AEHIP	Aboriginal Environmental Health Infrastructure Project
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CAP	Community Action Plan
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CWP	Community Working Party
DAA	NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs (now AANSW)
DPC	NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
DPMC	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
HIPP	Health Infrastructure Priority Projects
LDM	Local Decision Making
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPAYLP	Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young Leaders' Project
MPRA	Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
MPRC	Murdi Paaki Regional Council
NAHS	National Aboriginal Health Strategy

## PART 1

# ENGAGEMENT MODEL

## 1. INTRODUCTION

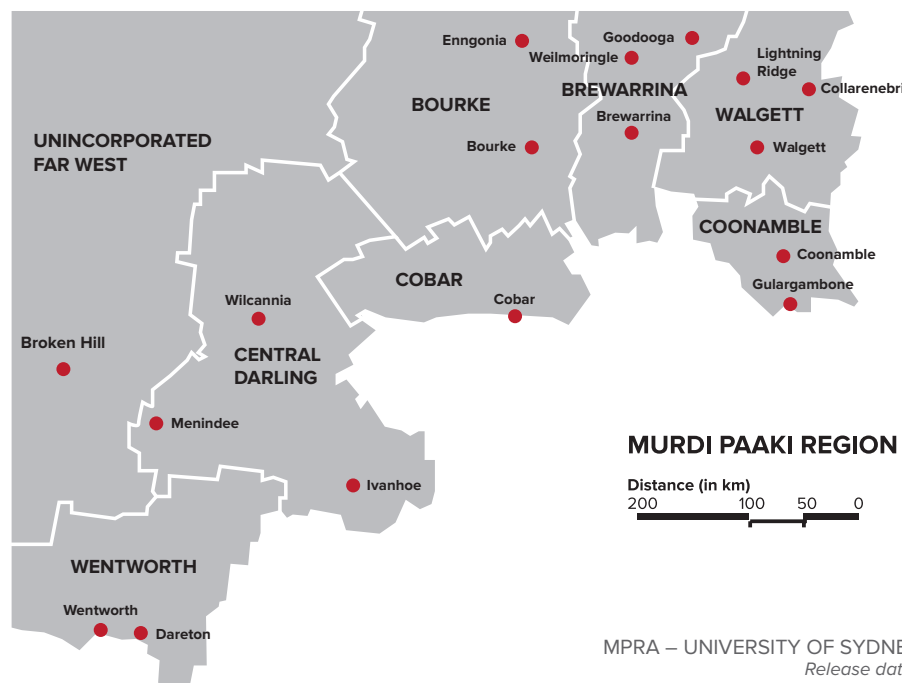
### 1.1 Statement of commitment

1.1.1 Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (the Assembly) and the University of Sydney (the University) are committed to improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in the Murdi Paaki Region. The sixteen communities identified in Figure 1, forming the Murdi Paaki Region and represented by the Assembly, acknowledge this commitment and will work collaboratively with the University to strengthen community social, cultural, civic, economic and political capability in a systematic and holistic way. To this end the parties have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (the Agreement).

1.1.2 The Agreement joins the parties as equal partners to work together in a spirit of cooperation to facilitate the delivery of a range of initiatives to Aboriginal communities in the Murdi Paaki Region that have mutually agreed objectives and achieve mutually agreed outcomes. In return, the University will develop a best practice model for community engagement in service learning that provides an environment for senior students and academic staff to work in and gain experience of different cultural contexts. In this regard, University personnel will be aware that the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the sovereign owners of the land we call Australia contributes an additional dimension to the reality of working in diverse cultural contexts.

1.1.3 This Engagement Model defines the engagement protocols which the University agrees to adopt in its dealings with the Assembly and member communities, and vice versa, and cultural norms which apply to the relationships.

Figure 1 – Murdi Paaki Region communities



## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The historical context of self-governance and engagement across the region is described in Part 2.
- 2.2 The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
- 2.2.1 The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly is the peak Aboriginal governance body for the Murdi Paaki Region representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across western NSW. The region covers an area that extends from Collarenebri in the north east of the region to Dareton/Wentworth in the south.
- 2.2.2 Membership of the Assembly comprises Chairpersons and/or nominees from the sixteen Community Working Parties (CWPs) representing the communities listed in Appendix 1, representatives of the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young Leaders (MPAYLP), and NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) Councillors, and an independent Chairperson.
- 2.2.3 The role of the Assembly is to:
- Prosecute a strategic agenda focused on regional autonomy, Aboriginal jurisdiction and self-determination;
  - Support further development of governance capacity and responsible leadership in Murdi Paaki Aboriginal communities;
  - Promote intergenerational skills transfer and increased youth leadership;
  - Provide an empowered framework for strategic engagement and planning, including coordination, enabling governments, NGOs, the private sector and other providers to connect with the Assembly and communities;
  - Advise governments, NGOs, the private sector and other providers on ways to direct the service system to operate effectively, to respond to the priorities of Aboriginal communities in the region, and to establish mutually agreed service outcomes;
  - Provide a strong and representative governance structure for Aboriginal communities to raise issues with tiers of government, NGOs, the private sector and other providers; and
  - Act as a catalyst and driver of regional initiatives important to Assembly member communities.
- 2.2.4 The Assembly operates in accordance with the accepted principles of good governance and in accordance with cultural practices and traditions of the people and Nations of the region.
- 2.2.5 The Assembly acknowledges the rights of member communities to pursue initiatives for the betterment of their community and recognises that these initiatives may be negotiated by the Community Working Party at a local level.
- 2.2.6 The Assembly is not a fund holder or a service delivery organisation.
- 2.2.7 The Assembly recognises and respects the cultural authority of Traditional Owner groups within the region and does not make decisions that would



impinge on the cultural authority and autonomy of these groups, nor on Native Title or Land Rights or any other matters relating to traditional lands or specific cultural groups across the region.

2.2.8 The Assembly does not represent personal or individual issues and/or matters. Rather, the Assembly represents the collective interests and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the Murdi Paaki Region.

## 2.3 Community Working Parties

2.3.1 Community Working Parties have been established to encourage community participation and to represent the interests of Aboriginal people at the community level. Community Working Parties are the foundation stone of the Assembly; they are owned by the communities and are of their making.

2.3.2 The functions of Community Working Parties are to:

- Represent and advance the interests of the local community, its Aboriginal organisations, families and individuals;
- Elect a representative to the Regional Assembly;
- Engage with all tiers of government, NGOs including community controlled Aboriginal organisations, the private sector and other providers around the provision of services and delivery of projects at community level;
- Determine community priorities;
- Document and prosecute a Community Action Plan which gives effect to community priorities;
- Sustain the practice of good governance at the community level;
- Negotiate service delivery agreements with government agencies, NGOs including community controlled Aboriginal organisations, the private sector and other providers; and
- Engage with service providers to articulate and advocate for community goals, needs, aspirations and priorities.

2.3.3 Community Working Parties are not fund holders or service delivery organisations.

## 2.4 Local arrangements

2.4.1 Some CWPs within the Murdi Paaki Region have developed their own community specific engagement protocols. These can be accessed through the respective CWP.

2.4.2 Community goals, needs, aspirations and priorities are documented in a Community Action Plan (CAP) prepared by each community. CAPs are available from the respective CWPs.

### 3 PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

#### 3.1 Principles underpinning the Engagement Model

3.1.1 Responding to the aspirations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities of the Murdi Paaki Region requires an on-going multi-faceted and structured approach over the long term, the framework for which is conditioned by the following set of principles agreed to by the parties:

**Priority principle:** The focus and beneficiaries of this initiative are twofold:

- Aboriginal community members, families and communities living within the Murdi Paaki Region in western NSW; and
- The University in its desires to build a 'best practice' model for community engagement in service learning and expose students to different cultural contexts as part of the students' professional development.

The efforts of all parties working in partnership are to be directed towards improving the circumstances of Aboriginal people living in western NSW through carrying out negotiated, outcomes-based projects to achieve identified objectives which also strengthen leadership, and build and reinforce individual and collective capacity and decision-making processes.

**Cultural engagement principle:** Aboriginal cultural considerations sit above all others. Projects are to be grounded in the local Aboriginal cultural and historical contexts and work to build stronger cultural connections and identity, and create in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population a greater level of respect for and appreciation of traditional value systems, decision-making processes and culturally sound ways of conducting community business. Communities describe respect, honesty, integrity, transparency and inclusiveness as core traditional values.

**Community engagement principle:** The parties acknowledge that Aboriginal people know best the needs of Aboriginal communities and so meaningful and respectful partnership-based engagement with communities is central to the planning, design and delivery of projects. It follows that the direct involvement of the Assembly and CWP is essential at all stages in the project delivery cycle.

**Ethical principle:** Ownership of knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality and culture, of the relationship with Country, of Aboriginal physical heritage and landscape, and of the historical context that created and continues to reinforce socio-economic disadvantage resides with the leaders and members each community. This knowledge is to be respected, accounted for in project development and delivery, and only used in ways which are agreed.

**Holistic development principle:** Parties understand that supporting development initiatives in Aboriginal communities requires an integrated multi-disciplinary approach built around community and family values, empowerment and healing.

**Access principle:** Projects are to be open to anyone in the community who wishes to participate, be delivered in a way that reflects local cultural values and practices and in a way that grass-roots people can understand and join with. Resources and effort are to be distributed equitably across all communities. In

this, it is acknowledged that the diversity of needs and priorities across the communities may require different approaches to be adopted from community to community.

**Sustainability principle:** Projects will be managed, resourced and supported over an adequate period of time to achieve mutually agreed outcomes that are beneficial to the Region and communities. Communities will only be asked to contribute resources within their means. Projects are to incorporate measures which strengthen the capacity of the community to achieve self-sufficiency.

**Integration principle:** In the event that Government agencies, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, NGOs and/or private sector organisations are in a position to contribute positively to projects undertaken under the Agreement, or in other ways, then the parties will negotiate and lead collaboration between and within service providers and/or funding contributors with the aim of effectively coordinating inputs.

**Accountability principle:** Projects will be subject to regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation with the objective of verifying progress against agreed objectives in improving the socio-economic standing of Aboriginal people of western NSW and refining the 'best practice' model.

