

CHAPTER 4

Community Working Parties Expand Their Role

Although Community Working Parties were established specifically to manage housing and infrastructure programs, the Murdi Paaki Regional Council sought their advice on all issues affecting a community. The CWP structure was always seen as an evolving process that needed ongoing support from the Regional Council, communities, agencies and other service providers.

Such was the initial success of Community Working Parties that the New South Wales government replicated them as a mechanism to advise it on the implementation of a government initiative to invest \$240 million over ten years to raise the health and living standards of selected, priority Aboriginal communities where major environmental health needs have been previously identified. The initiative was known as the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) and was started by the NSW government in 1998.

The impetus given to Community Working Parties under the ATSIC system owed a degree of continuity to the ACDP. The aims of the ACDP were to:

- Focus funding and effort within selected, priority communities rather than through existing state-wide government programs;
- Increase the capacity of selected Aboriginal communities to maintain these facilities and systems within agreed sustainability frameworks; and
- Adhere to the fundamental principles of community capacity building through consultation, community development and encouraging participation and self-determination in the Aboriginal communities involved.¹

The ACDP funds Aboriginal communities to provide new housing, repair, renovate or replace existing housing stock and upgrade or replace existing outdated water and sewerage systems or other essential infrastructure, recognising that basic essential services are crucial to a healthy living environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In NSW it was estimated that only 34% of Aboriginal people owned or were purchasing their own home, compared with 70% of the total Australian population. With a growing and young population, the housing needs of Aboriginal people could only be met by a substantial and ongoing commitment and partnership approach by State and Federal governments and Aboriginal organisations to upgrade and increase available housing stock and sustain it as

¹ New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *Frequently Asked Questions*, 16 November 2005.

<<http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/communitydevelopment/faq.html>>.

<<http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/communitydevelopment/acdp.html>>.

a necessary component of social housing in NSW.

The ACDP was designed to operate in communities where major environmental health needs had been identified. Concentrating funds and effort on those communities in most need was seen as the best way to make real change, as against spreading limited resources across a broad area resulting in a ‘band aid’ approach which did not create sustainable, community-driven solutions.

A number of indicators of needs were used to assess priority for the ACDP, using a survey developed between ATSI for its National Aboriginal Housing Strategy (NAHS), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

An important element of the implementation arrangements was the establishment of Community Working Parties in each community in which the ACDP operated to represent the views of the whole community and co-ordinate the delivery of the ACDP.

At the local level, Community Working Parties provided a culturally appropriate mechanism for decision-making about the ACDP and implementation of the defined scope of works in a community.²

Community Working Parties were designed to represent all of the views of the community, including the interests and needs of specific target groups such as women, seniors, young people and children.

Community Working Parties were seen as an essential part of the ACDP. By actively involving communities in decision making and project management, the work undertaken would meet community needs and be sustainable into the future.

² NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, *ACDP, Frequently Asked Questions*.

Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP)

