



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Hunter

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TWO WAYS TOGETHER REGIONAL REPORT Hunter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1.0 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REGION	6
1.1 GEOGRAPHY.....	6
1.2 LOCAL PLANNING FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES	7
1.3 ABORIGINAL CULTURAL GROUPS OF THE REGION	7
1.4 LAND.....	8
1.5 REGIONAL ECONOMY.....	8
1.5.1 Where are the job vacancies?	9
1.5.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP).....	9
2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION	10
2.1 DEMOGRAPHICS.....	10
2.2 POPULATION PROJECTIONS	11
3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS.....	13
3.1 HEALTH.....	13
3.1.1 Maternal and Child Health	13
3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease.....	14
3.1.3 Diabetes.....	14
3.1.4 Infectious Diseases	15
3.1.5 Alcohol-related Issues	15
3.2 HOUSING.....	16
3.2.1 Environmental Health	16
3.3 JUSTICE	17
3.3.1 Victim Rates.....	17
3.3.2 Adults.....	17
3.3.3 Juveniles.....	18
3.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.....	19
3.4.1 Employment and Unemployment	19
3.4.2 Income.....	19
3.4.3 Businesses.....	20
3.5 EDUCATION	20
3.5.1 School Retention Rates.....	21
3.5.2 Tertiary Education	22
3.6 CULTURE AND HERITAGE	22
3.6.1 Environmental and natural resources management	22
3.6.2 Coastal Development	24
3.6.3 Aboriginal Land Claims.....	24
3.7 FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE	25
3.7.1 Services for Families	25
3.7.2 Violence, Abuse and Neglect.....	25
4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT	27
4.1 COMMUNITY PRIORITIES	27
4.1.1 Housing.....	27
4.1.2 Law and Justice	27
4.1.3 Health and Substance Abuse	27
4.1.4 Families and Young People.....	28
4.1.5 Education and Training.....	28
4.1.6 Employment.....	28
4.2 ANALYSIS OF NEED	28
4.3 ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers together data¹ about Aboriginal people and the government services provided to them in the Hunter 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 in the Hunter. There is a brief overview of the local economy, in which Aboriginal employment is most commonly in the manufacturing, construction, retail, and health and community services sectors.

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

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

gender imbalance amongst younger Aboriginal people in the Hunter: in the 0-25 year old age group, there are around 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 Hunter region. The data reveals that Aboriginal people in the Hunter are doing comparatively well compared to Aboriginal people in other parts of the State. With respect to many of the health indicators, Aboriginal people in the Hunter are generally above average when compared to those in other areas of the State. In a few areas, the region ranks well compared with other regions. For example, levels of Aboriginal employment and participation in the workforce are high in the region when compared with non-Aboriginal people and with the state average for Aboriginal people. However, incarceration rates are much higher than the state average for Aboriginal people, and while literacy and numeracy rates for Aboriginal students in Years 3 and 5 are slightly 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.