## 4 ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

- 4.1 The Assembly has developed these engagement protocols to guide those wishing to engage with, or seek advice from, the Assembly and member Community Working Parties.
- 4.2 The Assembly and CWPs are the principal engagement points for the University in connecting to Aboriginal communities and peoples within the Murdi Paaki region in regard to delivery of projects under the Agreement. This is especially important when applying for funding or implementing new initiatives. Support, approval and acknowledgement either from the CWP and/or the Assembly demonstrates that engagement with the Aboriginal community has been undertaken.
- 4.2 Those engaging with the Assembly and/or CWPs should:
  - Respect the advice and opinions of Aboriginal people consulted;
  - Acknowledge that Aboriginal people know best the needs of their communities; and
  - Respect the Aboriginal cultural decision-making processes of each community.
- 4.3 University staff and students should engage the Assembly at a regional level and/or with the CWP at a community level when:
  - Visiting the region or community for the first time;
  - Seeking advice in regard to project inception, planning, design and delivery;

- Seeking endorsement for project proposals; and
- Reporting/providing advice on project delivery issues.

#### 4.4 University staff and students wishing to engage with the Assembly should:

- Contact the Assembly Chairperson or secretariat to request time on the relevant Assembly quarterly meeting agenda. Requests are to include details of issues to be discussed, estimated time required and relevance to the Assembly. Where ever possible requests should be provided at least 1 month prior to the scheduled Assembly meeting; and
- Where endorsement from the Assembly is being sought, relevant background documentation should also be provided in advance to allow the Assembly to fully consider proposals.

#### 4.5 University staff and students wishing to engage with CWP's should:

- Contact the CWP Chairperson or secretariat to request time on the relevant meeting agenda. Requests are to include details of issues to be discussed, estimated time required and relevance to the CWP. Note that requests to be placed on CWP agendas will be dealt with at the discretion of individual CWP. Where ever possible CWP's should be given ample notice to develop agendas;
- Where endorsement from a CWP is being sought, relevant background documentation should also be provided in advance to allow CWP members time to fully consider proposals; and
- Be aware of and conversant with local engagement/cultural protocols where they exist.

#### 4.6 Community participation

4.6.1 The Assembly and member Aboriginal communities, individually and collectively, undertake to participate cooperatively and openly with the University in achieving agreed outcomes.

4.6.2 The University will involve the Assembly and CWP's in decision-making around project development and delivery to ensure alignment with the Murdi Paaki Region Regional Strategic Plan at a regional level and Community Action Plans at a local level. This includes:

- Providing regular and consistent attendance (when required) at Assembly and CWP meetings; and
- Ensuring University staff and students are conversant with, and work to, the Murdi Paaki Region Regional Strategic Plan and relevant Community Action Plans at all stages of a project.

4.6.3 The University will ensure that students proposed to support communities in their endeavours are competent in their discipline, are committed to advancing the socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki Region, and will receive adequate guidance from academic staff.

#### 4.7 Respecting Aboriginal culture

- 4.7.1 The University should be aware of and respect cultural protocols of each community in the Murdi Paaki Region acknowledging that the Murdi Paaki Region is made up of many different Aboriginal nations and language groups.
- 4.7.2 The University should ensure the Aboriginal cultural competence of its staff to improve the quality of projects delivered, and to better respond to the needs of Aboriginal communities in a culturally sensitive and appropriate manner. In this regard, developing a competent understanding of the varied historical contexts of communities is essential to inform cultural competence.

## **5 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- 5.1 Parties to the Agreement seek to achieve the following objectives:
- Establish partnerships and share responsibility for achieving community-led, measurable and sustainable improvements in life experiences of Aboriginal people in the region and, in the process, build a best practice model for community engagement in service learning;
  - Identify needs and priorities of Aboriginal people living in the region through consultation and in collaboration with Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and constituent communities, and identify, develop and deliver projects which meet these needs and priorities at a regional, multi-community and/or community level;
  - Strengthen the region's capacity for leadership, culturally-informed decision-making, and integration of cultural and family values into everyday life experiences so that communities are empowered to exercise control over the future; and
  - Further develop cultural competency of University of Sydney academic staff and students to provide them with an enhanced understanding of working in the varied historical, social, economic, environmental and, especially, cultural contexts of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

## **6 AGREED PROJECT PRIORITY AREAS**

- 6.1 The parties agree that improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in western NSW will require a multi-faceted approach that sees effort directed across a range of sectors dealing with the socio-economic determinants of disadvantage. Improvement in one sector is heavily reliant on improvements made across other sectors. Priority areas identified are:
- Spiritual and cultural wellbeing, and caring for Country;
  - Physical and emotional wellbeing;

- Social cohesion and community resilience;
- Childhood and adolescent development; and
- Leadership.

Table 1: Community identified areas for action

	Culture and Heritage	Education and Training	Economic	Health	Youth	Housing	Law and Justice	Safe Communities	Leadership	Early Childhood	Men/women	Elders
Assembly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Community												
Bourke	✓	✓	✓						✓			
Brewarrina	✓	✓		✓	✓							
Broken Hill		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓					
Cobar	✓		✓		✓				✓			
Collarenebri	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓	
Coonamble	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓					
Dareton/Wentworth			✓			✓		✓				
Enngonia	✓		✓					✓				
Goodooga	✓	✓	✓									
Gulargambone	✓	✓		✓								
Ivanhoe	✓			✓	✓							✓
Lightning Ridge	✓	✓					✓		✓	✓		
Menindee		✓					✓	✓				
Walgett				✓	✓					✓		
Weilmoringle			✓	✓		✓						
Wilcannia		✓	✓									

- 6.2 The Results Logic Diagram setting out primary objectives and desired outcomes stated by the Assembly is attached at Figure 2.
- 6.3 Sectors identified by the Assembly and communities in which priority projects to be delivered under this Agreement sit are shown in Table 1. The tabulation provides an understanding of the commonalities and relative importance of issues within communities. These priorities may change over time as consultation and project delivery progresses.
- 6.4 In recognition that achieving measurable outcomes is a critical need if inroads into entrenched disadvantage are to be made across the Murdi Paaki Region, the first Schedule attached to this Agreement goes to tackling projects identified by the Assembly and by communities as priorities.
- 6.5 Additional schedules may be added from time to time as services and projects are identified and established as beneficial and achievable.

## **7 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT**

- 7.1 The Assembly will, in consultation with member communities, identify and provide a brief description, including desired outcomes, of potentially feasible and justifiable projects it wishes the University to support under the Agreement.
- 7.2 The University will, if it considers it is able to undertake the projects proposed, indicate its willingness to the Assembly to do so and develop draft project briefs for project roll-out for consideration by the Assembly. The draft project brief will define:
- Service/project objectives, methodology, outcomes and deliverables;
  - Consultation protocols with the Assembly and community, including reporting;
  - Lead and secondary disciplines responsible for delivering the service/project, and nominated academic staff and student involvement;
  - Expectations as to access to community facilities, resources and any financial support;
  - Timeline; and
  - Budget, including funds committed.
- 7.3 Upon agreement to the technical matters, and terms and conditions of the draft project brief, the University will then further develop the proposal to implementation stage by the preparation of a project work plan.
- 7.4 Before any activities are implemented, the Assembly, the Community Working Party/ies as relevant, and University will enter into a formal, binding undertaking to detail the specific form and content of activities.
- 7.5 Individual projects will be integrated into a master implementation plan which will provide the basis for performance monitoring, reporting and evaluation. The

master implementation plan, once endorsed, will form the formal overarching undertaking between the relevant participants.

## **8 OWNERSHIP**

- 8.1 The Assembly holds a strategic role in the Agreement; benefits are with member communities, individually or collectively.
- 8.2 The parties agree that ownership of any material produced through the conduct of the Agreement is vested in the Assembly and the respective Community Working Parties on behalf of their communities as a whole.
- 8.3 The manner of use by the University of intellectual property generated in the course of initiatives undertaken under the Agreement will be governed by specific agreements developed and documented on a case-by-case basis by the University and the Assembly and/or Community Working Party/ies, as relevant.

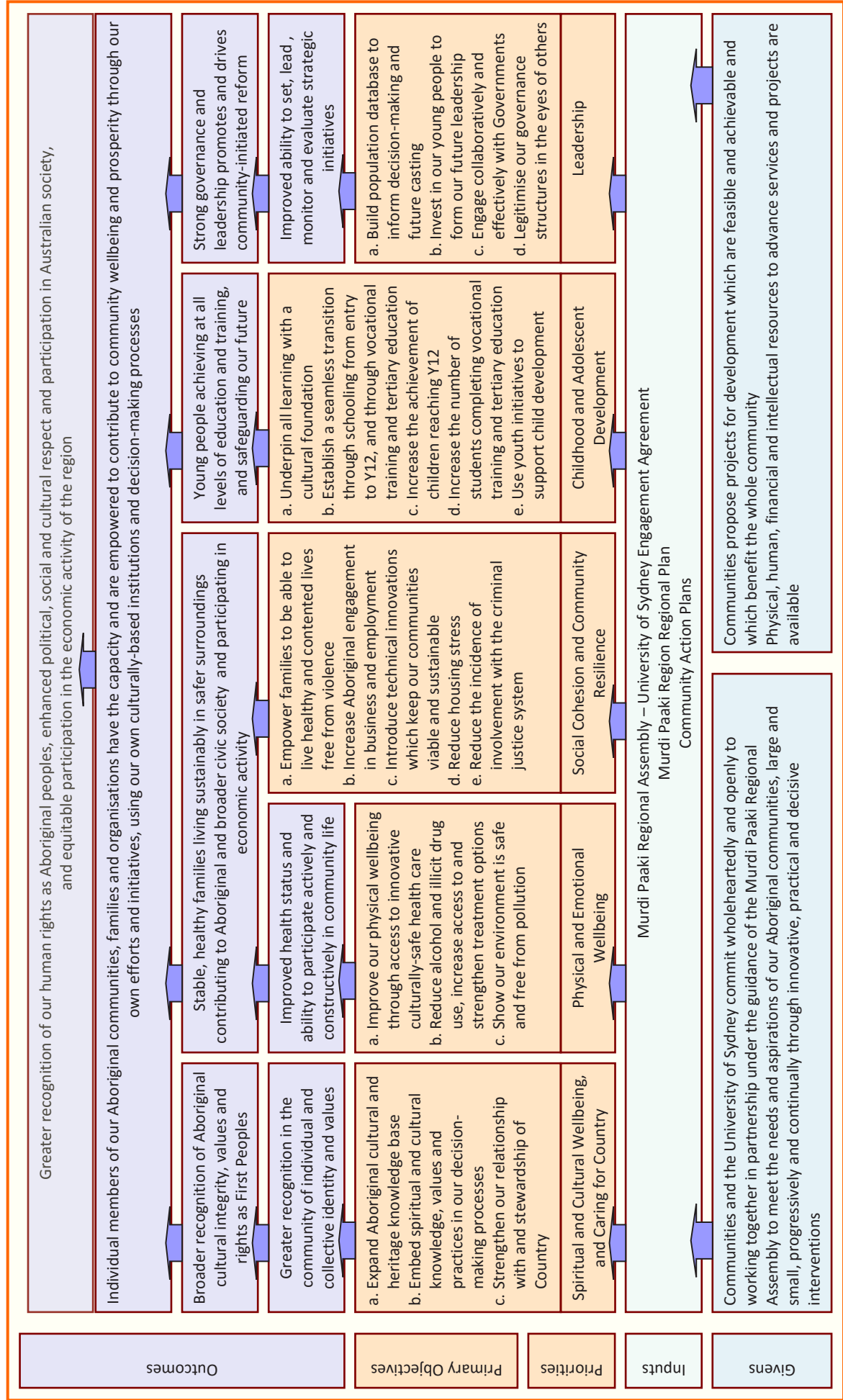
## **9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REPORTING**

