



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Central Coast

– November 2006 –



TWO WAYS TOGETHER REGIONAL REPORT Central Coast

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers together data¹ about Aboriginal people and the government services provided to them in the Central Coast region of NSW. The report has been developed as part of the regional implementation of *Two Ways Together*.

Two Ways Together 2003-2012 is the NSW Government's plan to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities. *Two Ways Together* recognises that in order to affect real and sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of Aboriginal people, a whole-of-government approach is required. It recognises that effective partnerships with Aboriginal communities must underpin government action if policies and programs are to be relevant to Aboriginal people. In developing sustainable partnerships between Aboriginal people and government it, aims to strengthen Aboriginal people's capacity to exercise their inherent rights as the first peoples of Australia.

At a state level, *Two Ways Together* targets seven priority areas to positively improve the lives of Aboriginal people. These areas have been identified as priorities by Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. They are: Justice; Health; Housing and Infrastructure; Education; Culture and Heritage; Economic Development and Families and Young People. Four cross-agency Cluster Groups have been established with responsibility for developing innovative initiatives which meet the needs of Aboriginal people in these priority areas. Each of the Cluster Groups is chaired by a lead agency and includes representation from 60 relevant NSW and Australian Government agencies and five Peak Aboriginal Bodies. *Two Ways Together* Action Plans for 2005-2007 are currently being implemented by the Cluster Groups.

At the regional level, Regional Engagement Groups (or REGs) have been established to ensure that government agencies are meeting community needs in the regions. The Regional Reports will be used by REGs to develop regional action plans to focus regional government activity on locally identified priority issues and areas. In most of the regions, regional action planning will include particular focus on up to three Partnership Communities. REGs are coordinated by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' Regional Managers. The regional reports have been developed to inform the work of REGs and government agencies in the regions.

A description of the contents and major findings of the report are outlined below.

Chapter 1 outlines the characteristics of the region, noting its geographical location, the local government areas that fall within its borders and its population. This chapter also outlines the Aboriginal cultural and language groups and the Local Aboriginal Land Councils on the Central Coast. There is a brief overview of the local economy, in which Aboriginal employment is most commonly in the retail trade, manufacturing, health and community services, property and business services, and construction sectors.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focused on the demographics and population projections. This chapter reveals that the Aboriginal population has a very large proportion of young people, with 60% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being

¹ Note: all data is from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2001 Census unless otherwise specified.

less than 25 years old. By contrast, only 0.3% of the Aboriginal population was aged 65 years and over. There is also somewhat of a gender imbalance amongst younger Aboriginal people on the Central Coast: in the 0-25 year old age group, there are 6.4% more males than females.

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in the Central Coast region. This data reveals that in many respects, Aboriginal people on the Central Coast are doing comparatively well compared to Aboriginal people in other parts of the State. With respect to many of the health indicators, Central Coast Aboriginal people have average or above average health when compared with other Aboriginal people in the State. Furthermore, with respect to cardiovascular disease and antenatal visits by pregnant mothers, the rates are similar or better than the state average for non-Aboriginal people. Levels of Aboriginal employment and participation in the workforce are also high in the region when compared with non-Aboriginal people and with the state average for Aboriginal people. However, incarceration rates are double the state average for Aboriginal people, and while literacy and numeracy rates for Aboriginal students in Years 3 and 5 are considerably higher than the state average for Aboriginal people, they are still significantly lower than for the overall population.

Chapter 4 provides a snapshot of the current environment by summarising the needs identified through assessment of the demographic and socio-economic data and the community's priorities. Chapter 4 concludes by suggesting some areas for further examination at the local and regional planning levels.

Important note:

The *Two Ways Together* regional reports have been written based on the ten Regional Coordination Management Group (or RCMG) regions in New South Wales. REGs are constituted as sub-committees of RCMGs, which are coordinated by the NSW Premier's Department.

However, much of the data relied upon in this report is collected by ATSI region, and these boundaries are not consistent with the RCMG boundaries. Where this creates possible issues in interpreting the data contained in this report, it is noted. **Figure 1** notes the six ATSI regions, outlined in black, the ten RCMG regions by colour, and the Local Government Areas, outlined in white and by name. The six former ATSI regions are:

- Sydney
- Many Rivers (on the north coast)
- Kamilaroi (including north-west NSW)
- Murdi Paaki (including western NSW)
- Binaal Billa (including mid-west and south-western NSW)
- Queanbeyan (on the south coast).

The ten RCMG regions are:

- Coastal Sydney
- Western/South Western Sydney
- Central Coast
- Hunter

- North Coast
- New England/North West
- Western NSW/Murdi Paaki
- Mid-Western NSW
- Riverina/Murray
- Illawarra/South East.

