CHAPTER 34
Conclusion

The Murdi Paaki Regional Council readily acknowledged that there was no 'one size fits all' for regional and community governance arrangements. The Council's experience, reflected in the establishment of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, was that each community and region needed to determine what was appropriate to it.

The foundations of the Assembly reflected and responded to the particular circumstances of Aboriginal communities in far western New South Wales and for a specific purpose.

Similarly, the House of Representatives Standing Committee concluded that its study of models of Indigenous governance from around Australia illustrated the diversity of possibilities, and showed that the particular model of governance a community develops may very well be unique to that community.

The committee went on:

> The Committee understands that the most important element of governance strengthening and development is that governance models are developed by a community, not imposed on a community. Further, the Committee notes that Indigenous governance can complement external accountability requirements, particularly with the aid of developmental capacity building.[1]

Process was clearly important in promoting, developing and consolidating the original idea of Community Working Parties. The Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly was the result of almost a decade of consultation, modelling, advocacy and negotiation.

The 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.

The consistency with which the Murdi Paaki Regional Council approached the development of its goal led almost inevitably to the transition to the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly because of community ownership.

Despite the government policy changes that intervened in this continuity, both the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and subsequently the Regional Assembly sought to work within the government's framework, and, if possible, to improve it, while retaining a focus on its desired outcome.

Throughout the Council's deliberations there were both a vision and a sense of reality. This was reflected in the leadership's public responses to the government's new arrangements. On the one hand, the Murdi Paaki leadership campaigned against the government's new arrangements, involving the abolition of ATSIC and Regional Councils.
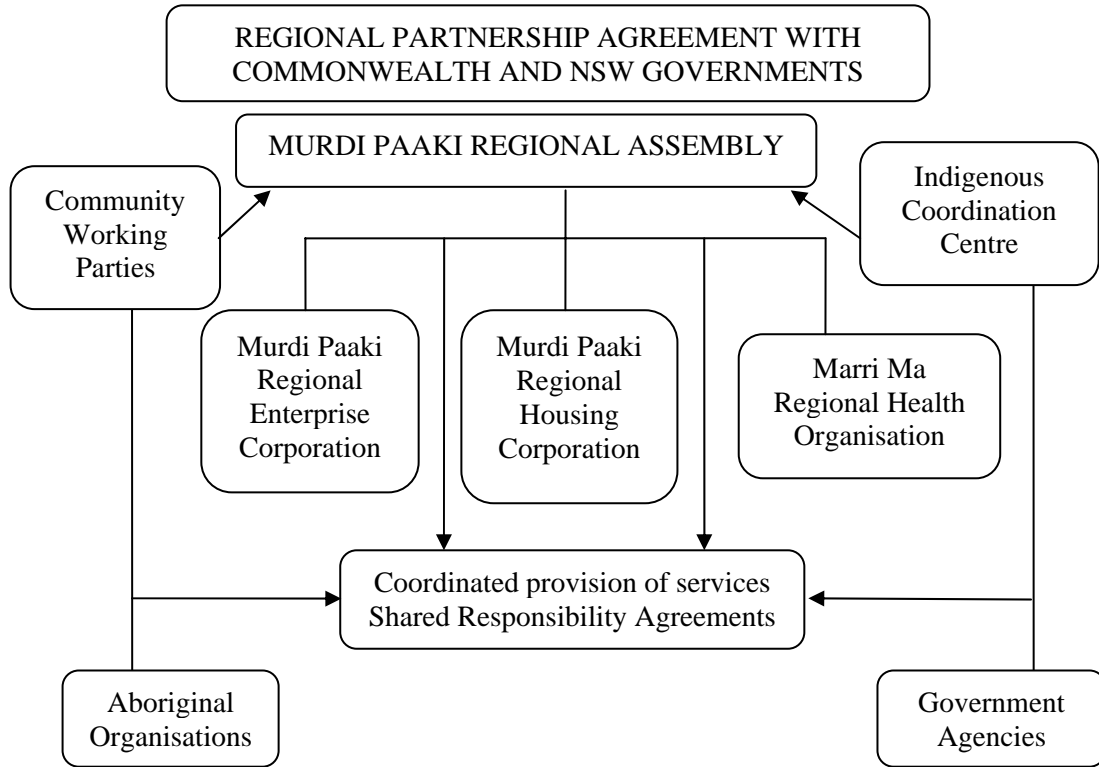
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[1] House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Many Ways Forward*, Report of the Inquiry into capacity building and service delivery in Indigenous Communities, Canberra, June 2004, p. 128.

On the other hand the basic premise of the Murdi Paaki quest for a legitimate and culturally appropriate governance framework - ownership by the communities themselves to reflect their individual circumstances - remained a continuing and important factor in achieving their desired outcome. The result was that their system of governance, honed over more than a decade, was able to adapt to new directions and requirements of government policy without compromising or retreating from the central purpose of the arrangements – 'true community control.'