- 9.1 Responsibility for reviewing implementation and outcome rests with the Community Service Hub Committee (CSHC) as noted in the Agreement.
- 9.2 Monitoring and evaluation
  - 9.2.1 Monitoring, measuring and evaluating projects delivered at regional, sub-regional or local level are critical to demonstrating progress towards agreed outcomes, and are to be considered essential tasks in the delivery process.
  - 9.2.2 A baseline set of indicators against which to assess the performance of any project and an evaluation framework will be developed and agreed by the CSHC as soon as practicable in the design and development of the project.
- 9.3 Reporting
  - 9.3.1 The University undertakes to have its participating staff and/or students attend regularly and consistently at Assembly and CWP meetings, and such other gatherings as are necessary to keep the community informed of progress and to facilitate decision-making.
- 9.4 Timetable
  - 9.4.1 It is agreed that the process of consultation and engagement with the Assembly and member Aboriginal communities, and implementation of the agreed actions under the Agreement, will continue for the life of the Agreement.
  - 9.4.2 The parties will jointly monitor and evaluate progress against the timeframes and performance indicators outlined in projects contained in the attached Schedule(s). The parties will provide sufficient information to each other for that purpose.



# Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly – University of Sydney Engagement Model

## FIGURE 2 – RESULTS LOGIC DIAGRAM



## PART 2

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCE OF RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING IN OTHER SECTORS

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the Engagement Model report provides a brief history of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) and its predecessor entities, explores the nexus between engagement and other aspects of MPRA's relationship with its partners and service providers over the years, and documents lessons learned about engagement which are likely to be useful in sustaining the relationship between MPRA and the University of Sydney. Interestingly, there is very little direct focus on engagement as a process in the substantial body of material published about the Murdi Paaki Region; however, there are lessons to be learned by inference from discussions of governance and outcomes of Murdi Paaki projects in various sources, and this section also presents insights obtained from discussions with the MPRA Chairperson Sam Jeffries. Finally, the learnings are distilled in the form of insights for an engagement model. A timeline is included at the end of the narrative.

### 2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MPRA

The story of sovereign rights begins in what is now known as the Murdi Paaki Region back in the 1930s, when William Ferguson, Pearl Gibbs and Jack Patten founded the Aborigines Progressive Association but, for the purposes of this narrative, it is better to begin in 1990, with the creation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) by the Commonwealth Government. ATSIC comprised two 'arms': an elected arm and an administrative arm. Although ATSIC was very much under ministerial control, the elected arm made significant progress towards self-determination for Aboriginal people, with its independence increasing over time: for example, in 1994-1995, ATSIC applied for and was granted accredited NGO status at the United Nations (Sanders 2004). Under the original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989, Australia was divided into 60 ATSIC Regions, and Regional Councils were elected in 1990. The regions were aggregated into zones, and an ATSIC commissioner elected to represent each zone. Two regions were created in far western and north-western NSW: the NSW Far West Region and the Wangkumara Region. These

regions were amalgamated in 1994, following a review of the operation of the ATSIIC legislation which recommended reduction of the number of regions to 35, to form the Murdi Paaki Region.

All Community Working Parties (CWPs) in the Murdi Paaki Region have been spontaneous outgrowths of community aspirations for governance and self-determination. The establishment in the mid-1990s of the Namatjira Working Party in Dareton and, at around the same time, the Maarima Committee in Wilcannia (which was later reconstituted as the Wilcannia CWP), was the direct result of the communities, supported by the ATSIIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council, seeking to establish a broadly representative body to govern the planning and delivery of specific housing and infrastructure projects (in Dareton, the Namatjira Health Infrastructure Priority Projects (HIPP) and, in Wilcannia, the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) Project). In 1996, the Murdi Paaki Regional Council negotiated an Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement with the NSW Government. The Agreement followed the successful integration of the NSW Government's Aboriginal Environmental Health Infrastructure Projects (AEHIP) with the Commonwealth-funded HIPP and NAHS Projects in Dareton and Wilcannia. Delivery of services under the Regional Agreement was guided by an Implementation Manual, developed by MPRC with funding from the then NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). The Manual drew heavily upon the experience gained through delivery of the HIPP and NAHS programmes in Murdi Paaki communities. By 1998, HIPP and NAHS projects were being developed for Bourke and Goodooga, and in that year, the NSW Government's Aboriginal Communities Development Programme (ACDP) was announced, and funding predicated for additional communities including Enngonia, Weilmoringle, Brewarrina and Walgett, as well as Goodooga, Bourke, Wilcannia and Dareton/Wentworth/Buronga. In parallel with allocation of capital works funding under these programmes, CWPs were created in the recipient communities to govern the roll-out of development projects.

By the time the second edition of the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement Implementation Manual was prepared in 1999, CWPs had been established in Bourke, Coonamble, Goodooga, Gulargambone and Walgett, in addition to the original CWPs in Dareton and Wilcannia; by 2001, CWPs also existed in Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Brewarrina, Enngonia, Weilmoringle, Broken Hill and Menindee, and in 2002, CWPs were also created in Cobar and Ivanhoe. The second edition of the Manual reflected a broadening of the role of the Community Working Parties which, while still focusing on their role in direction of the implementation of housing and environmental health infrastructure projects, were placing a more strategic emphasis on responsiveness, co-ordination and accountability of agencies and the programmes they were delivering. The Manual represented the first formal initiative to define and document CWP governance structures and protocols, but also served as a manifesto setting out the MPRC's expectations of the way governments and government agencies would interact with communities. The mode of engagement elaborated in the Manual was to foster, among other things:

- increased community participation through the CWP structure in service design and delivery;

- better targeted policy and programme frameworks through inter-agency co-ordination and co-operation;
- strengthening of principles of empowerment, self-determination and self-management; economic independence and equity; negotiation with and maximum participation by Aboriginal peoples; and maintenance of Aboriginal cultural practices by unreserved involvement of the community in decision-making;
- greater accountability on the part of agencies through the development and articulation by the CWPs of outcome-based accountability measures; and
- implementation of structured, fully funded training and employment initiatives resulting in accredited outcomes.

*(Burns Aldis 1999)*

These outcomes of engagement are as relevant today as they were in the 1990s.

In 2002, as the next phase in an orderly and strategic process of development, MPRC commissioned Michael Stewart and Patrick Bradberry to undertake the Community Working Parties Governance Study, and to prepare a six-booklet Murdi Paaki ATSIC Region Aboriginal Community Governance Resource Kit (Stewart & Bradberry 2002). This comprehensive kit placed CWPs at the heart of community governance in the Murdi Paaki Region, and the valuable work undertaken in preparing the kit continued to strengthen the institution and position Aboriginal communities in such a way as to provide the best prospects for correcting the power imbalance with governments. The kit is seen as still very relevant but in need of updating to reflect the evolved status of governance structures within the region, and changing relationships both within and external to communities. MPRA aspires to secure the University's help in updating this resource.

Through the intervening period, the sixteen CWPs have become the principal body in each community for representation and consultation related to a broad range of aspirations and issues. The discussion below explores aspects of engagement relevant to a succession of landmark initiatives and agreements during the 2000s and subsequently: the COAG Trial and its supporting Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) (2003 to 2007), two subsequent Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) (2009-2012 and 2013 until the demise of RPAs) and the Local Decision Making (LDM) Accord with the NSW Government (2015-2018). Local Governments have tended not to feature in region-wide partnership initiatives but two partnership initiatives between MPRC and local government councils should be mentioned here: the River Towns Project (2002) and the Barwon Darling Alliance. Both of these initiatives had focus on economic and social development within the local government areas involved.

Part-way through the COAG Trial, MPRC established a Planning Forum, comprising chairpersons of all 16 CWPs or their delegates. The Planning Forum was to be the first step in the transition from an ATSIC Regional Council to an independent Regional Authority; an agenda established by MPRC in its 1995 Regional Plan. A precedent for an Indigenous Regional Authority already existed in the form of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. In 2004, the name of the

Planning Forum was changed to Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and, shortly after, the Commonwealth Government indicated its intention to abolish ATSIIC. Upon the subsequent dissolution of the MPRC in 2005, the MPRA immediately dropped into the roles formerly fulfilled by the MPRC. The 16 communities all aspired to be represented at the MPRA table, and all saw their continued support of the regional governance structure as fundamental to a move to regional autonomy. It is important to note that the MPRA always was, and continues to be, people-centred, rather than issues-centred.

The withdrawal of Regional Managers from the region (from Bourke to Dubbo) during the last decade has resulted in the consolidation of government decision-making outside the region. Minimal staff numbers remain in NSW Aboriginal Affairs within the region; the closest DPMC regional office is now located in Dubbo. This continues to impact on governments' ability to co-ordinate service delivery, but also has the effect of de-centring the locus of decision-making.

Recently, devolution of services traditionally provided by governments to non-government organisations (NGOs) has resulted in the need for MPRA and CWPs to build stronger relationships with NGOs. The largest and most influential Aboriginal owned and controlled NGOs in the region are Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation, and Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation. Each of these organisations was established and nurtured as a strategic initiative of MPRC and, later, by MPRA, and each provides services in its area of expertise at a regional scale. In addition, though, the spheres of MPRA and the CWPs intersect with those of a number of mainstream NGOs; notably the former Far West NSW Medicare Local (now part of the Western NSW Primary Health Network), Royal Flying Doctor Service, Mission Australia, Red Cross, Burnside, McKillop Family Services, and Centacare. MPRA is working towards a structured process for engaging with these NGOs through a steering committee involving major organisations on a similar basis to engagement with Government partners.