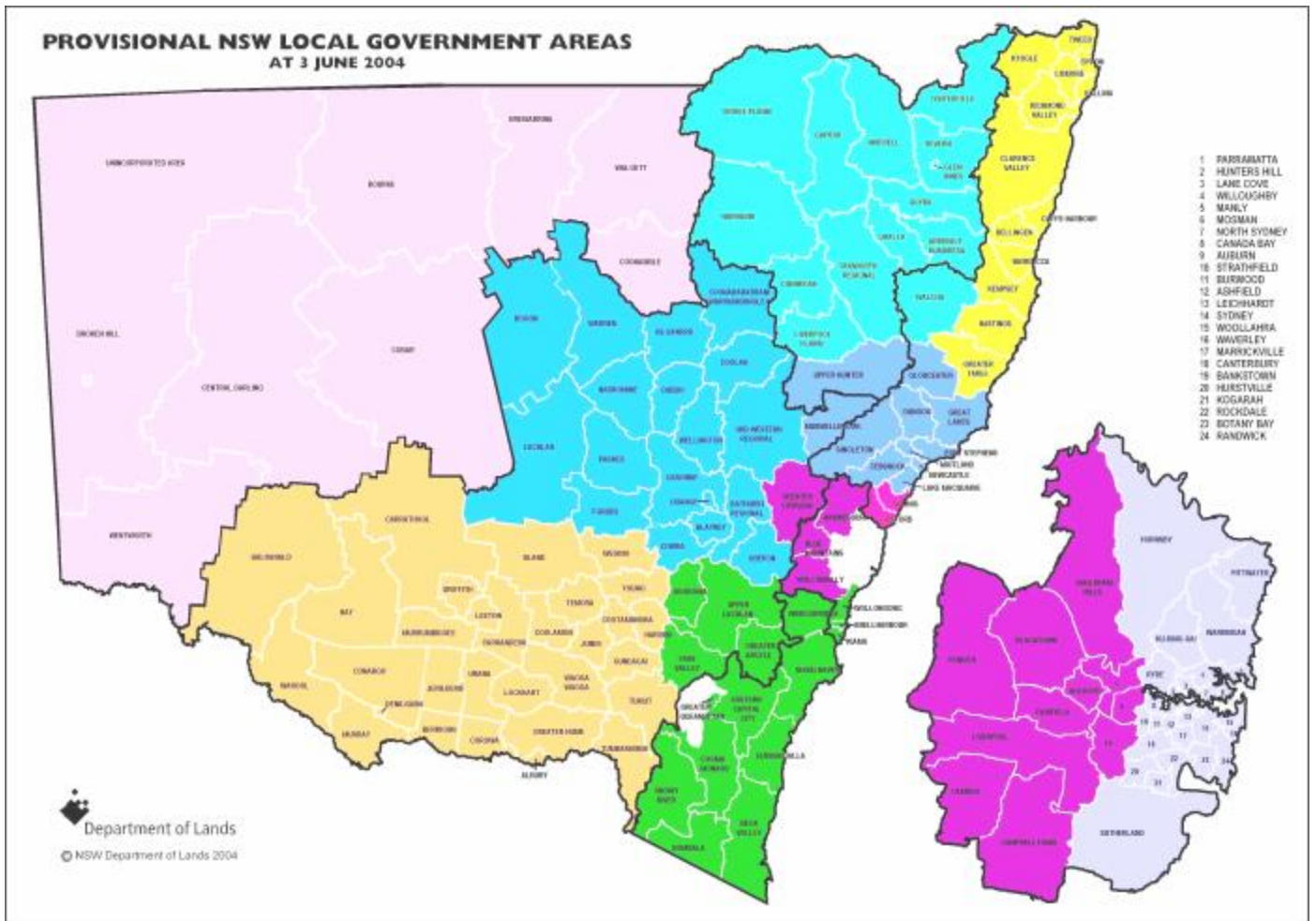


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSIIC and LGA boundaries

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 Hunter Region is shown on the map at **Figure 2**. The southern boundary of the region is approximately 165 kilometres north of Sydney, and extends from Lake Macquarie to Port Stephens on the coast and inland to the upper reaches of the Hunter Valley.

There are eleven Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the Hunter Region:

- Cessnock
- Dungog
- Gloucester
- Great Lakes
- Lake Macquarie
- Maitland
- Muswellbrook
- Newcastle
- Port Stephens
- Singleton
- Upper Hunter

There are four communities in the region with significant Aboriginal populations. These are Forster, Karuah, Maitland and Lake Macquarie. There is also a significant Aboriginal population in Newcastle.



Figure 2:
NSW Local Government Areas in Hunter NSW

The region includes 17 National Parks:

- Barakee
- Barrington Tops
- Ben Halls Gap
- Booti Booti
- Coolah Tops
- Crawney Pass
- Curracabundi
- Ghin-Doo-Ee
- Mount Royal
- Murrarundi Pass
- Myall Lakes
- Scone Mountain
- Tomaree
- Towarri
- Wallingat
- Woko
- Woolooma

It also includes 50 Nature Reserves, 36 State Forests, two Regional Parks (Blue Gum Hills and Stockton Bight), and ten State Conservation Areas (Barrington Tops, Black Bulga, Buladelah, Camerons Gorge, Coneac, Copeland Tops, Curracabundi, Glenrock, Karuah, and Medowie).

1.2 Local Planning for Aboriginal Communities

All local government 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.

One of the most comprehensive local planning documents dealing with Aboriginal issues in the region is Muswellbrook Shire Council's Social Plan 2005-2010 (2004). Within each of the target groups identified in the plan for planning and service delivery, i.e., children, younger people, older people and families, there is a section on the specific needs and service delivery gaps for Aboriginal people. Under each target group and sub-group, the Council has drafted an action plan identifying objectives, strategies, outcomes, timeframes, responsible officers, possible partners and additional resources. This document will prove useful in working through local issues with the Aboriginal community over the coming years.

Cessnock Shire Council's Social and Community Plan 2004-09 has identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as one of its target groups for service delivery. The Council has constituted a Local Area Planning Team (LAPT) of 24 members which includes two identified Aboriginal positions and has compiled a comprehensive list of issues of concern to Aboriginal people in the region, including transport, access to services, domestic violence, health, education, housing, etc. The LAPT has also compiled a range of actions and strategies to work with other levels of government to help resolve these issues. However, it is not clear what the ongoing status of this group is.

In its Community Plan 2003-08 (2004), Gloucester Shire Council has recommended that it help facilitate an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Plan aimed at building on existing training and employment programs in the LGA and to increase the awareness and uptake of them.

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

The Hunter Region is the traditional country of six Aboriginal peoples:

- Awabakal
- Birpai
- Gaddhang
- Gwaegal
- Wonnarua
- Worimi

The region includes six main language groups: Awabakal, Birpai, Dainggati, Darkinjung, Gwaegal and Kamilaroi.

1.4 Land

There are nine Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) with jurisdiction over the region:

- Awabakal
- Bahtabah
- Forster
- Karuah
- Koombahtoo
- Mindaribba
- Purfleet/Taree
- Wonnarua
- Worimi

As of March 2006, there were three outstanding land claims under the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1974*. One is located in Port Stephens (Garuahgal People NC06/2), and the second is in the Great Lakes area (Mr Miranda Avery-Slater & Ors NC04/1).

Wonnarua Nation Aboriginal Corporation holds two other properties in the Hunter Region. St Clair Mission consists of 33.63 hectares, while Valley Arm consists of 73.66 hectares, both of which were granted to Wonnarua on 28 June 1999.