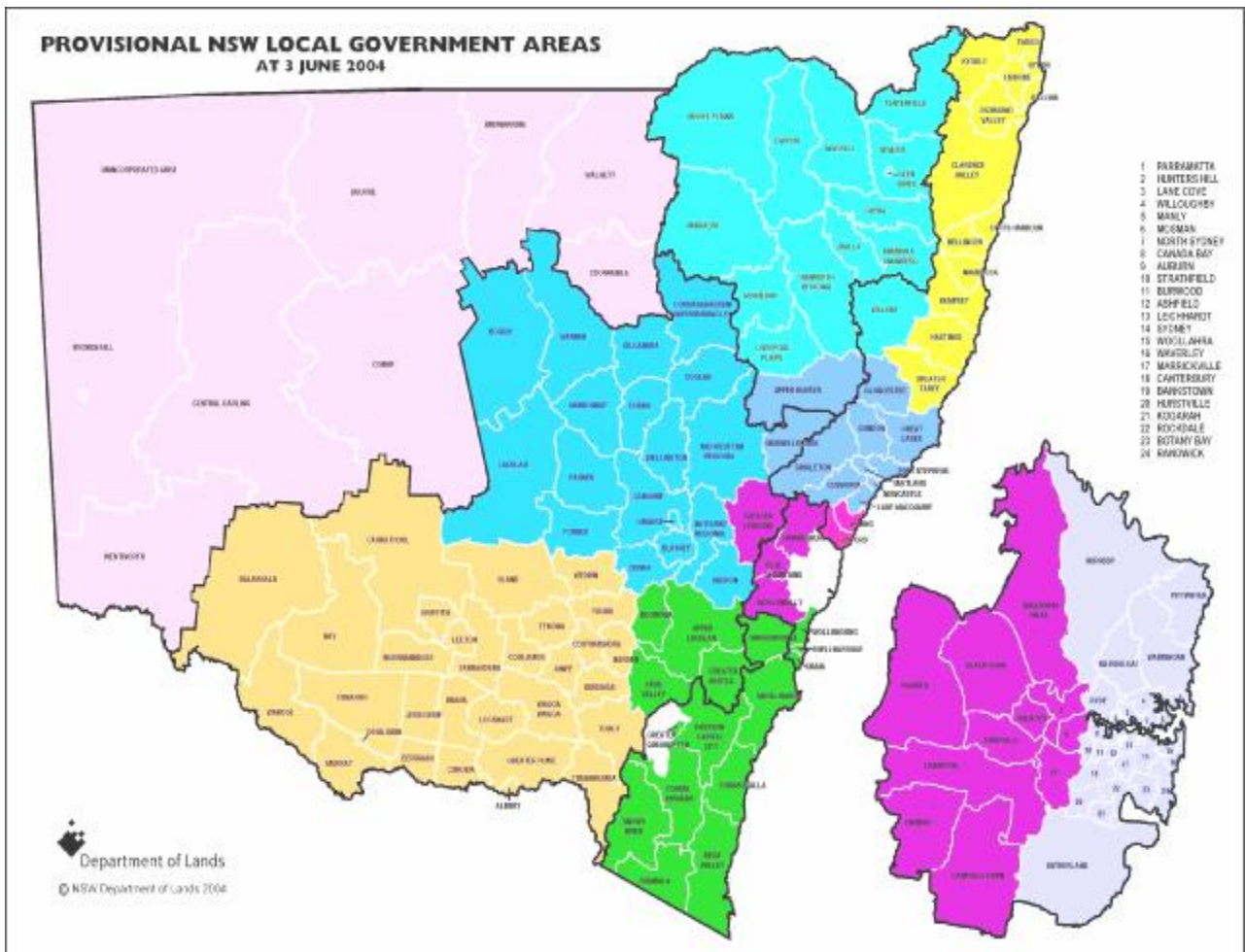


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSIIC and LGA boundaries

Please note that for the purposes of this report Weddin, Young and Harden have been included in the Riverina Murray region as their statistics are collected with West Wyalong, Temora, Coolamon and Bland. Weddin is situated within the Mid-Western RCMG boundary and Young and Harden are situated within the Illawarra-South East boundary.

Also although the Wentworth LGA is part of the Riverina Murray RCMG boundary, the statistics have been captured with Western NSW as it is expected that the information will be used to assist with the COAG Trial in the Murdi Paaki region, and Wentworth is part of the Trial site.

1.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION

1.1 Geography

The Central Coast region is shown on the map at **Figure 2**. The region covers both Wyong and Gosford Local Government Areas (LGAs), the boundaries of which take in the Hawkesbury River to the south, and Mangrove Mountain and Yarramolong Valley to the west. To the north, the region is bounded by, but does not include, Watagan State Forest. The eastern boundary of the region is formed by the Gosford-Wyong coastline.



Figure 2: NSW Local Government Areas in Mid-Western NSW

The region includes five National Parks – Dharug, Brisbane Water, Wyrabalong, Popran and Bouddi National Parks, and five State forests – Ourimbah, Wyong, Olney, McPherson and Strickland State Forests, and Jilliby State Conservation Area.

1.2 Local Planning for Aboriginal Communities

Shires and councils in New South Wales are required to have social plans that make specific mention of local Aboriginal communities and issues of concern to the communities. Some shires and councils also have management plans that cite issues of significance for Aboriginal people under their jurisdiction, such as places of cultural heritage significance.

For example, Wyong Shire Council has committed in its draft Management Plan 2005/06 to conserving significant items of Aboriginal heritage by ensuring that development approvals comply with the heritage requirements of legislation, Council regulations and Council policy. Heritage values are maintained for all items listed in the Local Environment Plan, and Management Plans are developed for all significant heritage items. The Council's 2002 Community Plan acknowledged the need for improved communication between Council and the local Aboriginal community. It identified some priorities for action with respect to employment, housing and access to services and facilities, but no further evidence of progress on this front is apparent from its on-line publications.

Gosford City Council currently has a Draft Aboriginal Development and Reconciliation Plan on public exhibition, prepared in consultation with a number of Aboriginal organisations in the region. Proposals in the draft plan include the

appointment of an Aboriginal Community Development Officer, development and implementation of an Aboriginal Employment Strategy, and a number of initiatives promoting Aboriginal access to, and involvement in, cultural events and organisations in the region. The Council's Community Plan (2000) and Cultural Plan (2004) prioritized the appointment of an Aboriginal Community Development Officer, who was appointed in February 2005. The Council's *Vision 2025* document repeats the earlier cited commitments, and also commits to developing an Aboriginal Cultural Centre as well as signage and a new Interpretive Plan to highlight important Aboriginal cultural and historic sites.

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

The Central Coast region covers the traditional lands of the Darkinjung and Garingai Peoples. The main language group in the region is Darkinjung, although Dharug and Awabakal were also spoken in the past.

1.4 Land

Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council is the only Local Aboriginal Land Council in the region.

As of March 2006, there appears to be only one native title claim lodged over the region, which is located in Dharug National Park (Dharug Aboriginal Corporation NC97/8). Land claims granted to Darkinjung Aboriginal Land Council cover over 1,106 hectares.²

As at 9 March 2006, the Indigenous Land Corporation had acquired no properties on the Central Coast.³

There are no cultural heritage agreements with cultural groups in the area.

1.5 Regional Economy

The semi-urban, decentralised regional economy of the Central Coast largely consists of retail trade, manufacturing, construction and a variety of service industries. The majority of the Central Coast population are employed in manufacturing, construction, retail trade, and property and business services. In 2001, Gosford had the largest share of all jobs (57%), while Wyong had the remainder (43%).⁴ Aboriginal people made up about 1% of the total population employed in both LGAs.

The largest industry by number of people employed was the retail sector (10,271 people). The five main employing industries in the region as a whole are (in descending order) retail trade, manufacturing, health and community services, property and business services, and construction. These industries are also the major source of employment for Aboriginal people in the region,⁵ with retail trade being the industry with the highest proportion of Aboriginal people.

² Department of Lands indicated in December 2005 that 17 claims granted by the Minister have not yet been surveyed so the area is in excess of 1,106 hectares.

³ Indigenous Land Corporation, personal communication to DAA, 9 March 2006.

⁴ ABS Census data.

⁵ That is, employing over 100 people. The retail trade industry employed 194 Aboriginal people in 2001.

Levels of employment as a proportion of the total Aboriginal population in each LGA was roughly the same, at 28% for Gosford, and 26% for Wyong, compared with 43% and 38% respectively for levels of employment in the two LGAs' non-Aboriginal population.