### **3 THE COAG TRIAL**

The Murdi Paaki COAG Trial was one of eight trials carried out across Australia between 2003 and 2007. The individual trials were formatively evaluated in 2005-2006, and a synopsis evaluation prepared. The trial objectives focused predominantly, for governments, on finding innovative ways of working which resulted in tailored, co-ordinated, responsive, accountable place-based service delivery to communities and, for communities, of enhancing capacity to negotiate as 'genuine partners with government' (Morgan Disney & Associates 2006).

The formative evaluation of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial examined the roles and performance both of the CWPs and of the government partners. The evaluation established that CWPs were:

- contributing to flow of information within community;
- fostering better links and greater co-operation among community organisations;

- acting as an avenue for contact and communication among groups;
- building increased level of community consensus;

and that the fact that the CWPs did not control funds, and their unincorporated status meant that they were less likely to be seen as competition.

Difficulties had arisen for the CWPs as a consequence of:

- some agencies failing to respond or engage with CWPs;
- insufficient direction provided to some CWPs at inception of COAG Trial as to their role and the decision-making processes;
- the process placed a heavy burden on already busy, unremunerated chairs;
- their experience of delays in negotiating and finalising SRAs, as well as some uncertainty and disagreement over the types of material which were or were not appropriate fodder for the SRA process.

In summary, the trial findings point to frustration over the slow progress of the Trial and lack of improvement in Government service delivery, coupled with limitations on capacity for co-ordination, but coupled with enhanced governance capacity at a community level. Of great importance to the CWPs was the Action Team – the ‘faces of government’ who were consistently available and in attendance – whose role was central to progress, to building relationships and to developing trust.

The evaluators of the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial noted that membership of the CWPs was ‘refreshed’ at the commencement of the COAG Trial to account for their ‘responsibilities for dealing with a wide range of issues’ (Urbis Keys Young 2006); however, at least some CWPs were exercising a governance function in relation to a wide variety of human services well before that (for instance, with the Namatjira CWP in Dareton successfully advocating for an Aboriginal Night Patrol in the late 1990s and the Wilcannia CWP engaging with human services agencies around a wide range of issues). The CWPs in the Murdi Paaki Region were not constituted passively in response to a whole-of-governments policy agenda; they autonomously developed an appetite for governance across the gamut of issues their communities contend with.

In the Murdi Paaki Region, the predominant process for engagement at a community level was through the preparation of the Community Action Plans (CAPs) which the evaluation indicated were regarded by community as ‘an accurate reflection of community sentiment’. Engagement for these would have been predominantly between the community and the consultants who prepared the CAPs: this process ‘contributed to the level of cohesion and goodwill in individual communities’. ‘... the CAP process was regarded in a positive light by the majority of stakeholders.’ But whether and how government really did respond to community priorities is questionable. The evaluation indicates frustration at community level over the slow rate of progress and perceptions of lack of improvement in service delivery. The Evaluation Report identifies ‘delays in finalising CAPs’ as retarding the ‘progress of the trial overall, to the frustration of both community and government stakeholders’. Discussion in an earlier version of the Report indicates that ‘considerable delays’ were experienced in

finalising all sixteen CAPs, yet the CAP process was regarded positively by most stakeholders, and the CAPs are regarded as accurately reflecting community priorities, important in building community support for CWPs and the trial, and contributing to community cohesion. This suggests that expectations about timeframes for the planning process were unrealistic to begin with, and that the actual time taken was about right in terms of satisfying the needs of the CWPs to engage internally within the community and with the consultants documenting the plans, and to reflect on each stage of the process, particularly bearing in mind that CWP members are volunteers, have many other demands on their time, and cannot reasonably be expected to exercise absolute flexibility with regard to attending meetings and workshops. The principal lesson to be learned from the CAP experience is that to have rigid initial expectations as to timeframes, and to predicate subsequent activity on these expectations, is likely to be counterproductive. It takes as long as it takes.

An enduring work which arose in response to the CWPs' and MPRA's ambition for self-determination in decision-making, set against the context of governance arrangements under the COAG Trial, is the MPRA Charter of Governance. Prepared in 2006, the charter makes the point that engagement with elected community representatives is seen as a link between governance and service delivery, and makes explicit the connection between relationships, partnership and participation. It positions MPRA as a 'gateway and checkpoint' (Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly 2006). The Charter of Governance has been amended from time to time to reflect contemporary relationships, but it has continued to articulate the role of MPRA as 'peak body and primary point of contact' – a role later embodied in MPRA's Engagement Protocols which form the foundation of Part 1 of the present document.

MPRA Chairperson Sam Jeffries expressed regret that, even though the Regional Partnership Agreement signed in 2009 (see below) followed logically from the COAG Trial, the lessons learned by governments about co-ordination and engagement and, particularly, about the need to resource community governance, did not continue to inform government practice after the Trial:

*As soon as the Trial ended, government disappeared ... we never reached the high water mark since; communities have never felt the high water mark of engagement again.*

A measure of the success of the COAG Trial, in terms of engagement, was that smaller communities felt that their voices were as important as those of larger, better resourced communities. Since the Trial ended, larger communities with strong leadership, such as Bourke and Walgett, have been more engaged. MPRA aspires to all communities being equally engaged. Mr Jeffries's view is that the COAG Trial was successful in effecting change:

*The COAG Trial really did move the frame. Governments were sorting themselves out for the first period – horizontal layers and vertical layers. We were getting better outcomes in education than the rest of the state ... engagement with CWPs meant that the agencies were getting exposure to what was happening in the community.*

He attributes the success of the Trial, in large measure, to having agencies with resources and capacity (the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the NSW Department of Education and Training) as lead agencies, rather than DAA and the Commonwealth Office of Indigenous Policy Co-ordination.

It had been intended to undertake a summative evaluation of outcomes of the Trials in 2007-2008 (Gilbert 2012) but this did not occur, and the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial simply lapsed in 2007 without any co-ordination and engagement structure having been put in place to ensure a seamless transition.

#### **4 THE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

Following the conclusion of the COAG Trial, Shared Responsibility Agreements at a regional scale were replaced by Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs). The MPRA negotiated a three year RPA with the Australian and NSW Governments, and the resulting document was signed in January 2009. The RPA had three primary objectives: specific actions and commitments devised to attain COAG Closing the Gap targets; collaboration to deliver the objectives of the COAG Reform Agenda and the NSW State Plan priorities; and, through a series of subgroups, to make plans to achieve the objectives of the partnership. While the RPA itself addressed principles, objectives, outcomes, governance structures, performance measures and dispute resolution procedures relating to the tripartite partnership, the substantive areas for action were defined in a series of six schedules to the agreement. These related to: leadership and governance; education; economic development and employment; housing and development; community health and safety; and local government engagement. Delivery, monitoring and evaluation of the RPA was to be the role of the Regional Engagement Group (REG), supported by five sub-groups with specific portfolio responsibilities. The REG, established prior to the RPA under the NSW Government's Two Ways Together policy, comprised representatives of MPRA and the Australian and NSW Governments.

A formative evaluation of the RPA was conducted at the half-way point, in mid-2010. The evaluation established that implementation of the RPA to date was meeting with mixed success. While specific actions and commitments aimed at attainment of the COAG Closing the Gap targets were being implemented, and new strategies and programmes were being delivered in the Murdi Paaki Region, the creation of a structured approach based upon co-operative working arrangements between governments and communities had been less successful. The partnership between the MPRA and the Australian and NSW Governments was to underpin delivery of the RPA and to provide continuity of collaboration following on from the COAG Trial in the region (notwithstanding a considerable time lapse between conclusion of the COAG Trial and commencement of the RPA). The review found that, conversely, the governance structures identified in the RPA were failing to fulfill the roles documented for them. The REG was experiencing difficulty engaging line agencies, ensuring that the portfolio sub-groups delivered, and even obtaining access to evidence to support



decision-making and accountability processes. MPRA was concerned that the RPA was losing momentum, and expressed concern about the nature of the partnership. The review recommended, among other things, that an effective, evidence-based communications strategy be developed; that the MPRA be adequately resourced to undertake its governance role; and that structure, roles, responsibilities and accountability measures for the REG be revisited (Johnstone 2010).

One issue of particular concern which arose in the context of the RPA review was that policies and strategies were being developed and implemented by governments outside of the RPA process. From 2009 onwards, another partnership initiative ran in parallel with the RPA in two Murdi Paaki communities, but this was one from which MPRA was excluded. The National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery (RSD) focused on 29 remote Indigenous communities across New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. A partnership between the Australian and relevant state and territory governments, its objectives were similar to those of the Murdi Paaki RPA: to improve access to services, improve the range and quality of services available, improve governance and leadership within communities, increase economic and social participation and promote personal responsibility, through integrated service planning, creating a single government interface and various other means, under the ultimate direction of the Coordinator General for Remote Service Delivery (Gilbert 2012). Wilcannia and Walgett, in the Murdi Paaki Region, were two of the RSD communities. The logic for including in RSD two communities which were, at the same time, part of the RPA process can only be guessed at. Unfortunately, the RSD leadership completely ignored existing governance structures within the region, bypassed MPRA and the two CWPs completely, and took its business directly to local government. Johnstone's review of the RPA noted that new policies and strategies were being developed and implemented outside of the RPA framework, and commented that while it may have been desirable to link these to the RPA, different policy drivers, timeframes and decision-making processes made this challenging. The RPA Assessment Report indicated, for example, that any opportunity for integration of the RSD projects with the RPA was superseded by events, with RSD strategies for the two communities finalised before RPA schedules could be prepared. Stewart and Jarvie (2015) observed, in the context of a critique of the impediments to policy learning:

*... it is difficult to see COAG trial learnings in other subsequent COAG initiatives. For example, the agreement reached in 2008 on remote service delivery (RSD) under the new Commonwealth Labor government, eschewed the word partnership and aimed at ensuring services in remote areas were the same as those available in urban areas rather than negotiating priorities with Aboriginal communities.*

The situation in the Murdi Paaki Region was further confounded by the NSW Government's introduction in 2012 of Connected Communities, an initiative led through schools in the Region and elsewhere, intended to address the educational and social aspirations of young Aboriginal people through the creation of 'community hubs' within schools. About one-third of the sixteen communities in the Region, comprising a total of eight schools, are part of this

initiative. Connected Communities have a history of non-engagement with the MPRA, although signs are that this might be changing. Whereas RSD has concluded, Connected Communities is ongoing. It is unclear where Connected Communities sits in relation to the recently-executed Local Decision Making Accord (see below). Logically, LDM should sit above Connected Communities initiatives such as language nests. Part of the problem is the role of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs) in Connected Communities. MPRA's view is that AECGs play a gatekeeper role in communities; if they are the sole point of contact for Connected Communities initiatives (which extend far beyond school education), then engagement across all community interests is not possible. History indicates a tendency for agencies to play competing community governance structures off against one another to advance external agendas.