1.5 Regional Economy

The economic base of the Hunter is varied. Mining is the predominant source of full time employment in the Upper Hunter, with coal mining being predominant around Muswellbrook and Singleton. Livestock provides the greatest level of employment in the Taree region, while retail and manufacturing predominates in the Newcastle region.

Manufacturing is the largest employer of Aboriginal males in the region, followed by construction and retail. Health and community services, combined with retail, account for the majority of Aboriginal female employment in the Hunter. Education and accommodation, cafes and restaurants, and property and business services, are the other significant areas of employment. The proportion of both male and female Aboriginal people employed in the private sector is amongst the highest in New South Wales.

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"> • Manufacturing (17%) • Retail (13%) • Construction (12%) • Property & Business Services (8%) • Wholesale trade (6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing (15%) • Construction (13%) • Retail (11%) • Government Administration & Defence (8%) • Transport & Storage (7%)

Table 1: Industry employers (male)

With the exception of manufacturing, which has below average prospects, the top five industry employers of Aboriginal men have average or above prospects for future employment and growth.²

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

² 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>)

<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (21%) • Health & Community Services (20%) • Education (11%) • Property & Business Services (9%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (8%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Community Services (21%) • Retail (18%) • Education (11%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (10%) • Property & Business Services (9%)

Table 2: Industry employers (female)

The top five industry employers of Aboriginal women all have average to very good prospects.³

1.5.1 Where are the job vacancies?

In mid-May 2006, job networks in the Hunter region listed 724 job vacancies.⁴ The top five occupations with vacancies were:

- Marketing and Sales Representatives (27% of vacancies)
- Metal and Engineering Trades (17%)
- Electrical and Electronics Trades (9%)
- Food, Hospitality and Tourism (8%)
- Labourers, Factory and Machine Workers (8%)

1.5.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

There is one Indigenous Employment Centre (IEC) in the Hunter region, which is located in Newcastle and called Youlooe-Ta Indigenous Development Association Incorporated (02 4949 5877). 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.

In 2001, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) run in the Hunter employed 62 Aboriginal men and 31 Aboriginal women, as well as three non-Aboriginal men. In the 2005-06 financial year, the CDEPs run in Cardiff, Forster and Maitland provide for up to 230 places.⁵

1.5.3 Shared Responsibility Agreements

Information about Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) planned or operating in the region is included as Attachment 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://jobsearch.gov.au/jobseeker/SelectOccupation.aspx?WHCode=0&TextOnly=0&rqn=2102ncco&st=11&SessionID=ao5gozbscglplw55mx2ddu45&print=0&>

⁵ This figure was supplied by DEWR in January 2006.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 Demographics

In 2001, the total population of the Hunter Region was 527,447, of whom 11,605⁶ were Aboriginal. The Aboriginal community therefore make up 2.2% of the total regional population, with a slightly higher number of females (5,838) than males (5,767), and 8.6% of the total NSW Aboriginal population.

There are four communities in the region with significant Aboriginal populations. These are Forster, Karuah, Maitland and Lake Macquarie. There is also a significant Aboriginal population in Newcastle.

Tables 3 and 4 compare the age structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. This illustrates the youthfulness of the Aboriginal population, with 58.2% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being less than 25 years old. In contrast, only 0.25% of the Aboriginal population was aged 65 years and over, whereas 14.7% of the non-Aboriginal population was aged 65 years and over.

⁶ 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.