The top five industry employers of **men** in 2001 were:

<i>Non-Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Aboriginal Men</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction (16%) • Manufacturing (15%) • Retail (14%) • Property & Business Services (10%) • Wholesale trade (6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction (17%) • Manufacturing (14%) • Retail (11%) • Property & Business Services (9%) • Government Administration & Defence (6%)

The top five industry employers of Aboriginal men have average or above prospects for future employment and growth, except manufacturing, which has below average prospects.⁶

The top five industry employers of **women** in 2001 were:

<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (21%) • Health & Community Services (19%) • Property & Business Services (11%) • Education (9%) • Manufacturing (7%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Community Services (23%) • Retail (20%) • Education (11%) • Property & Business Services (9%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (8%)

The top five industry employers of Aboriginal women all have average to very good prospects.⁷

1.5.1 Where are the job vacancies?

In mid-March 2006, Job Networks in the Central Coast listed 384 job vacancies.⁸ The top five occupations with vacancies were:

- Food, Hospitality and Tourism (29% of vacancies)
- Labourers, Factory and Machine Workers (14%)
- Marketing and Sales Representatives (14%)
- Health, Fitness, Hair and Beauty (10%)
- Sales Assistants and Storepersons (9%)

⁶ Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations *Australian Jobs 2005* (<http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/2709B7D1-572F-4C8A-A5B2-24342B5A352D/0/AustralianJobs2005.pdf>)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://jobsearch.gov.au/jobseeker/SelectOccupation.aspx?WHCode=0&TextOnly=0&rgn=2102ncco&st=11&SessionID=ao5gozbscglplw55mx2ddu45&print=0&>

1.5.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

There is one Indigenous Employment Centre (IEC)⁹ in the Central Coast region (called Darkinjung Aboriginal Employment Centre). IECs are contracted by the Commonwealth to assist Aboriginal people participating in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEPs) to find ongoing work outside of the CDEP. There are presently 35 participants in the IEC,¹⁰ including four non-Aboriginal people. Around 85% of the participants are male, the majority of whom are looking for work in construction and labouring. Female participants are mostly seeking work in retail and hospitality – very few are seeking work in administration. The age of current IEC participants ranges between 16-52 years, while the average age is 20-30 years.

There is only one CDEP in the Central Coast region which is run by Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council. There are 155 participants in the program,¹¹ of which four are non-Aboriginal people.¹² and about 60% of the participants are male.¹³ 135 participants are from the Central Coast region and the rest are from the Lake Macquarie Local Government area. Darkinjung CDEP estimates that of the 135 participants 70% are from the Wyong Local Government area and 30% from the Gosford Local Government area.

⁹ At the Central Coast meeting on 23 January 2006 (including representatives from some Aboriginal NGOs, Aboriginal staff from some government organisations and some local Aboriginal community members) DAA was informed that the IEC is limited to the Wyong LGA. It is very difficult for Aboriginal people in the Gosford LGA to access the IEC because of limited transport options.

¹⁰ The contract between the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and the Darkinjung IEC only provides for 35 participants in the IEC program. However, Darkinjung IEC advised DAA by phone on 9 March 2006 that since early March 2006 this number has changed to 50 participants and steps are currently being taken to increase the number of participants.

¹¹ As at 9 March 2006 there were 155 participants. The Darkinjung CDEP covers Wyong and Gosford LGAs and a portion of the Lake Macquarie LGA known as the 'Toronto Cell'. Of the 155 CDEP participants, 20 were from the Toronto Cell.

¹² The contract between DEWR and the Darkinjung CDEP requires Darkinjung CDEP to have 3% non-Aboriginal participants. All of the four participants - 3 male and 1 female - came from the Wyong LGA.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 Demographics

In 2001, the Central Coast region had an estimated total population of 284,581 people, of whom 4,748¹⁴ were Aboriginal. Both the Wyong and Gosford Shire Council areas have a significant Aboriginal population: 2,565 and 2,183 respectively. The Aboriginal community therefore make up 1.7% of the regional population, with a slightly higher number of males (2,392) than females (2,356), and 3.5% of the total NSW Aboriginal population.

There are no identifiable Aboriginal community concentrations in the region due to the high level of migration of Aboriginal people from other areas.

A comparison of the age structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in the region illustrates the youthfulness of both populations, with 60% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being less than 25 years old, and 61% of non-Aboriginal people. In contrast, only 0.3% of the Aboriginal population was aged 65 years and over, whereas 17% of the non-Aboriginal population is aged 65 years and over.

As has also been found in the Illawarra region, there is a distinct gender imbalance in the Central Coast region. In the 0-25 year old age group for the non-Aboriginal population there are 5% more males than females, but in the Aboriginal population there are 6.4% more males than females. It is not clear why this is the case.

2.2 Population Projections

The Aboriginal community in the Central Coast region is the fastest growing Aboriginal community in New South Wales and comprises one of the most populated Aboriginal community areas in the State. Between the 1996 and 2001 Census the Aboriginal population in this region increased by 30%. However, as a discrete region for the purposes of this study, the Central Coast region has the lowest number of Aboriginal people in New South Wales.

The total regional population is projected to increase by an estimated 2.9% between 2001 and 2011.¹⁵ In contrast, the Aboriginal population is projected to increase from 4,748 in 2001, to between 5,745 and 6,837 (low series and high series, respectively) in 2009 – or by between 21% and 44%.¹⁶

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics advises that there was an under-reporting of Aboriginality in the 2001 census. Estimates for the population at a regional level are not currently available.

¹⁵ NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, *New South Wales Statistical Local Area Population Projections 2001-2031* (www.planning.nsw.gov.au).

¹⁶ These figures are the population projections for the Many Rivers (Coffs Harbour) ATSI region. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Experimental Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001-2009* (Canberra: ABS: Cat. No. 3238.0.55.002).