At the expiry of the RPA in 2012, a second RPA was negotiated. This Agreement was put in place for a further three-year period (2013 to 2015) but, with change in Commonwealth government, and with the NSW Government putting in place the OCHRE Strategy, RPAs were abandoned. Most recently, a 2013 round of Community Action Plans has been prepared by Commonwealth bureaucrats without meaningful engagement with communities, and it is not known on what basis the content of these plans has been compiled.

## **5 THE LOCAL DECISION MAKING ACCORD**

The most recent partnership initiative involving MPRA and government is the Local Decision Making Accord, executed on 19th February 2015 by MPRA and the NSW Government. LDM Accords are an initiative under the NSW Government's OCHRE Strategy for Aboriginal Affairs. The Accord recognises the MPRA as a legitimate regional Aboriginal governance body, and defines roles; decision-making processes; monitoring, performance measurement and evaluation provisions; and dispute resolution processes. The duration of the Accord will be three years. Objectives and outcomes focus on the key areas of affordable and appropriate housing, economic development, education, early childhood services, and governance capacity and support. A series of deferred priority areas are also documented in the Accord: domestic, family and lateral violence; child safety; Aboriginal incarceration rates and interaction with the justice system; and cultural and language development. The Accord contains action schedules to support attainment of objectives and outcomes (Unknown author 2015).

The Accord has only recently been executed so progress against objectives and outcomes will not be discernible for some time; however, unique among partnership initiatives, the negotiation process itself has been evaluated. Negotiation of the Accord was a three-stage process: a pre-negotiation phase ran from February to July 2014; the negotiation phase, from August to mid-October 2014; and the signing phase, from October 2014 to February 2015. Lessons drawn from several of the evaluation findings are directly relevant to this Engagement Model. In summary, the findings were as follows. Success factors

were:

- the strong leadership of the MPRA;
- the MPRA negotiating panel had decision-making capacity;
- time and resources allocated to developing the priorities;
- engagement of an independent facilitator to assist negotiations;
- attributes of the lead government negotiator;
- support provided to MPRA and Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) by AANSW to facilitate and document the negotiation; and
- decision-making capacity of NSW government agency representatives at the negotiating table.

Opportunities for improvements were:

- the need for application of more resources to prepare government representatives; to support staff change during negotiation process; and for increased information and dialogue to increase understanding of LDM across government agencies;
- engagement of senior government decision-makers from commencement of the negotiation process;
- development of innovative and holistic solutions which represent significant and strategic change in the way government does business, supported by adequate resources;
- enhancement of the capacity of MPRA representatives, including providing clarity about the process and representatives' role from commencement of the process, and possibly also access to independent expert advice;
- better understanding of the roles of negotiating parties.

Overall, participants felt positive about the process and the attitudes of those involved, and valued the relationship-building which emerged from the process; however, as with earlier initiatives, a minority of agency representatives were felt to be disengaged from the process. There was also concern that the Accord represented a missed opportunity in that it did not include significant strategic innovation in government service delivery (Cultural & Indigenous Research Centre Australia 2015). From MPRA's perspective, notwithstanding the strengths of the engagement process, the evidence is that there is still work to do; for example, to avoid unilateral actions on the part of government in issuing media releases which differ from agreed drafts, and to have government understand that locally evolved governance structures are off limits for the purposes of colonisation.

## 6 NOW AND IN THE FUTURE ...

MPRA Chairperson Sam Jeffries regards the LDM Accord as providing the opportunity to recover ground lost after the COAG Trial, when governments reverted, more or less, to business as usual. “You reclaim aspects of it with individual agencies – we’re reclaiming space at the moment with the Accord. The State Government helped ... by making super-agencies – we’re able to partner further up the ladder.” Mr Jeffries sees one of the factors for success as a focus on the relationship between communities and government services which bypasses special interest groups. He notes that it represents a “clean slate for Aboriginal people and agencies”. Under the new relationship, with decision-makers at the table, he aspires to convince partners of the value of engagement beyond service delivery and to have agencies embrace opportunities beyond traditional core business; for example, in relation to broader areas of policy development such as Native Title in the policy context of the place of Aboriginal people in western NSW, and cultural and practical rights to access to water. Mr Jeffries also aspires to engage partners in supporting decision-making to a 20 year horizon, underpinned by analysis of long-term demographic and economic trends.

At present, the MPRA has no formal instrument of agreement with the Australian Government, and negotiation of a Regional Framework Agreement between MPRA and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) has proved frustrating for regional leaders. MPRA has, however, been funded, through a single line allocation, to conduct business for the next three years. Currently, MPRA has a number of projects in train which will contribute to the wellbeing of people in the region: the LDM Accord is in place; talks are progressing with NSW Treasury in relation to creation of a flexible funding pool for the region; negotiations continue with DPMC; MPRA is refreshing its Regional Plan and is positioning itself for greater regional autonomy; NGOs are being brought back into the negotiation space; and the MoU between MPRA and the University of Sydney is expected to enable progress on issues on which it has been difficult to gain traction because they have not been a neat fit with governments’ ‘one size fits all’ policy agenda. The total population in the region has declined over several intercensal periods; however, at a regional scale, the Aboriginal population is increasing (although change is spatially variable). MPRA is targeting sustainability of communities as critical to ensuring the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the future. An element of MPRA’s sustainability agenda is to utilise the process of local government reform to best advantage.

When asked whether governance arrangements are settled, the MPRA Chair indicated that the system of community governance is mature in relation to the MPRA and most CWPs. No consultation has been undertaken recently within the Murdi Paaki Region to identify whether the governance model adopted is a complete fit with community needs. An engagement process around LDM funded by AANSW and conducted in 2014 sought community views about the ongoing relevance of MPRA and the CWPs. This elicited strong support for the MPRA; comments about the CWPs tended to be ad hominem rather than about the CWP as governance institutions. However, the CWPs have brought together people who never previously engaged with one another for the benefit of the community, and the process of engagement in MPRA is seen to be improving

CWPs through enhancing their capacity to take a regional view, and to perceive their place within a broader regional context. Fragility does exist within the model as a result of the resource capacity of communities which creates an implementation gap: CWPs do not have the capability to operationalise their decisions, and this undermines governance, and confidence in their long-term legitimacy. MPRA is in a relatively strong position now that it is funded for a full-time executive position, but some small CWPs are reducing the frequency of their meetings to bimonthly or three-monthly and using the savings on venue hire to fund formal secretariat support. MPRA itself would ideally like to be in a position to fund two experienced policy officers to work full-time on researching, documenting and developing policy to support the Assembly's work in the region but the resource situation will not permit this. Jarvie and Stewart (2011), distilling insights obtained from the work of the Productivity Commission, identified several key factors underpinning good governance: 'governing institutions, leadership, capacity building, self-determination, cultural match and resourcing', and confirmed that all these factors are self-reinforcing, indicating that allocation of adequate resources is a critical element in the governance equation.

MPRA continues to aspire to self-determination, and to recognition of Aboriginal rights to sovereignty. The MPRA Chairperson identified Aboriginal people's relationship with government as representing a 'constituent sovereignty' which 'gives primacy to negotiation, recognising our rights as Indigenous people.' He further asserts that '... self-determination must be moulded to our own special circumstances, whether we live in urban, rural or remote areas' (Jeffries 2004). The model for engagement between MPRA and the University of Sydney has unprecedented potential to support self-determination, and the quest for recognition of sovereignty.

## **7 REFLECTIONS ON ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENTS**

MPRA delegates have displayed a high level of individual resilience and strength over many years. Continual advocacy and persistence has led to the Murdi Paaki Region consistently being able to attract governments to engage in innovative partnerships. The history of MPRC and MPRA, as documented in a large number of academic articles, published papers and presentations, evidences consistently clear vision, ability to make things happen, and realistic expectations. The history of engagement between MPRA and its government partners indicates no consistent, overarching long term vision on the part of governments which, perhaps, should not be surprising given the duration of the electoral cycle and the fluctuating ideological environment which accompanies the cycle. MPRA Chairperson Sam Jeffries observed:

*It comes and goes – it happens with a change of government. MPRA is most influential on government policy when a new government comes in.*

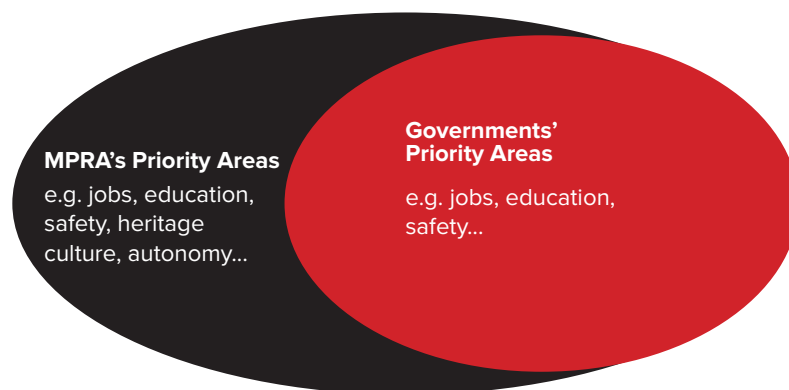
Notwithstanding this, there have been periods in MPRA's history of interaction with governments which have been characterised by vision on both sides – the COAG Trial is a case in point. For the most part, though, governments have

been intent on providing services and programmes within portfolio areas, as dictated by government policies of the day and its bureaucratic interpretation. Notwithstanding rhetoric and COAG policy positions relating to co-ordination, reductionist approaches have prevailed, with governments showing little integrative capacity in the long term, notwithstanding community expectations of a holistic response to community needs and priorities. Agency and community attitudes to measurement and evaluation, too, have differed, with agencies more interested in outputs, and communities, in outcomes. This has long been a source of frustration to communities.

With all formal partnerships to date, MPRA has been able to obtain government buy-in where initiatives are consistent with priorities under the policy regime of the day. As Mr Jeffries noted:

*We put our issues on the table, the government puts its issues on the table, we built the agreement around the shared issues ... we parked the areas of inconsistency ...*

The impact of this has been that priority areas other than those shown in the red area on the diagram below have tended to receive little attention in partnership arrangements; historically, it is only areas of overlap which have been resourced. These areas are seen as fertile ground for project planning in the relationship between MPRA and the University.