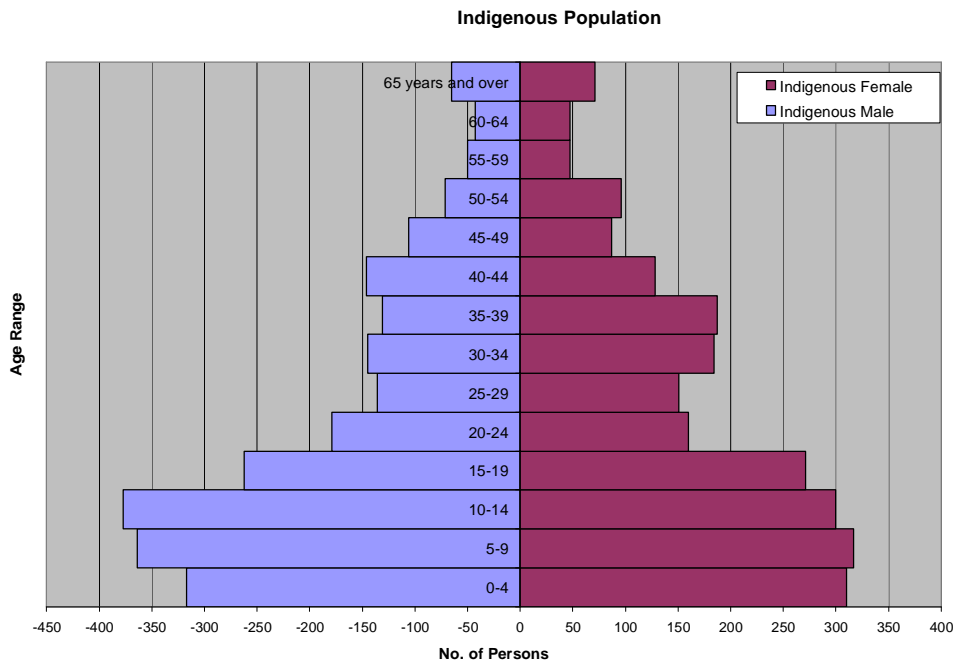


Table 3: Age Distribution by Aboriginal Population

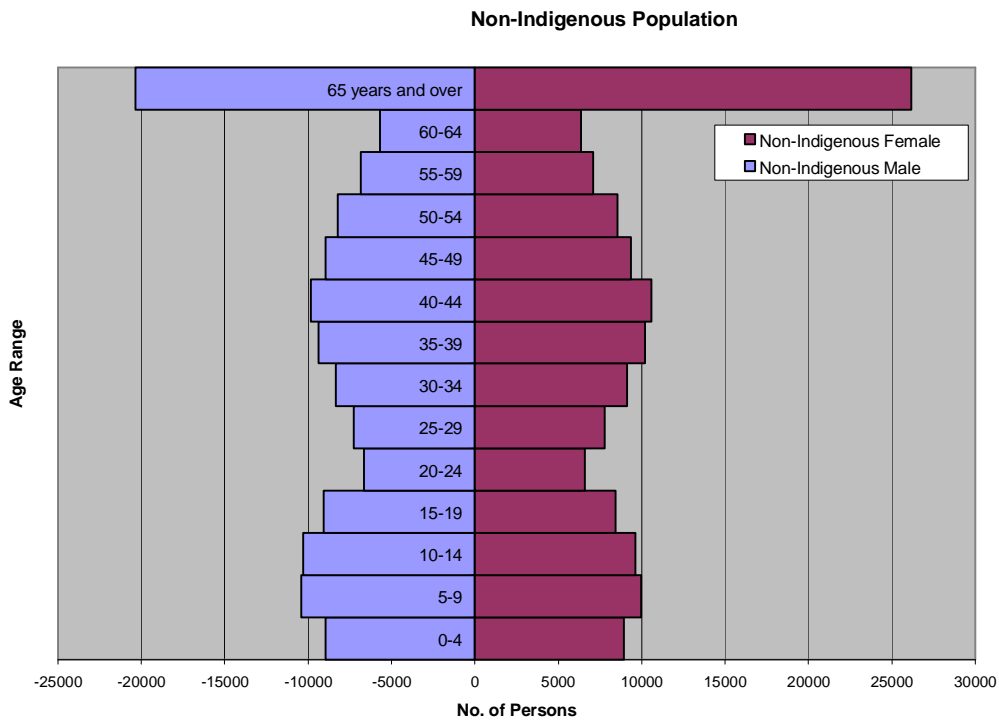


Table 4: Age Distribution by Non-Aboriginal Population

Unlike most of other regions of New South Wales, there was a gender imbalance slightly in favour of females overall in the Hunter in 2001 (70 more females overall). However, in the 0-25 year old age group for the non-Aboriginal population there are 4.6% more males than females, whereas in the Aboriginal population there are 3.8% more males than females.

2.2 Population Projections

The Aboriginal community in the Hunter region is one of the fastest growing Aboriginal communities 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 38%.⁷ As a discrete region for the purposes of this study, the Hunter has one of the highest numbers of Aboriginal people in New South Wales after Sydney. The Tweed and Hunter Regions were identified as being the two areas with fastest population growth. The total regional population is projected to increase by an estimated 7.3% between 2001 and 2011.⁸ In contrast, the Aboriginal population is projected to increase from 12,158 in 2001, to between 14,711 and 17,507 (low series and high series, respectively) in 2009 – or by between 21% and 44%.⁹

If the current demographic trends continue, by 2009 there will be between 1,500 and 3,000 more Aboriginal young people in the region than there were in 2001. This has obvious implications for human service delivery in the region.

⁷ This is based on a figure of 8,786 Aboriginal people in Cessnock, Great Lakes, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton and Walcha in the 1996 Census. The ABS has indicated that in the 1996 and 2001 Census there was an under-reporting of Aboriginality.

⁸ NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, *New South Wales Statistical Local Area Population Projections 2001-2031* (www.planning.nsw.gov.au).

⁹ 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).

3.0 Socio-economic Indicators

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Hunter region is generally above average when compared to other areas of the State.

For example, rates of cardiovascular disease in the Aboriginal population are much lower than the average for the rest of the State, and slightly lower than those for the non-Aboriginal population in the Hunter and throughout the State. Hospital separation rates for infectious diseases and skin infections are also much lower than the state average for Aboriginal people, and similar to those for the non-Aboriginal population. On the other hand, while diabetes rates are much lower than the average for the Aboriginal population in the rest of the State, they are still much higher than the rate in the non-Aboriginal population.

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 2006.¹⁰

The data below provide clear evidence that more needs to be done to address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Hunter region.

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 Hunter that were born with a low birth weight increased significantly between 1993 and 2001, but has decreased between 2001 and 2004. The period between 1999 and 2004 saw a doubling in the number of Aboriginal babies born in the region compared with the previous six year period.