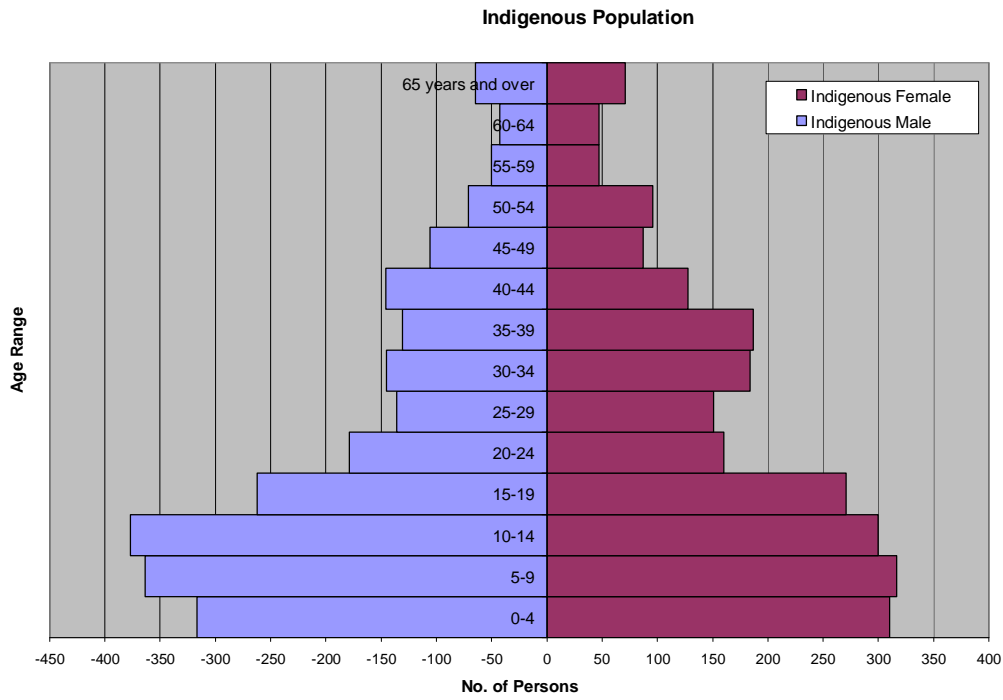


Figure 3: Age Distribution by Aboriginal Population

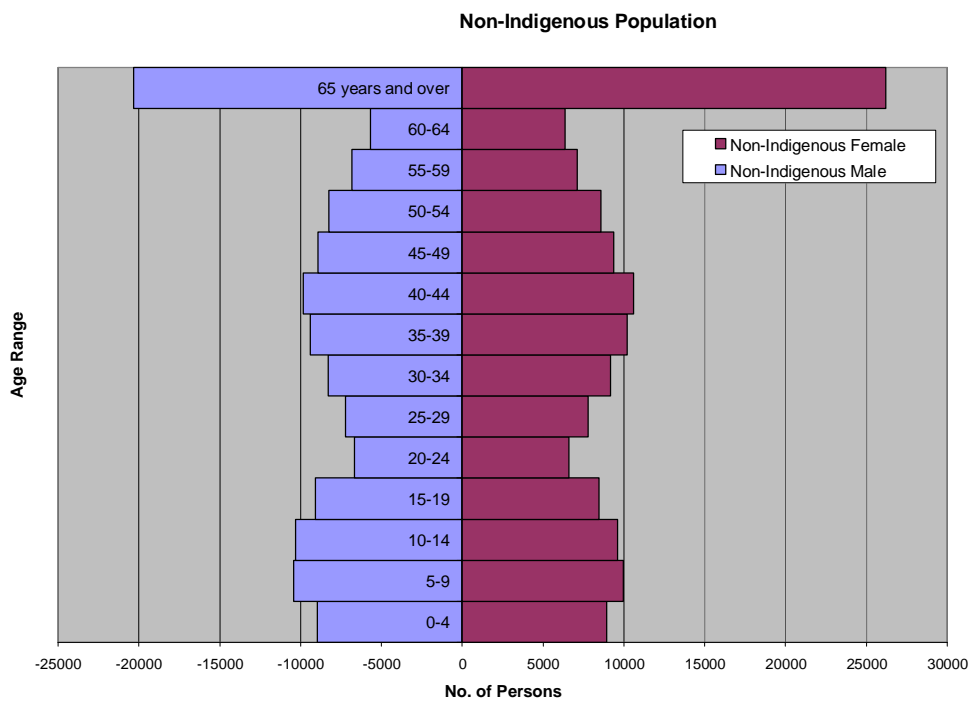


Figure 4: Age Distribution by Non-Aboriginal Population

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Central Coast region is generally better than other areas of the State. In some respects, the region ranks well compared to other regions of the State, but is average or only slightly above average in other areas. For example, with respect to antenatal visits by pregnant women, Aboriginal women on the Central Coast are visiting clinics at a similar rate to non-Aboriginal women throughout the State. Rates of cardiovascular disease in the Aboriginal population are similar to those for the non-Aboriginal population throughout the State, and much better than for the whole Aboriginal population. Diabetes rates, on the other hand, are much the same as for the Aboriginal population in the rest of the State, while rates of infectious disease are only slightly lower than the state average for Aboriginal people.

All of the material in the Health section of this report was sourced from the *Report of the New South Wales Chief Health Officer*, accessed on 31 March 2006.¹⁷

3.1.1 Maternal and Child Health

A birth weight of less than 2,500 grams for babies is considered to be low and may be indicative of poor health of the mother, her environment or the lack of available antenatal care. The proportion of Aboriginal babies in the Central Coast region that were born with a low birth weight increased markedly between 1993 and 2001, but has decreased between 2001 and 2004. The period between 1999 and 2004 saw an almost four-fold increase in the number of Aboriginal babies born in the region compared with the previous six year period, and may account for the sudden spike in the statistics.

Between 1999 and 2001, approximately 13.6% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.6% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. Between 2002 and 2004, 10.1% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.7% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. This figure is still 63% higher than for non-Aboriginal babies, only 6.2% of which were born with low birth weight in the period 2002-04. The higher rates of Aboriginal babies born with low birth weights is related to a high incidence of Aboriginal mothers smoking in the second half of pregnancy (58% in 2000, compared with 15.3% of non-Aboriginal mothers), and the younger overall age of Aboriginal mothers (smoking rates among younger women are higher than among older women).

Linked to low birth weight is the time of the first antenatal visit by pregnant women. Ideally, this should occur before 20 weeks of pregnancy. Between 2002 and 2004, the Central Coast had the best figures in New South Wales for visits to antenatal clinics, with 87.6% of pregnant Aboriginal women consistently having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is significantly higher than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), and is also slightly higher than

¹⁷ NSW Department of Health, Population Health Division, *The health of the people of New South Wales – Report of the Chief Health Officer*, Sydney, at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/chorep/atsi/atsi_anteprocatsi_rcmg.htm.

that of non-Aboriginal mothers throughout the State, 87.3% of whom had their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks of pregnancy. However, it is somewhat lower than the average for non-Aboriginal mothers in the region, which is also the highest in the State, at 95.7%. These data suggest that there is a high awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst all mothers on the Central Coast.

It is also possible that the birth-weight data collected by NSW Health is under-reporting data on Aboriginal babies. For example, the Midwives Data Collection (MDC) only collects information on the Aboriginal status of the mother and not the father. Maternal Aboriginality is also under-reported on the MDC. In 2002, it was estimated that of all babies born to Aboriginal mothers, only 69% were reported as having an Aboriginal mother.

3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease

Between 2002 and 2005, rates of hospital separation¹⁸ for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast were around 30% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 2,231 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. Interestingly, the rate is only 3% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), as well as the rate for the non-Aboriginal population on the Central Coast (2,162 per 100,000).

While the rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has increased dramatically between 1993 and 2005 (a three-fold increase), the overall worsening by 25% of the statistics across the total NSW Aboriginal population over the last decade or so indicates that the increase may be partially attributable to a higher rate of patients in the region identifying themselves as Aboriginal in recent years.

3.1.3 Diabetes

Diabetes is a major health problem. The rate of diabetes amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast rose exponentially from 1993-96 (20 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (719 per 100,000). The rate in the period from 2002 to 2005 was therefore 36 times higher than the rate from 1993 to 1996. However, it is still 4% lower than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, but is three times higher than the rate for the total NSW non-Aboriginal population (236 per 100,000).

While the fifty-six-fold worsening of the statistics over this period may partially relate to a higher rate of patients in the region identifying themselves as Aboriginal in recent years, the significant overall worsening of the statistics across the total NSW population over the last decade or so indicates a major public health crisis in relation to diabetes.

3.1.4 Infectious Diseases

Hospital separation rates for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenzae meningitis throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have dropped by 80% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

¹⁸ Hospital separation: A formal separation is a discharge, transfer or death of a patient. It refers to the process by which a same day patient or inpatient completes an episode of care. A type of change separation occurs when an episode of care ends because the type of care provided to the patient changes.