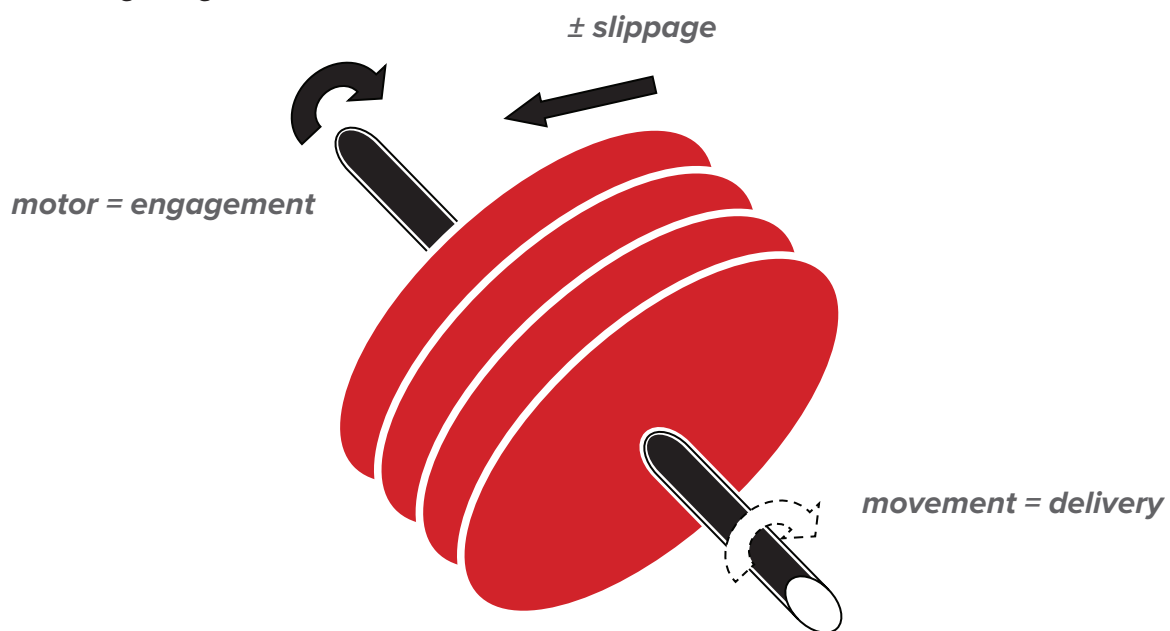
MPRA's experience in engagement with governments reveals differences in relationships around strategic and operational matters. Discussions with Mr Jeffries indicated that MPRA sees its relationship with the University as predominantly strategic at the regional scale, and expects the relationship to be easier than that with governments, since it sees the University as more strategic in its intent and approach, and also as more a 'part of the community' than governments. When asked about unequal power relationships in engagement processes between MPRA and its government partners, Mr Jeffries indicated that imbalances are about unequal resource capacity rather than inequitable power structures. Fragility in an otherwise mature governance model takes the form of compromised capacity within communities to implement the changes they aspire to.

Ideally, the history of engagement between MPRC and then MPRA would have produced a recursive process of reciprocal change:

*change in community  $\rightleftharpoons$  change in institutions of government*

While governance arrangements at the community and regional scales have matured, no consistent, sustained process of change in governments has been observable; perhaps because the processes of government are inherently reductionist, fragmented, territorial and characterised by inertia. As Jeffries and Menham (2008) observed, '[t]he governance arrangements in the Murdi Paaki Region as they have been developed and sustained speak for themselves against the background of the shifting sands of government policy.'

A useful analogy to conceptualise the relationship between engagement and change might be the friction clutch:



When the clutch has been fully engaged, communication between MPRA and the CWP's and their government partners at the 'motor' end has directly effected change at the 'work' end. When the clutch has not been engaged, communication has not resulted in change, resulting in frustration for MPRA and the CWP's. Most of the time, there has been some degree of 'slippage', so engagement between community and governments has produced inconsistent results. MPRA aspires to have the clutch constantly engaged.

### **The nexus between governance and engagement: Humpty Dumpty, the greased pig, and the treadmill**

There is no reason why governance should preoccupy the partners to this MoU; nonetheless it is important to discuss it here because it is inextricably linked to MPRA's experience of engagement in the context of partnerships with governments in particular and, perhaps to a lesser extent, with NGOs. The discourse underpinning MPRA's relationship with its government partners has been characterised by emphasis **by government partners** on the supply side, on co-ordination in service delivery, and on the demand side, on governance structures and processes. 'Governance' appears to be code for the ability

of community to formulate and articulate priorities constructively, within a framework broadly representative of the range of interest groups within the community, to the extent that priorities are consistent with the prevailing policy directions and ideological orientation of the government(s) of the day.

In this discourse it appears to have little if anything to do with sovereignty, self-determination or autonomy other than in regard to group decision-making bounded by regimes of Government policy priorities, programme definition and delivery. Jeffries and Menham (2011) observed in this regard:

*Apart from the establishment of ATSIC, Indigenous governance arrangements supported by governments have tended to reflect jurisdictional and bureaucratic imperatives rather than Indigenous aspirations and priorities.*

An early observation arising in the course of the Indigenous Community Governance Project, undertaken under the leadership of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at ANU, was as follows:

*The search for a clearly articulated concept of 'Indigenous governance' has only recently begun in Australia. The term has rapidly transferred into government, bureaucratic and Indigenous agendas, but there is a lack of critical analysis and hard evidence, and confusion over its actual meaning.*

*(Hunt & Smith 2006)*

The writers' experience has been that governments have tended to take an approach to defining governance (and shaping it in accordance with government imperatives) akin to that of Humpty Dumpty:

*"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."*

*(Carroll 2013 (1871))*

It is impossible to define 'governance' with any degree of confidence because of the way in which governments use the word in accordance with dominant regimes of policy and practice at the time. It has, in effect, become a greased pig – impossible to capture.

The extent to which governments co-opt and colonise the MPRA/CWP structure is hinted at in the recommendation in the Murdi Paaki COAG Trial Evaluation Report:

*If government intends to maintain the status of CWPs as a central feature of government/community interaction into the future, it should communicate this to communities as a matter of priority*

*(Urbis Keys Young 2006)*



and articulated again, in commentary on the capacity of MPRA in the evaluation of the LDM Accord negotiation:

*While MPRA's strengths were acknowledged, some stakeholders noted that in phases two and three of LDM, MPRA's internal governance will come under scrutiny (although it should be noted that the existing governance structure of MPRA and the Community Working Parties was identified as a strength)*

*(Cultural & Indigenous Research Centre Australia 2015)*

MPRA's experience with governments assumptions about their rights to colonise the CWP structure is best illustrated by the actions of the then NSW DAA in 'refreshing' membership of the CWPs. MPRA itself encourages CWPs to refresh membership on an annual or biennial basis, but the onus is on the CWPs to do so, consistent with the recognition that governance structures have to be locally responsive. However, notwithstanding the MPRA-authored Regional Agreement Implementation Manual, which clearly defined governance structures and practices within the region, DAA took it upon itself to "write the rules for CWPs when ACDP was coming in" (Sam Jeffries, pers. comm.). Later, when the Two Ways Together Partnership Communities Programme was developed (from 2008 onwards), DAA itself undertook to refresh CWPs in partnership communities and was instructed to desist. In Menindee, where the CWP chose not to engage with DAA at all, DAA attempted to set up a rival group.

The governance model continues to be undermined by the actions of government. The NSW Ombudsman, for example, chose to undertake probity checks on individuals participating in Accord alliances (such as, in the case of the Murdi Paaki LDM Accord, MPRA members), notwithstanding that these individuals are not doing the business of government. Given the high historical and contemporary incidence of Aboriginal people's contact with the criminal justice system, this is certain to have perverse outcomes. Mr Jeffries asserts that MPRA and the CWPs constitute the optimum framework possible for engagement in the region.

Experience has shown the risk inherent in the discourse of governance as it plays out in the government sector is that communities will find themselves on an eternal treadmill of building of capacity to identify and represent community needs and aspirations. The question raised by MPRA's Chairperson: "Does [the MPRA/CWP governance structure] meet the governance requirements of LDM?" encapsulates the problem. Through ATSIC's existence, and since its demise, the Murdi Paaki CWPs have continually developed their capacity to represent their communities in a culturally and geographically legitimate way; yet, time after time, they have been sent back along the path of capacity development at the behest of governments which have used the pretext of governance failure at community level, usually expressed in terms of lack of capacity within communities 'to manage their own affairs', to mask a variety of failings on the part of government, including lack of policy fit, triumph of ideology over reality, and simple inaction. The view articulated by Jarvie and Stewart (2011), who undertook field research in the Murdi Paaki Region in relation to the COAG Trial, is that 'best practice is not necessary for progress, and that "good enough" governance will do'.

The historical reality is that CWPs (and MPRA) have only been able to survive and thrive in the long term as peak decision-making entities because of the dedication of individuals within their communities and the commitment of MPRA-initiated regional enterprises (MPREC, Maari Ma and MPRHC) which have stepped in to subsidise MPRA activities from time to time over the years. The level of governments' commitment to recognising the status of Murdi Paaki governance entities has tended to be reflected in the level of financial support to CWPs and MPRA over the years. For example, SRAs negotiated in the course of the COAG Trial ensured that CWPs were resourced for the duration of the Trial. More recently, MPRA has received funding from DPMC to facilitate its governance functions over the coming three years, as mentioned above.

The relationship between MPRA and the University differs from that with Governments in that governance structures at regional and community scales are not a legitimate concern for the University (unless, of course, MPRA or Community seek assistance in this area from the University), whereas they are of consuming interest for government partners of MPRA. The critical driver of engagement of MPRA by governments is the nexus between governance and governmentality: that is, the imperative on the part of governments to use governance arrangements in the MPRA to fashion the conduct of groups and individuals towards the fulfillment of government policies.

## **8 ENGAGE WITH WHOM?**

The Engagement Protocol documented in Part 1 of this report sets out clearly the parties with which the University will be engaging to formulate, plan and deliver projects. At a regional level, engagement will be with MPRA, and at the level of individual communities or clusters of communities, with the relevant CWPs. However, there are some subtleties at the nexus between engagement and leadership which need to be explored.