Between 1999 and 2001, 15.9% of Aboriginal babies in the Hunter were born with low birth weight, which is exactly the same rate as for all Aboriginal babies born in New South Wales during that period. Between 2002 and 2004, 10.6% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.7% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. Although this is the second lowest figure for RCMG regions in the State after the Central Coast, it is 71% higher than for non-Aboriginal babies throughout the State, only 6.2% of which were born with low birth weight in the period 2002-04.

While it is perhaps too early to judge trends in the figures, the figures appear to have improved in recent years.

The higher rates of Aboriginal babies born with low birth weights is generally 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).

¹⁰ Population Health Division, *The health of the people of New South Wales – Report of the Chief Health Officer*, Sydney, NSW Department of Health at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/chorep/atsi/atsi_anteprocatsi_rcmg.htm.

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 Hunter had the fourth lowest figures in New South Wales for visits to antenatal clinics, with 66.9% of pregnant Aboriginal women having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is slightly lower than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), but is 30% lower than that of non-Aboriginal mothers throughout the State, 87.3% of which have their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks of pregnancy. It is also significantly lower than the average for non-Aboriginal mothers in the Hunter, which is actually the third lowest in the State for non-Aboriginal women, at 85.8%. These data suggest that there is a relatively low awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst mothers in the Hunter.

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 separation¹¹ for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter were around 33% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 2,056 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. Interestingly, the rate is 5% lower than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 1.5% lower than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in the Hunter (2,089 per 100,000).

While the rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has almost doubled between 1993 and 2005, this may be related to a higher rate of patients in the region identifying themselves as Aboriginal in recent years. Within the non-Aboriginal population, the overall trend has been downward throughout the State over the same period. The opposite is true of the Aboriginal population.

3.1.3 Diabetes

Diabetes is a major health problem. As in many other parts of New South Wales, the recorded rate of hospital separations for diabetes amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter rose dramatically between 1993-96 (95 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (397 per 100,000). The rate in the period from 2002 to 2005 was therefore four times higher than the rate from 1993 to 1996. However, it is still 47% lower than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, but is 40% higher than the rate for the total NSW non-Aboriginal population (236 per 100,000).

It may be that the four-fold worsening of the statistics over this period relates to a higher rate of patients in the region identifying themselves as Aboriginal in recent years. However, it seems more likely given the across-the-board increases in the

¹¹ 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.

incidence of the disease that the diabetes rate is genuinely increasing amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter and therefore requires urgent attention.

3.1.4 Infectious Diseases

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

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter during the period from 2002 to 2005 is significantly lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 1.5 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000, and is almost the same as that of non-Aboriginal people in the region (1.4 per 100,000). It is also half the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (3 per 100,000).

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 in the Hunter during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 24% higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 278 per 100,000, compared to 211 per 100,000. However, it is only 13% higher than the rate for the total NSW population (242 per 100,000), and is 52% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

While the doubling in the rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter between 1993 and 2005 may be an artefact of under-identification of Aboriginal people in the region during the earlier period, the worsening of the statistics amongst the general population during this period indicates that the same is true of the Aboriginal population.

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 in the Hunter during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 50% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 901 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000, but is almost twice the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (461 per 100,000), and 70% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (537 per 100,000).

The rate of hospital separations for trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 22% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 388 per 100,000, compared to 497 per 100,000, but is 87% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (208 per 100,000), and 81% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (214 per 100,000).

The doubling in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and three-fold increase in trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region

between 1993 and 2005 may be partially attributed to under-identification of Aboriginal people in the region during the earlier period. However, the worsening of the statistics across the general population for this indicator suggests that there has been a genuine deterioration of the situation for Aboriginal people during this period.

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, around 38% of Aboriginal households in the Hunter 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. In the 2000-01 financial year, 2.4% of households suffered from overcrowding in Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings in the ATSI Many Rivers region (which includes nine of the eleven LGAs in the Hunter 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.

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.

As no data was available from the 2001 Census to calculate the average number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in Hunter households, it was not possible to determine how crowded they were than in other parts of the State. The worsening Hunter statistics for both acute respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections may be partially attributable to increased self-identification of Aboriginal people in the region, but may also reflect a genuine increase in the incidence of these diseases in the Aboriginal population.

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 369 per 100,000, but had risen to 665 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: an 80% increase over twelve years. The Hunter figures for the period 2002-05 are 65% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), and 11% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (523 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people in the Hunter during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 16 per 100,000, but had risen to 103 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a more than six-fold increase over twelve years. The Hunter figures for the period 2002-05 are 64% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and 30% lower than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (147 per 100,000).

3.3 Justice

The region has a relatively low rate of assault and sexual assault involving Aboriginal people when compared with the Aboriginal population in other parts of New South Wales. However, the level of incarceration of Aboriginal adults who formerly resided in the region is significantly higher than the state average. There is one Aboriginal Legal Service in the whole region, based in Newcastle.

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

Rates of assault involving Aboriginal people in the Hunter are significantly lower than in other regions of New South Wales, but are significantly higher than amongst the non-Aboriginal population in the region. The rate of assault for Aboriginal people in the Hunter in 2004 was approximately 2,240 per 100,000, compared to approximately 1,330 per 100,000 for the total regional population (more than 68% higher), and 4,400 per 100,000 for the total Aboriginal population in the State (around 50% lower).