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 3 per 100,000, compared to 4 per 100,000, but is around twice the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region. However, it is the same as the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period.

Skin infections are related to the later onset of heart and kidney disease. Hospital separation rates for skin infections throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by 16% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is more than twice the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region and in the State, at 508 per 100,000, compared to 230 per 100,000, and 235 per 100,000, respectively. However, it is 15% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

3.1.5 Alcohol-Related Issues

Hospital separation rates attributed to alcohol throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by 11% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 9% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 1,942 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000. However, this is two-and-a-half times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region, and three-and-a-half times the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period.

The rate of hospital separations for trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people on the Central Coast during the period from 2002 to 2005 is virtually the same as the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 498 per 100,000, compared to 497 per 100,000. However, it is 60% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region, and 133% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period.

The eighteen-fold increase in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and eight-fold increase in trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 appears once again to be partially an artefact of under-identification of Aboriginal people in the region during the earlier period. However, the general upward trend in the statistics for Aboriginal people across the State indicates that alcohol-related problems are on the increase in the Aboriginal population.

3.2 Housing

A substantial number of Aboriginal people in New South Wales are assisted with public housing. In 2004-05, 934 Aboriginal households were newly assisted, while there are currently around 8,700 Aboriginal tenants in public housing. Mainstream community housing also houses an additional 600 Aboriginal households.

Aboriginal households are about half as likely to own or be purchasing their own homes as the total population. In 2001, 45% of Aboriginal households on the Central Coast owned or were purchasing their homes, compared to 72% of non-Aboriginal households.

Aboriginal families are more than twice as likely to be living in overcrowded dwellings as the total population. The average size of a household on the Central Coast with Aboriginal occupants was 3.2 people per dwelling, compared to 2.5 people for dwellings with no Aboriginal occupants.

In the 2000-01 financial year, 2.4% of households suffered from overcrowding in Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings in the ATSIC Many Rivers region (which includes the two LGAs in the Central Coast RCMG). This was slightly below the average for the whole of New South Wales for that period. In the 2002-3 financial year, the figure had increased slightly to 2.7%, which was the average for the whole of New South Wales for that period.

Between 2000 and 2003, the percentage of new allocations of housing to Aboriginal households as a proportion of all allocations in public housing for the Many Rivers region increased from 6.3% to 7.6%, suggesting that efforts by the NSW Government to improve Aboriginal people's access to social housing has begun to take an effect. However, as information on Aboriginal people already in mainstream social housing is poor, care should be taken in analysing this data.

No data was forthcoming from the Aboriginal Housing Office or the Department of Housing on the Central Coast region for inclusion in this report.

3.2.1 Environmental Health

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection, gastrointestinal infection, rheumatic heart disease, skin infections and tuberculosis are conditions related to environmental health. In particular, they may be related to poor housing factors, such as over-crowding and lack of access to adequate means of sanitation.

Aboriginal households on the Central Coast are comparatively less crowded than in other parts of the State, and environmental health standards appear to reflect this fact. However, it should be noted that with respect to exponential rises in the Central Coast statistics for both acute respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections, these rises appear to be an artefact of increased self-identification of Aboriginal people in the region, as with the other health statistics for the region.

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 99 per 100,000, but had risen to 1,076 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a more than ten-fold increase over twelve years. The Central Coast figures for the period 2002-05 are 40% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), but 46% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (738 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 18 per 100,000, but had risen to 293 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a more than sixteen-fold increase over twelve years. The Central Coast figures for the period 2002-05 are only 3% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and only 5% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (278 per 100,000).

3.3 Justice

The region has a low rate of assault and sexual assault involving Aboriginal people when compared with other parts of New South Wales. However, the level of incarceration of Aboriginal adults who formerly resided in the region is around twice as high as the state average.

The information below was provided by the NSW Attorney General's Department in March 2006 and is sourced from the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, unless otherwise indicated.

3.3.1 Victim rates

Reported rates of assault involving Aboriginal people on the Central Coast are much lower than in other regions of New South Wales, and are also significantly lower than amongst the non-Aboriginal population in the region. The rate of assault for Aboriginal people on the Central Coast is approximately 820 per 100,000, compared to approximately 1,300 per 100,000 for the total regional population (almost 40% lower), and 4,400 per 100,000 for the total Aboriginal population in the State (more than 80% lower). These are significant differences which require further investigation.

There is no data available on the rate of hospital separations for assault-related injuries for Aboriginal people in the region.

3.3.2 Adults

In 2004, the rate of incarceration for Aboriginal adults who reported their last known address as being on the Central Coast was much higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 21.5 per 1,000 people, compared to 1.4 per 1,000 people. It was also almost double the incarceration rate for Aboriginal adults throughout New South Wales, which was 12.3 per 1,000 people.

There were also significant differences between male and female incarceration rates, with 39.7 Aboriginal males in prison per 1,000 head of population, compared to 2.8 non-Aboriginal males, and 4.8 Aboriginal females in prison per 1,000 head of population, compared to 0.2 non-Aboriginal females.

These statistics indicate that Aboriginal people on the Central Coast were more than fifteen times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal people residing in the region, while Aboriginal women were twenty-four times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal women residing in the region.

An examination of NSW Local Criminal Court statistics for Gosford and Wyong Local Courts reveals that rates of imprisonment of Aboriginal people for selected principal offences in the region was significantly lower than the state average for Aboriginal people in relation to assault and sexual assault, similar to the state average for driving licence offences, and slightly lower than the state average for regulatory driving offences.

As courts on the Central Coast appear to be no more punitive than in other regions for these offences, it has been suggested by the Attorney General's Department that the much higher rates of incarceration of Aboriginal people who formerly resided on the Central Coast may be partially a function of a number of other factors. These

include the crime rate in the area (and therefore the number of offenders), the types of crimes that are committed (i.e., some crimes are more likely to receive prison sentences than others), and the characteristics of the offenders (e.g. repeat offenders are more likely to be imprisoned). Furthermore, due to the relatively small number of Aboriginal people in prison from the Central Coast (46 males and 6 females), a handful of additional inmates can make a significant difference to the rates. It is also possible that some of these inmates have been incarcerated for a long time, in which case their imprisonment does not reflect current demographic or crime patterns. Nevertheless, while these factors may go some way to explaining the very high rate of over-representation of Aboriginal people in correctional facilities who formerly resided on the Central Coast, there clearly is a problem in this regard which requires more attention.

3.3.3 Juveniles

In 2004, around 58% of Aboriginal juveniles identified in criminal incidents (excluding driving offences) were diverted from the court system on the Central Coast, consistent with the NSW average of 58% for Aboriginal juveniles. This compares unfavourably with 88% of non-Aboriginal juveniles diverted¹⁹ from court in the region, and supports observations of structural inequalities that persist in the juvenile justice system throughout the State.