APPENDIX I

MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL ASSEMBLY GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH              │
│  COMMONWEALTH AND NSW GOVERNMENTS                 │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

        ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
        │  MURDI PAAKI REGIONAL ASSEMBLY    │
        └──────────────────────────────────┘

┌────────────┐                                    ┌──────────────┐
│ Community  │                                    │ Indigenous   │
│ Working    │                                    │ Coordination │
│ Parties    │                                    │ Centre       │
└────────────┘                                    └──────────────┘

   ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐
   │ Murdi Paaki  │  │ Murdi Paaki  │  │ Marri Ma     │
   │ Regional     │  │ Regional     │  │ Regional     │
   │ Enterprise   │  │ Housing      │  │ Health       │
   │ Corporation  │  │ Corporation  │  │ Organisation │
   └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘  └──────────────┘

        ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Coordinated provision of services        │
        │ Shared Responsibility Agreements          │
        └─────────────────────────────────────────┘

┌──────────────┐                              ┌──────────────┐
│ Aboriginal   │                              │ Government   │
│ Organisations│                              │ Agencies     │
└──────────────┘                              └──────────────┘
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APPENDIX II

REGIONAL ENTITIES IN THE MURDI PAAKI REGION

Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation

The Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation Ltd (MPREC) was established as a corporation limited by guarantee and commenced operations in August 2003. It was an initiative of a Regional Strategy Plan of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council.

The organisation is vested with the responsibility of managing and operating Community Development Employment Programs (CDEPs), implementing training and developing enterprises. CDEPs that faced or entered liquidation mainly due to inadequate management and governance were placed under the MPREC umbrella.

The corporation has as its requirement Best Business Practice and Governance, and provides asset and fund management to eight communities.

The corporation has four primary objectives driven by its constitution. These include:

- Regional CDEP operation, administration and management;
- Employment and Training initiatives;
- Business Enterprise development; and
- Consultancy Services.

A primary role of the organisation is the responsibility to manage, administer and operate nominated CDEPs. The corporation was set up to be initially responsible for six CDEPs, but now has eight communities under its umbrella of responsibility. The CDEPs are located throughout the entire Murdi Paaki Region, the largest geographical region in NSW.

Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation

The Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation Limited (MPRHCL) has been identified as a positive model for other organisations to consider to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their own housing services.

MPRHCL was established in 1997 with the broad aim to maximise housing outcomes for Indigenous people in the area.

A study into Indigenous housing by the Murdi Paaki Regional Council revealed significant deficiencies in the provision of housing, including insolvency and financial difficulties confronting some of the local Indigenous community housing organisations. The decision was made at the time to deliver the Aboriginal housing program on a regional basis. MPRHCL currently provides housing services for up to 30 communities with housing programs.

Approximately 400 properties are either owned (177) and/or managed

(223) by MPRHCL on behalf of local community organisations. It has an Indigenous Board made up of representatives of local community organisations.

MPRHCL objectives include:

- The establishment of a single management structure to coordinate and control housing development in the region;
- Clarification of the respective roles and responsibilities for housing services of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council, State government departments and other agencies;
- To improve and increase housing availability to Indigenous families in the region;
- To efficiently collect rental payments for housing;
- Maximise employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal people; implement a common approach/framework for services to each community; and
- Streamline asset management and provide recurrent support to Indigenous Community Housing Organisations.

Marri Ma Health Aboriginal Organisation

Maari Ma Health is an Aboriginal community controlled health organisation dedicated to improving the health outcomes for communities in the region.

Since its incorporation Maari Ma has built a strong local strategic alliance with Greater Western Area Health Service, Sydney University's Department of Rural Health and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Maari Ma Health is a regionally focused Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils of Associations Act 1976*. The organisation was established in November 1995 following an extensive community consultation conducted by the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council.

Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation was established to provide Aboriginal people in the region of far west NSW with a vehicle to have a greater say in the design and development of health services, and to allow for more Aboriginal people to be employed in the system.

Maari Ma aims to develop a better balance between community based care and acute services, and to provide more services focused on surveillance, prevention, early intervention, health promotion and education.

Maari Ma exists so that the Aboriginal people it represents and serves can re-establish a strong sense of cultural identity and can build and sustain individual, family and community systems that engender self-respect and self-esteem through good health and wellbeing.

Maari Ma has built a strong partnership with the former Far West Area Health Service and continues to strengthen these ties with the newly formed greater Western Area Health Service. Maari Ma also enjoys strong alliances

with Sydney University Department of Rural Health and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The Barwon Darling Alliance

The Barwon Darling Alliance (BDA) was a unique collaboration between the Murdi Paaki Regional Council and five western NSW Shires (Central Darling, Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett and Coonamble).

The Alliance was born out of a desire by Murdi Paaki Regional Council of ATSIC and the participating Shire Councils to address their common regional concerns. The Alliance takes its name from the Barwon and Darling rivers, which flow through the region.

The aim of the Alliance is to support and maintain economic growth and employment in the region and to develop positively the lifestyle and culture of its people.

The Alliance covers an area of 145,340 km^2 with a combined population of 21,571 in the north west of New South Wales.

The Barwon Darling Alliance is working on a number of fronts to support economic growth, increased employment and increased quality of life for all community members, within its region.

The Alliance's projects have included sourcing and running traineeships, an employment audit and Community Action Plans, engaging consultants to investigate the feasibility of Aboriginal organisations setting up commercially sustainable businesses, establishing a Credit Union for the region and auspicing the River Towns Project.

The five shires face low socio-economic ratings. One of its initiatives was to seek government support for a trial of a 'Socio-economic zone'.

Focused on employment, through the creation of increased numbers of sustainable real jobs, the initiative aimed to 'kick start' a turn around for the region and its communities.

The alliance has argued that long term, consistent teamwork between white and black communities, business, government and the social service sector is needed.