However, it should be noted that while rates of assault amongst Aboriginal males in the Hunter were not significantly higher than for non-Aboriginal males (1,456 per 100,000, compared to 1,363 per 100,000), rates of assault amongst Aboriginal females were more than three times that of non-Aboriginal females (3,026 per 100,000, compared to 1,006 per 100,000). These are significant differences which require further investigation.¹²

3.3.2 Adults

In 2005, the rate of incarceration for Aboriginal adults who reported their last known address as being in the Hunter was almost ten times higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 14.1 per 1,000 people, compared to 1.5 per 1,000 people. It was also 17% higher than 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 26.3 Aboriginal males in prison per 1,000 head of population, compared to 2.8 non-Aboriginal males, and 2.4 Aboriginal females in prison per 1,000 head of population, compared to 0.2 non-Aboriginal females.¹³

These statistics indicate that Aboriginal people in the Hunter were almost ten times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal people residing in the region, while

¹² NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (ref: sp06_3721).

¹³ NSW Department of Corrective Services, Extract from *NSW Inmate Census*.

Aboriginal women were twelve times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Aboriginal women residing in the region.

According to the Attorney General's Department, it is possible that the much higher rate of incarceration of Aboriginal people who formerly resided in the Hunter may be a function of a number of 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 Hunter (83 males and 8 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.

However, the simple fact that Aboriginal people in the region are ten to twelve times more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be found guilty and imprisoned for a range of offences per head of population clearly indicates that there are some issues relating to the justice system in the Hunter that require serious attention.

3.3.3 Juveniles

Aboriginal young people are massively over-represented in the juvenile justice population, and tend to come from particular areas identified as 'hot spots' by the Department of Juvenile Justice. In 1996, 30% of all juvenile detainees in the State were Aboriginal.

Between 1998 and 2003, the rate of juvenile detention for Aboriginal males across the State has decreased from around 545 per 100,000 to around 455 per 100,000, while the rate for females has remained fairly stable.

Data collected by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research indicates that Aboriginal juvenile persons of interest (POIs) who come into contact with police are less likely than the general population of POIs to be diverted¹⁴ away from court. In 2002, 58.2% of Aboriginal juvenile POIs compared to 81.1% of all juvenile POIs were diverted from court.¹⁵

These statistics are reflected in the ATSIIC Many Rivers region (which includes nine of the eleven LGAs in the Hunter region), where around 55% of Aboriginal juveniles were diverted from court, and 82% of all juveniles in the region. There are many factors which can affect the likelihood of POIs 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Statistic cited in *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, June 2005, p. 71.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Employment and Unemployment

In 2001, 74% of Aboriginal people in the Hunter 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 40%. Levels of Aboriginal employment in the region were still slightly higher than the average for Aboriginal people in non-Sydney New South Wales 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 in the Hunter (52%), in the Illawarra (52%), and on the South Coast (57%).

Aboriginal people in the Hunter had slightly lower rates of participation in the workforce than non-Aboriginal people in the region, and comparable rates to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people elsewhere: 54% in the Hunter and 58% 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 people on the South Coast.

In 2001, there was an average Aboriginal unemployment rate in the region of 14.3%, compared to an average total unemployment rate in the Hunter of 7.6%. The State's unemployment average for Aboriginal people in 2001 was 23.1%.

3.4.2 Income

The median weekly Aboriginal *family* incomes for the various Hunter LGAs from 2001 are set out below in **Table 5**.

The median income of Aboriginal families in eight of the eleven Hunter LGAs was between \$600 and \$699. In two of the LGAs, median incomes were lower than this, and in Singleton, it was higher. In ten of the eleven LGAs, non-Aboriginal families had higher median incomes than Aboriginal families. In six of these LGAs, median family incomes were more than \$100 per week higher.

LGA	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Cessnock-Bellbird	\$600-\$699	\$700-\$799
Dungog/Great Lakes	\$600-\$699	\$600-\$699
Gloucester/Walcha	\$500-\$599	\$600-\$699
Hunter south	\$600-\$699	\$700-\$799
Lake Macquarie	\$600-\$699	\$800-\$999
Maitland	\$600-\$699	\$800-\$999
Newcastle	\$600-\$699	\$800-\$999
Port Stephens	\$600-\$699	\$700-\$799
Raymond Terrace	\$500-\$599	\$700-\$799
Singleton	\$700-\$799	\$1,000-\$1,199
Upper Hunter	\$600-\$699	\$800-\$999

Table 5: Median weekly family income 2001

The median weekly Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal *household*¹⁶ income for the various Hunter LGAs in 2001 are set out in the table below.