This statistic is reflected in the ATSIIC Many Rivers region (which includes both of the LGAs in the Central Coast region). There are many factors which can affect the likelihood of juveniles being diverted from court by police, including the nature of the offences and the offending history of the individual. These factors are not analysed here.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Employment and Unemployment

In 2001, 78% of Aboriginal people on the Central Coast who were actively looking for work and who were aged over 15 years were employed. If those people not in the labour force are counted, this figure drops to 62%. Levels of Aboriginal employment in the region were still much higher than the average for Aboriginal people in non-Sydney NSW using the latter criterion (36%). The Aboriginal employment rate was also considerably higher than the proportion of non-Aboriginal people aged over 15 years who were employed on the Central Coast (52%), in the Illawarra (52%), and on the South Coast (57%).

Aboriginal people on the Central Coast also had higher rates of participation in the workforce than non-Aboriginal people in the region, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people elsewhere: 79% on the Central Coast and 57% for non-Aboriginal people. This compares with 52% of Aboriginal people and 57% of non-Aboriginal people in the Illawarra, and 51% of Aboriginal people and 61% of non-Aboriginal

¹⁹ Diversion: This is where juvenile persons of interest (POI) have their charges proceeded against by legal processes other than referral to court. Not all crimes have an associated POI and not all POIs have legal proceedings taken against them. The legal processes available to police include referral to court, referral to a youth justice conference, the issue of a caution or warning, or the issue of an infringement notice. There are many factors that can affect the likelihood of POIs being diverted from court by police, including the nature of the offence or the offending history of the individual.

people on the South Coast. It is not clear from any of the available data why this should be the case.

In 2001, there was an average Aboriginal unemployment rate in the region of 22.4%, compared to an average total unemployment rate on the Central Coast of 8.7%. The Local Government Area (LGA) with the highest Aboriginal unemployment was Wyong, at 23.1%, compared with Gosford, at 21.6%. The State's unemployment average for Aboriginal people in 2001 was 23.1%.

3.4.2 Income

In 2001, the median weekly Aboriginal *family* income in Wyong LGA was between \$600 and \$799, the same as the median non-Aboriginal family income in the area. The comparable statistics for Gosford LGA were \$500 to \$799 for Aboriginal families, and \$400 to \$600 for non-Aboriginal families.

The median weekly Aboriginal *household*²⁰ income for Wyong LGA in 2001 was \$600 to \$699, compared to \$600 to \$799 for non-Aboriginal households in the area. The comparable statistics for Gosford LGA were \$500 to \$699 for Aboriginal families, and \$400 to \$500 for non-Aboriginal families.

These statistics suggest that Aboriginal families in the region are making as much money, or more money, than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Based on the available data, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of Aboriginal households on the Central Coast that have incomes below the poverty line, although a very rough calculation indicates a figure of around 30%.

3.4.3 Businesses

In December 2003, there were six Aboriginal businesses in the Central Coast region.

3.5 Education

The Central Coast ranks very well in most aspects of Aboriginal educational achievement compared to other regions of New South Wales. The high performance of Aboriginal students in the region is not easy to explain from the data available.

The data below were sourced from either the *2001 Census*, or from the Department of Education and Training's Planning and Innovation Directorate *Mid-Year Census 2003-2005*.

In 2001, 41% of Aboriginal people who had completed their schooling on the Central Coast had completed Year 10 or equivalent as their highest level of schooling, while an additional 28% had completed Year 11 or 12. By way of comparison, 40% of non-Aboriginal people who had completed their schooling on the Central Coast had completed Year 10 or equivalent, while 37% had completed Year 11 or 12. It would appear from the 2005 data on Apparent Retention Rates for Years 10 to 12 cited below that these statistics have improved over the last several years, although fluctuations with respect to the small numbers of students involved can render such conclusions dubious.

²⁰ *Households* do not correlate exactly with *families* because Aboriginal families may live across several households, or Aboriginal households may be composed of more than one family.

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5 for Aboriginal students on the Central Coast in 2005 are in most cases significantly higher than the state average for Aboriginal students. More encouraging is the fact that they are only between two and eight percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 2 and above for Year 3, and Band 3 and above for Year 5).

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 3 students in the region, 26.1% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 29.9% were placed in the two highest skill bands for numeracy. These compare with 16.5% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 3 literacy, and 21.1% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 3 numeracy. On the other hand, 38.4% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 42.3% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 42.2% and 46.2% respectively, for all students across the State.

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 5 students in the region, 23% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 30.6% were placed in the two highest skill bands for numeracy. These compare with 18.4% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 5 literacy, and 21.5% of all Aboriginal students in the State for Year 5 numeracy. On the other hand, 44.3% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 45.8% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

At the local level...

Wyong: Gorokan Public School had operated an Aboriginal homework centre between the late 1980s and 2002, which after being shut down for four years due to lack of funding has recently reopened after receiving a Commonwealth grant. Aboriginal students currently constitute around 10% of Gorokan's student body.

3.5.1 School Retention Rates

The region is well below average compared with other RCMG regions for retention rates for Years 10 to 12 Aboriginal students.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate across all schools for Central Coast Aboriginal students in Years 10 to 12 was 34.5%, compared to 63.8% for all students in the region. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students on the Central Coast are remaining in school at less than half the state average.

These data indicate that Central Coast schools need to improve their efforts at assisting Aboriginal students in the transition to, and completion of, senior high school. However, these statistics do not fully capture all of the students who may be enrolled in Year 11 and 12 coursework, such as part-time students, mature-aged students, and repeating students.

3.5.2 Tertiary Education

In 2001, an estimated 26% of Aboriginal people on the Central Coast who provided details of their tertiary qualifications and were aged 15 years or over had tertiary qualifications (646 people), compared to 38% of the non-Aboriginal population in the region. Another 229 Aboriginal people aged 15 years or over were studying for a

tertiary qualification, or 5% of the total Aboriginal population, compared with 4.7% of the total non-Aboriginal population. These data suggest that the Aboriginal population on the Central Coast, as in other urban regions of New South Wales, is both increasingly educated and educated to a higher level.

Aboriginal women on the Central Coast are in general less qualified than Aboriginal men, with the exception of Bachelor degrees and Advanced Diplomas and Diplomas. Aboriginal men hold more than twice as many Certificates as Aboriginal women in the region, most of which are for apprenticeships and traineeships in trades.

Whilst similar proportions of Aboriginal women have certificate level qualifications compared to non-Aboriginal women, non-Aboriginal women are more likely to have higher-level qualifications. Non-Aboriginal men on the Central Coast are more than twice as likely to have a Bachelor’s degree, and six times more likely to have a postgraduate degree, than Aboriginal men.

Aboriginal men in the region are 29% more likely to have no qualification compared to non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women in the region are 13% more likely to have no qualification compared to non-Aboriginal women.