One of MPRA's major achievements has been its focus on leadership succession. A key element of this is the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young Leaders' Project (MPAYLP), which has resulted in the development of leadership qualities and skills in a cohort of young Aboriginal people from across the region. While the MPAYLP is having a quiet period at present, the project is by no means complete. Further cohorts of young people from each community will be provided the opportunity to develop their leadership attributes in the future. In the meantime, MPRA has identified a leadership gap among people aged in their 20s and 30s. MPRA aspires to cement a culture of leadership throughout the region, so it is important that people in this age cohort be engaged as future leaders too. Also of concern is the challenge of engaging a cohort of people who work or involved in the governance of individual organisations but are not involved in community governance outside of their organisation. MPRA aspires to have the University assist with initiatives to engage these groups.

## 9 OTHER LESSONS LEARNED

Sensitivity and flexibility will be required on behalf of all stakeholders when engaging around time-constrained projects. This may be the case particularly where community-university projects involve personnel whose individual enrolment status requires working to a deadline (for example, for Honours and HDR students) or where grant applications are concerned. In relation to grant-funded projects, it will be essential for University personnel to ensure that CWPs:

- appreciate that grant funding rounds are often annual or, at best, semi-annual, and that this has implications for the feasible length of negotiations both internally within the community and between the CWP and the University;
- are fully aware of application deadlines, and have a realistic appreciation of the steps involved in preparing an application;
- are able to make time available flexibly to support preparation of rejoinders as necessary;
- understand that the timeframe for consideration of grant applications tends to be of the order of six to seven months.

In practical terms, this will require that the engagement process involve clarity and transparency about processes which are often completely opaque to anyone outside the academic environment, and will require existing project management regimes around grant applications to be modified to reflect the flexibility required by engagement processes.

Needs and aspirations as documented in the CAPs have changed little over the twenty-odd years since the ATSIIC-aided community planning processes commenced. Planning processes are time-consuming and, given the scepticism in communities about translation of aspirations to concrete actions with real outcomes, ought not to be repeated too frequently. It is worth noting that some of the projects on which MPRA is asking the University of Sydney to collaborate are effectively the same projects MPRA and its predecessors have been asking governments to support for the past 22 years, since the very first round of ATSIIC Community Plans in 1992-93.

## 10 INSIGHTS FOR AN ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Several themes emerge from the history of engagement of Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly's (and its predecessors') engagement with service providers over the period since the inception of the then Far West NSW and Wangkumara ATSIIC Regional Councils. The experiences of the MPRA Chairperson, Mr Sam Jeffries, inform the discussion which follows, and Mr Jeffries's support in making time on several occasions to discuss insights derived from 25 years of leadership within the region is gratefully acknowledged. Of all the documentary sources consulted during the preparation for this Engagement Model, the most useful in terms of identifying success factors in engagement processes has been the Murdi Paaki

LDM Accord Negotiation Evaluation (Cultural & Indigenous Research Centre Australia 2015), so the following discussion also draws heavily on this document.

Chief among the insights gleaned both from the literature and from the personal experience of those who have been involved with what might be termed the Murdi Paaki project is that engagement has been a means to an end rather than an end in itself. While the quality of engagement is important in fostering community ability to articulate needs and aspirations, it is of little value if not underpinned by a uniformly strong and consistent commitment at all levels within MPRA's partner organisations to meet those needs and aspirations in a timely way, to learn from the process of engagement, and to effect sustained organisational change in response to lessons learned. It must be an authentic process which presents the prospect of real change. Following from this starting point, then, the lessons learned can be encapsulated as follows:

- Engagement processes should lead to the development of positive long-term relationships. Ensure as far as possible continuity of personnel and consistency of structures. This is essential to building trust within the relationship between University of Sydney staff and students and the Murdi Paaki communities. Where change in personnel is unavoidable, make careful provision for handover.
- Ensure that a clear, agreed understanding exists of roles and responsibilities in engagement processes.
- Be conscious of time, and be realistic about timeframes. Time must be taken to explore and explain processes, roles, responsibilities and expectations on both sides of the relationship, and MPRA and the CWP's will need time between sessions for discussion and reflection. Impacts of artificially-imposed time limits on project scope should be openly discussed. One of the key frustrations Aboriginal communities experienced in the course of the COAG Trial related to slow progress. Honesty about what is achievable within realistic timeframes is essential.
- Make commitments with utmost caution and utter certainty. Communities have bitter experience of expectations raised and then dashed as well-intentioned service providers have made promises then been unable to deliver. Few things are as corrosive to trust. Engagement must be built around the art of the possible.
- Be prepared. University staff and students need to have a clear understanding of what will be expected of them when attending CWP and MPRA meetings, and engaging with community generally, and need to ensure they have a secure command of any information the community is likely to expect them to have. Internal negotiations within the University are part of the preparatory process. The University must, at the outset, be able to identify who in each faculty, school or business unit will have responsibility for engagement and framing of projects and be clear as to how these champions will secure support within the institution.
- Communities in the region have been subject to innumerable planning initiatives of one sort or another, dating back to the early 1990s or earlier. Be conscious that most if not all communities have their own strategic

documents, including Community Action Plans and, although somewhat aged now, Community Housing and Environmental Health Plans. Individual community organisations may also have operational plans in place. These can be a resource to minimise lead time involved in community engagement processes, and may be used as the foundation for specific projects where there is convergence in strategic interests and approach across the community.

- Ensure that University personnel engaging with CWPs and MPRA have the authority necessary to make decisions in relation to projects and other forms of collaboration under negotiation.
- Explicit and transparent accountability arrangements within the University, MPRA and the CWPs must be part of the engagement process.
- Define matters open for negotiation.
- Adhere rigidly to protocols. Appeals to particular interest groups within communities, sideways excursions and unilateral changes to negotiated projects are to be avoided.
- Community engagement must be adequately resourced, in terms of time allowed and in the provision of support in facilitating and documenting engagement processes. Engagement processes should cover the out-of-pocket costs of MPRA and CWP members participating.
- Explore use of technology in engagement, but be prepared to support communities with skills development and technological infrastructure.
- Provide support to MPRA and CWPs to keep their communities informed.
- Support MPRA and CWPs to have access to information which will allow them to make evidence-based decisions and judgments.
- Apply the principle of subsidiarity. Decisions about projects and other forms of collaboration should be made at the level closest to the point at which initiatives will take place. Projects to be delivered at the scale of the community should be framed with CWP leadership and engagement; projects undertaken at a regional scale should be developed in collaboration with MPRA.
- Structure engagement processes to encourage broader conversations which may lead to more holistic approaches and the identification of synergies.
- Be prepared to manage scepticism about engagement processes. Engagement in the Murdi Paaki Region always has an historical dimension. Expect MPRA and the CWPs to raise previous experiences reflecting historical disadvantage. Be patient, and recognise that these issues need to be worked through before it is possible to move on.
- Always consider power relationships and resource imbalances in engagement processes.
- Take the long view. Be realistic about the scope of joint projects over a defined timeframe, and consider in collaboration with the community or the

MPRA, as relevant, how projects can be taken forward to foster sustainability and ensure momentum is maintained. Projects need to have a beginning, a middle, an end and a future.

- Ensure that students and academics are able to develop cultural competence not just through gaining an appreciation of theoretical aspects (although this is important too), but by immersion in the community; experiencing the passive racism that community members are subject to; feeling the frustration that MPRA and the CWPs do when progress is stifled; and more broadly, learning what it feels like to be marginalised by settler society and its institutions.
- Respect the role of the CWPs and MPRA in assessing cultural competence.

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Timeline			
	Murdi Paaki Region	NSW Government	Australian Government
<b>1989</b>			ATSIC Act assented to
<b>1990</b>	ATSIC Wangkumara Regional Council and Far West Regional Council come into being		Commonwealth Election: ALP re-elected ATSIC Act takes effect 5th March
<b>1991</b>		State Election: L-NP Coalition re-elected (minority government)	
<b>1992</b>		National commitment to improved outcomes in the delivery of programs and services for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (COAG)	
<b>1993</b>	Wangkumara and Far West ATSIC Regions amalgamated to form Murdi Paaki Region Murdi Paaki Regional Council formed; Regional Councillors elected		Commonwealth Election: ALP re-elected ATSIC Act amended. Regional Councils reduced from 60 to 35
<b>1994</b>			
<b>1995</b>	First Murdi Paaki Regional Plan – emphasis on aspirations for Regional Autonomy	State Election: ALP elected	
<b>1996</b>	Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement signed	Commonwealth Election: L NP Coalition elected	
<b>1997</b>	Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Implementation Manual prepared	NSW Government Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal People Aboriginal Housing Act legislated	
<b>1998</b>	Regional Council loses control of Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme to new Aboriginal Housing Office	Aboriginal Housing Office created	Commonwealth Election: L NP Coalition re-elected
<b>1999</b>	Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Regional Agreement Implementation Manual second edition with broader emphasis	State Election: ALP re-elected	
<b>2000</b>		COAG Communiqué on Reconciliation	
<b>2001</b>			Commonwealth Election: L NP Coalition re-elected
<b>2002</b>	Murdi Paaki selected as COAG trial site	Service Delivery Partnership Agreement negotiated with ATSIC and NSWALC COAG resolved to undertake trials	
<b>2003</b>	Murdi Paaki Shared Responsibility Agreement signed (22nd August); trial structures (MP Action Team, MP Steering Committee, MP Regional Group; MP Data Working Group) established and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework developed MPR CWPs refreshed	State Election: ALP re-elected  Two ways together: partnerships, a new way of doing business with Aboriginal people: New South Wales Aboriginal Affairs plan 2003-2012	ATSIC reviewed; ATSIIS created
<b>2004</b>	CWP Governance Workshops commenced  Preparation of Community Action Plans commenced ICC established in Bourke  Further SRA signed (3rd December) to fund CWP resourcing and support	COAG agreed to National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians	Commonwealth Election: L NP Coalition re-elected Abolition of ATSIC and ATSIIS announced OIPC established