LGA	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal
Cessnock-Bellbird	\$1,000-\$1,199	\$1,000-\$1,199
Dungog/Great Lakes	\$1,200-\$1,499	\$800-\$999
Gloucester/Walcha	\$1,200-\$1,499	\$800-\$999
Hunter south	\$700-\$799	\$1,000-\$1,199
Lake Macquarie	\$1,000-\$1,199	\$1,000-\$1,199
Maitland	\$1,000-\$1,199	\$1,000-\$1,199
Newcastle	\$1,000-\$1,199	\$1,000-\$1,199
Port Stephens	\$800-\$999	\$1,000-\$1,199
Raymond Terrace	\$800-\$999	\$1,000-\$1,199
Singleton	\$1,200-\$1,499	\$1,200-\$1,499
Upper Hunter	\$1,000-\$1,199	\$1,000-\$1,199

Table 6: Median weekly household income 2001

We can see from this table that Aboriginal households in most of the Hunter LGAs were making as much as, or more money than, non-Aboriginal households in 2001. The exceptions were Hunter south, Port Stephens and Raymond Terrace. In Dungog and Gloucester LGAs, Aboriginal households were making considerably more money than non-Aboriginal households. Singleton was another LGA with high Aboriginal household income.

These statistics suggest that Aboriginal families in the region are generally making slightly less money than their non-Aboriginal counterparts, although Aboriginal households (which may include individuals who are not related) are doing comparatively better.

3.4.3 Businesses

It is not clear from the available data how many Aboriginal businesses are operating in the Hunter region, although it is known that there are more than thirty Aboriginal Corporations.

3.5 Education

The Hunter ranks average to above average in most aspects of Aboriginal educational achievement compared to other regions of New South Wales.

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, 65% of Aboriginal people who had completed their schooling in the Hunter had completed Year 10 or below as their highest level of schooling, while an additional 24% had completed Year 11 or 12. By way of comparison, 59% of non-Aboriginal people who had completed their schooling in the Hunter had completed Year 10 or below, while 34% had completed Year 11 or 12.

¹⁶ *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.

It would appear from the 2005 data on Apparent Retention Rates for Aboriginal students in 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.¹⁷

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 3 for Aboriginal students in the Hunter in 2005 are slightly higher than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are three to eight percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 2 and above). Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 5 for Aboriginal students in the Hunter in 2005 are significantly higher than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are still six to eight percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 3 and above).

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 3 students in the region, 17.8% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 25.9% 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, 39.8% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 43.3% 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, 24.3% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 28.6% 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, 43.4% 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.

3.5.1 School Retention Rates

The region is in the top group (with Coastal Sydney, the Mid-Western and New England/North-West regions) of RCMG regions for retention rates for Years 10 to 12 Aboriginal students. When compared with ATSiC regional data for 2002, the Hunter had a higher retention rate than most other regions, and has a retention rate around six percentage points higher than the state average for 2002.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate for Hunter Aboriginal students in all schools for Years 10 to 12 was 37.6%, compared to 62.3% 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 in the Hunter are remaining in school at about half the state average for all students, and performing slightly worse than the state average for Aboriginal students.

These data indicate that Hunter schools need to improve their efforts at assisting Aboriginal students in the transition to 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.

¹⁷ Department of Education and Training, Planning and Innovation Directorate, Data Collection Unit, *Mid-Year Census 2003-2005, LGA 2005, NonGov Historical*.

3.5.2 Tertiary Education

In 2001, an estimated 7% of Aboriginal people in the Hunter region who provided details of their tertiary qualifications and were aged 15 years or over had tertiary qualifications, compared to 21% of the non-Aboriginal population in the region.

No data has been extracted from the *2001 Census* for the Hunter to enable an analysis of the number of Aboriginal people aged 15 years or over who were then studying for a tertiary qualification. It is therefore not possible to assess whether the Aboriginal population in the Hunter is following the trend toward being both increasingly educated and educated to a higher level, as has been found in other urban regions of New South Wales.

Very few Aboriginal women in the Hunter have any form of tertiary qualification, and are far less qualified than Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men hold more than forty times as many Certificates as Aboriginal women in the region, most of which are for apprenticeships and traineeships in trades.

While Aboriginal men tend to be less qualified than non-Aboriginal men in the region, they hold similar levels of qualification overall to non-Aboriginal women in the region.

Non-Aboriginal men and women in the region are also far more likely to have higher-level qualifications than Aboriginal men and women.

Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
Men	Women	Men	Women
Postgraduate (0.4%)	Postgraduate (0.0%)	Postgraduate (0.6%)	Postgraduate (0.6%)
Bachelor (1.3%)	Bachelor (0.0%)	Bachelor (1.8%)	Bachelor (2.2%)
Adv. Dip/Dip. (1.1%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (0.0%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (1.4%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (1.9%)
Certificate (4.2%)	Certificate (0.1%)	Certificate (8.8%)	Certificate (3.2%)
Not Qualified (92.9%)	Not Qualified (99.8%)	Not Qualified (87.3%)	Not Qualified (92%)
Unclear (0.1%)	Unclear (0.1%)	Unclear (0.1%)	Unclear (0.1%)

Table 7: Tertiary qualifications of people in the Hunter region

3.6 Culture and Heritage

An Aboriginal Cultural 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 will not replace existing local, regional and state-wide consultative processes of the Department of Environment and Conservation or other NSW government agencies. The Committee will provide strategic advice about the development and administration of Aboriginal culture and heritage programs, policies and projects.

3.6.1 Environmental 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).

There are more than thirty Aboriginal Corporations across the Hunter region, as well as sixteen Local Aboriginal Land Councils, three Regional Land Councils and a growing number of Elder groups with interests in, or responsibilities for, natural resource management (NRM). Each of these groups maintains their associations with country and natural resources and must be factored into any integrated regional NRM planning.