Table 1: Tertiary qualifications of people on the Central Coast

Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
Men	Women	Men	Women
Postgraduate (0.2%)	Postgraduate (0.2%)	Postgraduate (1.2%)	Postgraduate (0.7%)
Grad. Dip/Grad. Cert. (0.7%)	Grad. Dip/Grad. Cert. (0.8%)	Grad. Dip/Grad. Cert. (0.8%)	Grad. Dip/Grad. Cert. (1.1%)
Bachelor (2.4%)	Bachelor (3.9%)	Bachelor (5.6%)	Bachelor (6.5%)
Adv. Dip/Dip. (3.1%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (4.6%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (5.1%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (6.5%)
Certificate (21%)	Certificate (10.1%)	Certificate (30.6%)	Certificate (11.2%)
Not Qualified (63%)	Not Qualified (70%)	Not Qualified (49%)	Not Qualified (62%)
Unclear (9%)	Unclear (11%)	Unclear (8%)	Unclear (12%)

3.6 Culture and Heritage

Most of the Aboriginal population on the Central Coast is not from the area, which creates controversies within the community about who can legitimately speak for the land.

An Aboriginal Heritage Advisory Committee was recently established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The Committee will advise the Minister for the Environment and the Director General of the Department of Environment and Conservation about any matter relating to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in New South Wales. The Committee is not intended to replace the Department of Environment and Conservation or other NSW government agency consultative processes. It is intended that the Committee will provide strategic advice about culture and heritage program, policy and project development and administration.

3.6.1 Cultural Heritage and Natural Resources Management

The broad environmental and natural resource management themes are land (land quality, land use and management), atmosphere (air quality, climate), biodiversity conservation, water (water quality and ecology, water use and allocation) and human settlement (waste, noise, Aboriginal heritage and non-Aboriginal heritage).

Like other coastal areas of New South Wales, the Central Coast is a 'hot spot' for new developments in, and issues affecting, Aboriginal culture and heritage. There does, however, appear to be some recognition by both local councils that these issues need to be taken into serious consideration when planning the development of the region. For example, the development of the Somersby Industrial Estate includes a Plan of Management for Aboriginal heritage sites.

There is a state-wide trend towards greater Aboriginal involvement in the management of national parks. On the Central Coast, the main priorities of Darkinjung LALC are development pressures and environmental management.

There is currently an agreement being negotiated between Darkinjung LALC and State Forests over the management of Warrewarren Aboriginal Place in Strickland State Forest.

There are 245 sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Department of Environment and Conservation's Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for Wyong LGA, and 2,352 sites in Gosford LGA. In Wyong, 49% of the sites are located in mixed land tenure, 35% in State Forest, and 17% in National Parks Estates. In Gosford, 48% of the sites are located in National Parks Estates, 45% in mixed land tenure, and 7% in State Forest.

The sites consist of rock engravings, pigment art, burial areas, stone arrangements, axe grinding grooves and open camp sites.

There are two Aboriginal Areas declared within the region:

1. Howe Aboriginal Area
2. Mooney Mooney Aboriginal Area.

There is an ongoing contestation between Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government regarding the fishing rights of local Aboriginal people, especially the harvesting of regulated species such as pipis, abalone and lobster. At the core of the issue is the tension between what Aboriginal people consider a 'cultural act' — that is, their ability to continue harvesting traditional foods from their ancestral lands — and recreational and commercial fishing that has put such pressure on fisheries that species must be regulated. There are no Natural Resource Management Agreements in the area.

3.6.2 Coastal Development

Increased migration to coastal areas—a national trend—is creating new demands for land and therefore new demands on Aboriginal communities. Much of the Central Coast is important to traditional Aboriginal communities for cultural and heritage reasons and Darkinjung LALC also owns some significant tracts of land. There are pressures on the LALC to sell land for development purposes, but coastal developments on non-Aboriginal land are also happening so quickly that traditional owners are struggling to protect heritage sites or make land claims over areas of significance to them.

3.6.3 Aboriginal Land Claims

Ownership, control of and access to land increases opportunities for Aboriginal people to practice, promote and protect their culture and heritage and participate in natural resource management, which has both cultural and economic benefits. In addition to an individual's private purchases, there are several mechanisms through which Aboriginal people can own or control land in New South Wales. These are: the *Native Title Act 1993*; *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*; the Indigenous Land Corporation; management agreements; non-statutory co-management agreements and Aboriginal Land Use Agreements.

3.7 Families and Young People

The profile of Aboriginal families on the Central Coast is markedly different in key respects to that of non-Aboriginal people.

While the proportion of families that are a couple with dependents (including children or students) is higher for the Aboriginal community, there are almost twice as many single parent families with dependents in the Aboriginal community, and far fewer couple families without children.

However, unlike most other regions of New South Wales, an unusually high proportion of retirees live on the Central Coast. This may account for the high proportion of couple families without children in the non-Aboriginal community.

	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal
Couple family with dependents (children or students)	35.5%	43.5%
Single parent family with dependents	12%	23%
Couple family without children	38.5%	23%

Table 2: Profile of family structures on the Central coast

3.7.1 Services for Families

Aboriginal welfare workers on the Central Coast report that there is a distinct lack of services for families available in the region. Shortages of childcare places, lack of community transport, and lack of support services for Aboriginal youth and people with substance abuse and mental health problems are some of the more important areas that need addressing.

There are two NSW Government-run programs and one project currently operating on the Central Coast which provide services specifically oriented to Aboriginal families. The Department of Education and Training runs a program aimed at encouraging parent participation in early childhood activities, and the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation and NSW Health each run a program/project aimed at increasing family participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities.

3.7.2 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

In 2004, rates of sexual assault involving Aboriginal people on the Central Coast were significantly higher than for the total population in the region, at approximately 126 per 100,000, compared to approximately 82 per 100,000 for the total regional

population. These rates are, however, significantly lower than the rates for Aboriginal people across the whole State, which were 192 per 100,000 people in 2004, or around 50% higher than those for the Central Coast.

The victimisation rate for domestic violence for Aboriginal people in the region in 2004 was approximately 5.3 per 1,000. This is much the same rate as for the total population in the region (at 5.2 per 1,000), and is significantly lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people, at 24.9 per 1,000. It is also not significantly higher than the rate for the whole NSW population, at 4.3 per 1,000.

Nevertheless, for those Aboriginal families with domestic problems, there are no family refuges on the Central Coast, and crisis housing is often full. Young people can only stay in crisis housing for a very short time, and mothers with teenage sons must send their sons elsewhere. There is also no emergency housing for young people.

It should be noted also that the Many Rivers Regional Council and the Coffs Harbour office of the former ATSIC prepared a *Many Rivers Regional Aboriginal Family Violence Workshops Final Report* in 2004. The Report summarised the findings of a series of community workshops in nine locations throughout the region, including Newcastle, and the development of the Many Rivers Family Violence Action Plan. It is not clear whether this plan has subsequently been implemented by the Commonwealth.

4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community Priorities

The Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) and DAA have been involved in consultations for several months with Aboriginal community members, NGOs and government agencies on the Central Coast to develop a plan that addresses community priorities. While these consultations are ongoing, it is possible to identify a number of priority areas for the region and to identify actions would help address Aboriginal interests in the area. In addition, the ATSIIC *Many Rivers Strategic Regional Plan 2005-2010* identifies ten key action areas for the region that roughly map onto the priority areas identified under *Two Ways Together*.