Timeline			
	Murdi Paaki Region	NSW Government	Australian Government
<b>2005</b>	<p>MPRC abolished; MPRA formally recognised as primary representative regional body</p> <p>SRA amended to recognise MPRA's status in replacing MPRC as representative body (1st August)</p> <p>Murdi Paaki Strategic Plan endorsed to guide Trial</p> <p>SRA signed (26th October), establishing Murdi Paaki Partnership Project (CWP facilitation)</p>		<p>ATSIC formally abolished 24th March</p> <p>ICC established in Dubbo with overall responsibility for MP Region</p>
<b>2006</b>	<p>Community Action Plans complete for all 16 communities</p> <p>Formative evaluation of COAG trial undertaken</p> <p>Murdi Paaki Charter of Governance adopted</p> <p>Murdi Paaki Regional Group restructured to focus on key policy areas</p>	<p>Commonwealth and NSW Governments signed 5-year Bilateral Agreement on Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in New South Wales (ratified Two Ways Together)</p>	
<b>2007</b>	<p>Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Regional Plan launched</p> <p>Murdi Paaki COAG Trial concluded 31st December</p>	<p>State Election: ALP re-elected</p>	<p>Commonwealth Election: ALP elected</p>
<b>2008</b>		<p>National Indigenous Reform Agreement – Closing the Gap (COAG)</p>	
<b>2009</b>	<p>Murdi Paaki Regional Partnership Agreement signed by MPRA, Commonwealth and NSW Governments</p>		
<b>2010</b>			<p>Commonwealth Election: ALP re-elected (minority government)</p>
<b>2011</b>		<p>State Election: L-NP Coalition elected</p> <p>NSW Auditor-General's performance audit of Two Ways Together published</p>	
<b>2012</b>			
<b>2013</b>		<p>OCHRE: NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs: education, employment &amp; accountability</p>	<p>Commonwealth Election: L NP Coalition elected</p>
<b>2014</b>			
<b>2015</b>	<p>Murdi Paaki Local Decision Making Accord signed by MPRA and NSW Government</p>	<p>State Election: L-NP Coalition re-elected</p>	

## PART 3

# SCHEDULE OF PROJECTS

### 1 SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL WELLBEING, CARING FOR COUNTRY

#### 1.1 PROJECT FOCUS: Aboriginal Oral History

Description: Build the historical narrative through interview to honour the lived experience of older people in our communities who have paved the way for us. To know where we are going we must know how we journeyed to where we are now. To move forward, we need a strong sense of our identity. We need to know about the diverse traditions and the varied experiences of our different nations, language groups and clans and about our own history in the places which made us.

##### IDENTIFIED PROJECT THEMES:

1.1.1 Language group oral history recording

1.1.2 Cultural competence education content development

1.1.3 Aboriginal culture and history in the broader community as a vehicle for reconciliation

#### 1.2 PROJECT FOCUS: Access to Aboriginal languages

Description: How much of our identity and our culture are produced by language? Through this project, undertake an audit to identify and secure access to all possible sources of linguistic knowledge about the languages of our Murdi Paaki peoples – recordings in AIATSIS and elsewhere, publications ... Where are the gaps? Can these be filled by collaboration by linguists and community? Work together to set up a regional language library accessible to all communities, and then develop ways to teach community members of all ages their languages, remembering that most of our people were multilingual.

##### IDENTIFIED PROJECT THEMES:

1.2.1 Nations' languages in teaching and a methodology for early childhood education

#### 1.3 PROJECT FOCUS: Health and security of indigenous food and medicine sources

Description: Protecting the health and security of ecosystems; security of, access to and knowledge about Aboriginal science including uses of traditional foods and medicines in contemporary society. In these contexts, environment includes land and waterways. How can we acknowledge the importance of the integrity of narrative landscapes, riverscapes and their ecosystems to the spiritual and physical health of our people in the way that the environment is managed in our region?

#### IDENTIFIED PROJECT THEMES:

1.3.1 Bush tucker and traditional medicines – assessment, protection and use

1.3.2 Quality of the river systems with reference to water quality and pollution sources

## **2 PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING**

2.1 PROJECT FOCUS: Alcohol and illicit drug use, social and emotional wellbeing and comorbidity in Aboriginal communities, treatment and its impact on communities

Description: What is the level of need for services in our communities? How does this differ from community to community across our region? What impact are AoD and SEWB issues having on our people? What causes these problems and what exacerbates them? What is the connection between these issues and overrepresentation of our people in the criminal justice system? What services are available and to what extent are they used? Are they culturally safe? How successful are they? What gaps in services exist? How can and how should these gaps be addressed so all our people have equal and sufficient access to culturally safe, effective services? How can Aboriginal community controlled services be supported and resourced to achieve their best possible outcomes?

#### IDENTIFIED PROJECT THEMES:

2.1.1 Substance use – regional profile and service need

2.2 PROJECT FOCUS: Expectations/attitudes of Aboriginal people to health service provision in western NSW, and unmet need

Description: What are the expectations of Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki communities in terms of culturally safe, accessible health services? We have among the highest incidence of chronic, complex, lifestyle-related conditions in our population. Why is primary prevention not working better? To what extent and in what ways is the delivery of health services to Aboriginal people confounded by the history of colonisation? Is it a case of the body as a site of resistance to colonisation? What is the role of habitus in health choices among our people? What models of service provision are making a positive difference in our communities, and what are their characteristics? In what ways are projects such as community gardens making a difference?

2.2.1 Market garden(s) and local food production – feasibility study

2.2.2 Animal health

2.3 PROJECT FOCUS: Aboriginal population characteristics and how they have changed – trends and future projections

Description: What are the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of each of the communities in our region? How have these changed over time? What changes can we project in the future? How can we use the methods of

economic geography to interpret the differences from community to community? We need a statistical resource we can use to give us power over our own future. This resource will be vital to inform other projects under this MoU. We will own the analysis, we will have confidence in it, and we will use it for our own purposes.

2.3.1 Demographic study with particular reference to changes in labour market characteristics

### **3 SOCIAL COHESION AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE**

#### **3.1 PROJECT FOCUS: Justice reinvestment**

Description: Our communities have very high rates of incarceration. Many of our children and young people are in Out Of Home Care, in Juvenile Justice facilities and in prison. How can we reduce the incidence of incarceration of our young people? How can we mitigate the impacts of family dysfunction, substance misuse and poverty? What would a sustainable model for prevention, early intervention and diversion look like? How can we make it a reality?

3.1.1 Justice reinvestment – framework and business model

3.1.2 Lateral violence and its elimination

3.1.3 Aboriginal-specific community safe houses and refuges – feasibility study

3.1.4 Regional campaign to reduce the incidence of domestic and family violence

#### **3.2 PROJECT FOCUS: Community self-sufficiency and sustainability with particular reference to energy**

Description: A pressing problem in all our communities is the high cost of energy. We need to reduce energy costs to improve availability of money to buy food and other necessities. Some families pay so much for electricity they can only afford bread and Devon to eat and inability to buy nutritious food is making our people ill. Our communities are diverse so we expect there to be a diversity of solutions. In Weilmoringle, for example, people aspire to technology which will allow the community to go off-grid completely. How can this be done, and what might the innovative and effective solutions be in other communities?

3.2.1 Alternative energy feasibility study

#### **3.3 PROJECT FOCUS: Unmet housing and infrastructure need**

Description: It is almost impossible to identify unmet housing need from the ABS Census. Homelessness for Aboriginal people rarely involves rough sleeping because there is always a bed or sofa or mattress on the floor at someone's house. At the same time, secondary homelessness is often not recognised as homelessness or housing need. Our people have high rates of family formation because of the age structure of the population. The supply of social housing in the region is limited and discrimination still operates in the private rental

market, yet we still have a low rate of home ownership. How can we unpack all of this and find out the real level of unmet housing need in each community across the region and what can we do to meet this need? How can we address the condition of infrastructure assets on our former reserves and discrete settlements to deal with the never-ending drain on the funds of Land Councils and other Aboriginal community controlled property owners?

3.3.1 Aboriginal aged care facility and accommodation for the elderly – feasibility study

3.3.2 Housing needs assessment and review of social housing models for appropriateness

3.3.3 Home ownership – a reality or pipe dream for welfare dependent families?

3.3.4 Former Reserves: Viable settlements and opportunities for adaptive reuse?

### 3.4 PROJECT FOCUS: Mainstream service and programme delivery

Description: Governments and NGO service delivery consistently fails to achieve noticeable outcomes despite repeated initiatives targeting the Aboriginal community and considerable commitment of resources, financial and otherwise. What is the actual picture in the Region? Are there other models of service and programme delivery that MPRA could consider and advocate for?

3.4.1 Community services delivery and its management for improved outcomes

### 3.5 PROJECT FOCUS: Economic development and employment – land use studies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business

Description: All our communities aspire to economic development. Some of our communities have significant land holdings with potential for economic development. How can we link these two ideas? We need to undertake land capability investigations for Aboriginal community-owned properties, and this needs to balance the imperative to develop sustainable employment opportunities and income streams against the requirements of communities for land for social and cultural purposes. We also need to explore and develop economic propositions for communities which do not have economically valuable land holdings. What are feasible Aboriginal businesses that can be supported by our human and property assets, how do we engender a business culture and how do we make all of this sustainable and self-propagating?

3.5.1 Goat abattoir development feasibility study and business case

3.5.2 Regional land capability assessment – use and productive capacity

3.5.3 Regional technology hub – feasibility and business case

3.5.4 Aboriginal business capability – a model for sustainable development

## **4 CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.1 PROJECT FOCUS: Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning**

Description: How can an Aboriginal pedagogy sit side-by-side with existing methods and structures in our schools? We need to explore practical and feasible ways of unsettling the primacy of White epistemologies and methodologies in schools in our region. How can we incorporate place-specific, culturally relevant Aboriginal knowledges (not just in areas traditionally bearing the 'Culture' label but also, for example, our environmental science bodies of knowledge) in a fully integrated way into the curriculum? How can we do this in ways which will help our young people to learn and stay engaged with school, equip them for a productive and fulfilling life in the mainstream economy, and break down the barriers of racism in our communities? Could this be the key to engaging our children and families with education?

#### **4.1.1 Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning – a methodology for the region**

### **4.2 PROJECT FOCUS: Pathways to learning**

Description: Why are our children disengaged from education? What can we do to re-engage them? We have high rates of school non-attendance and non-completion in our communities. We need to find ways to re-engage and retain children in education, and build pathways to give both youth and adults access to educational opportunities. These pathways need to be flexible and culturally safe, taking into account the realities of life for individuals and families in our communities. How can we do this in a sustainable way that meets our diverse needs?

#### **4.2.1 Mentoring programme for high school students across the region – action research**

## **5 LEADERSHIP**

### **5.1 PROJECT FOCUS: Succession: the next generation**

Description: The Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Young Leaders Project has resulted in a cohort of young adults from our communities developing the high-level skills and leadership attributes needed to lead our region in the future. Many of the Young Leaders have gone on to tertiary study. We still need to develop the skills of people in our communities who are aged in their 20s and 30s, and to foster an appetite for leadership and governance. We also need to look to the leadership potential of people in our communities who may involve themselves in one organisation but do not interact more broadly in community governance. How can we secure the gains our generation have made by bringing on the leaders of the next generation?

#### **5.1.1 Generational transition in leadership – skills and attributes, and building capacity**





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REGIONAL  
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