Taking into consideration the issues identified through consultation with Aboriginal NGOs and some community members over the last several months and the additional work undertaken through the plans, it is possible to identify the following priorities (below).

4.1.1 Housing

There is insufficient public housing stock that meets the needs of the community (including families in need of larger houses), and a lack of housing alternatives and rental assistance for the working poor in the community. Due to the comparatively high housing prices in the region, Aboriginal-specific home loan schemes do not provide sufficient amounts of money to Aboriginal families in the region to purchase their own homes.²¹ There is also a serious shortage of emergency housing for families and young people in crisis.

4.1.2 Law and Justice

There is a lack of legal service support for Aboriginal people in the region (the closest Aboriginal Legal Service is in Newcastle), and a perceived lack of cultural awareness amongst court workers. Diversionary programs for adult Aboriginal offenders with substance abuse problems, such as the Magistrate Early Referral Into Treatment (MERIT) Program which currently operates, would be of increased benefit to the community if they could be extended to under 18 year olds. The area also requires an Aboriginal-specific youth worker and mental health worker.

4.1.3 Health and Substance Abuse

There are few doctors who bulk bill in the region, and access to medical services for Aboriginal people generally is a problem. There is a lack of Aboriginal-specific drug and alcohol workers and counsellors on the Central Coast, and no Aboriginal-specific youth workers, grief and loss counsellors, or mental health workers.

4.1.4 Families and Young People

There are serious inadequacies with Aboriginal family support services in the region, including access to affordable and convenient childcare facilities. Aboriginal families tend not to access mainstream human services because there is a perception that

²¹ For example, the former ATSIIC home loan scheme was transferred to Indigenous Business Australia (which falls under the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations) when ATSIIC was abolished.

the workers in those services are not trained to work with Aboriginal people. There is a perception amongst kinship carers in the region that the relevant agency is not providing sufficient support services for them, nor is it providing counselling or sufficient resources to Aboriginal children and young people in care. Some community members have also expressed concerns about the lack of cheap recreational facilities for Aboriginal children and young people in the region, and inadequate transport options for those who need to get to recreational activities. It would also appear that there is either a lack of awareness about the sporting and recreational activities that are available, or that those activities that are available are difficult for young people to access due to inadequate transport options.

4.1.5 Education and Training

Lack of affordable transport options for Aboriginal people on low incomes to get to and from educational facilities and employment is a major issue on the Central Coast, and is hampering Aboriginal peoples’ access to educational and employment opportunities. The lack of affordable and convenient childcare facilities is also a serious obstacle to improved educational and training outcomes for Aboriginal people in the region.

4.1.6 Employment

As noted above, inadequate transport and childcare options for Aboriginal people on the Central Coast have a serious impact on their employment, education and training prospects.

4.2 Analysis of Need

An overview of the demographic information detailed previously suggests, with a high proportion (60%) of the Aboriginal population aged 25 years or younger, there is a high level of need for early childhood initiatives, pre-school education, sport and recreation, school education and youth programs, vocational training, unemployment programs, housing and disease prevention programs.

The socio-economic indicators also identify the Central Coast region’s Aboriginal population as being more disadvantaged or less disadvantaged (relative to Aboriginal people in other regions) in the following areas:

Less disadvantaged	More disadvantaged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and child health • Median income • Cardiovascular disease • Infectious diseases • Sexual assault & domestic violence rates • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Adult incarceration rates • Alcohol use • Services for families • Years 10-12 retention rates

According to the information provided to the DAA and the ICC during community consultations, the areas of greater disadvantage are also priorities for the wider Aboriginal community. In addition to housing, justice issues, drug and alcohol counselling, and services for families, the community has given high priority to transport, education and employment opportunities. While it is generally acknowledged that transport options are a major problem on the Central Coast, problems surrounding education and employment for Aboriginal people in the region

appear to relate more to access to support services than to a significant lack of educational and employment opportunities.

4.3 Issues for Consideration

On the basis of the information set out in this report, it is recommended that the Central Coast Regional Engagement Group undertake further investigation of the following issues:

1. As in most other regions of the State, the fact that around 60% of the Aboriginal population on the Central Coast is under 25 years of age suggests that more resources need to be directed to early childhood initiatives, pre-school education, sport and recreation, school education, youth programs, vocational training, unemployment programs, housing and disease prevention programs.
2. The data relating to health suggests that there are a number of areas, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dental health, which may require additional resources. An examination of the suitability of current medical services in the region should also be undertaken.
3. Providing scope for more Aboriginal juvenile diversions from the courts and greater legal and drug and alcohol counselling support for Aboriginal people in contact with the justice system generally should be a focus for attention.
4. Providing funding and support for an Aboriginal-specific youth worker and mental health worker in the region should be made a priority.
5. The need for more crisis accommodation and the lack of affordable housing in the region and possible alternatives for addressing these problems.
6. As manufacturing employs 14% of Aboriginal men, but has below average prospects, young Aboriginal men should be encouraged to seek careers in other industries, such as food, hospitality and tourism, the sectors in which there are currently the most job vacancies.

In developing appropriate responses to these issues, consideration should be given to advice consistently provided by Aboriginal people in various forums in relation to service delivery.

Transport and cost are regularly identified as significant barriers to accessing government services. As noted above, this is an issue that could be resolved at the REG level. In particular, Aboriginal people often express a lack of confidence in utilising community buses that are not specifically operated by Aboriginal organisations such as Aboriginal Medical Services. This may be due to lack of familiarity with drivers, a lack of knowledge about what services are on offer, or a perceived lack of flexibility and adaptability with respect to timetables. It is understood that one-off funds have been recently approved to purchase a bus to assist Aboriginal families to access long daycare and pre-school services, although it is not clear what areas of the region the bus will service.

This reflects a broader concern identified by Aboriginal people regarding the culturally inappropriate manner in which services are delivered. This manifests itself in a range of ways, including:

- the absence of Aboriginal staff in organisations, particularly at the first point of contact such as reception areas;
- an inability by service providers to communicate effectively with Aboriginal people; and
- overt racism expressed by service providers.

“Cultural understanding” is listed as one of the goals under the *Two Ways Together*. The Department of Education and Training has developed a cultural competence course called the Aboriginal Cultural Education Program. It is suggested that the relevant CEOs prioritise cultural awareness training for public sector employees in key agencies with high levels of contact with Aboriginal people, including NSW Police, and the Departments of Community Services, Corrective Services, Education and Training, Environment and Conservation, Health, Juvenile Justice and Primary Industries.

Finally, because of the dispersed nature of the Aboriginal population on the Central Coast, the region does not have identified priority Aboriginal communities. There is therefore a danger that the region is overlooked in the development strategies contained within the CEO TWT Cluster Action Plans. Attention to the linkages between the Regional Report’s recommendations and the Cluster Action Plans should therefore be a priority.

Agencies are recommended to give careful consideration to these concerns when developing a response to the issues identified in this report.

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