According to the Department of Environment and Conservation, there are 7,933 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the eleven LGAs in the region.

The sites consist of axe grinding grooves, burial areas, ceremonial sites, fish traps, earth mounds, ochre and stone quarries, open camp sites, pigment art, rock engravings, scarred trees, shell middens, stone arrangements and water holes.

There is a state-wide trend towards greater Aboriginal involvement in the management of National Parks. In the Hunter, the Gloucester Aboriginal community is currently involved in discussions with the Department of Environment and Conservation with regard to an economic development project for the Mountain Maid goldmine.

Aboriginal Ownership of Stockton Bight

In 1995, the former Premier committed to the creation of a Stockton Bight National Park. The proposed National Park required satisfying various competing interests in the area, including Aboriginal land claims, conservation, sand mining, and recreational uses.

Several Aboriginal land claims to the Bight had lodged been under section 36 of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* by Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC). Also two native title claims had been lodged under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), although these claims has since been discontinued.

On 13 February 2001, the NSW Government entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Worimi LALC and Worimi Traditional Owners and Elders. The MoU included funding for the Aboriginal ownership negotiations and to establish the Stockton Bight National Park.

In June 2004, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs appointed an Aboriginal Negotiating Panel (ANP) to negotiate the leaseback of the proposed conservation reserves at Stockton Bight. The ANP began meeting in September 2004 and negotiations between the ANP, Worimi Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Minister for the Environment commenced in February 2005. Negotiations to create an Aboriginal-owned Stockton Bight National Park have also included the Department of Lands and the Port Stephens Council.

The west Lake Macquarie area has been the focus of Hunter Community Renewal for the last four years. The Warada Aboriginal Land Care Group and the local primary school are involved in an Environmental Trust – Protecting Our Places funded project to restore land and restore culture by developing a bush tucker garden within the school.

There are also a number of landcare, cultural heritage protection and conservation programs operating in the region, most of which have modest funding attached to them.

There are five Aboriginal Places declared within the region:

- 1) Pulbah Island Aboriginal Place
- 2) Dark Point Aboriginal Place
- 3) Mt Mackenzie Aboriginal Place
- 4) Appletree Aboriginal Area
- 5) Finchley Aboriginal Area

There is also one Voluntary Conservation Agreement declared within the region, i.e. Yorks Creek VCA, an area consisting of 28.5 hectares.

With respect to the coastal areas of the Hunter region, as with other coastal areas of the State, 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. For example, there is some concern within the Aboriginal community at Karuah regarding traditional fishing rights in the newly formed marine park from Port Stephens to Forster as there has been little consultation with Aboriginal people.

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. There are pressures on the regional LALCs to sell land for development purposes, but as in other parts of the State, coastal developments on non-Aboriginal land are 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.

As a result of the land claims process under the *NSW Land Rights Act*, and more recently, some acquisitions through the Indigenous Land Corporation, Aboriginal people are increasing their land holdings in the Hunter-Central Rivers region. However, few parcels of land exceed 100 hectares and the majority of individual lots are less than one hectare. These parcels of land are generally not highly productive or valuable and are often in a degraded condition. Most productive land was 'taken

up' years ago and is too expensive for Aboriginal individuals or organisations to buy back, and only land that is not required for an 'essential public purpose' can be claimed under the *NSW Land Rights Act*. Nevertheless the Local Aboriginal Land Councils are among the largest private landholders in the region.

3.7 Families and Young People

The profile of Aboriginal families in the Hunter 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.

Like the Central Coast, an unusually high proportion of retirees live in the Hunter region. 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 8: Profile of family structures in the Hunter region

3.7.1 Services for Families

Two Ways Together working parties in the Hunter region report that there is a distinct lack of services for families available in the region. Lack of adequate housing, a shortage of culturally appropriate medical and aged care services, and inadequate availability of drug and alcohol counselling are some of the more important areas that need addressing.

There are a number of NSW Government-run programs and projects currently operating in the Hunter which provide services specifically oriented to Aboriginal families. These include Aboriginal family support services and workers in Broadmeadow (Muloobinba), Mayfield, the mid Hunter, Upper Hunter and Port Stephens, youth services and youth project officers in various locations, and a number of sports programs and projects. There is also a Women's and Children's Refuge (Warlga Ngurra) at Wallsend, and an Awabakal Crisis Accommodation Project which draws on SAAP and CAP funding.

3.7.2 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

In 2004, rates of sexual assault involving Aboriginal people in the Hunter were significantly higher than for the total population in the region, at approximately 172 per 100,000, compared to approximately 82 per 100,000 for the total regional population. These rates are, however, somewhat lower than the rates for Aboriginal people across the whole State, which were 192 per 100,000 people in 2004

The victimisation rate for domestic violence for Aboriginal people in the region in 2004 was approximately 14.3 per 1,000. This is almost three times the rate for the total population in the region (at 4.9 per 1,000), although it is around 75% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people, at 24.9 per 1,000.¹⁸

Aboriginal women in the Hunter are almost four times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be the victims of domestic-violence related assault, and more than three times more likely to be victims than Aboriginal men. However, on the basis of data available for the whole State for the period from 1998 to 2002, it is apparent that Aboriginal women are seven to eight times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to be the victims of domestic-violence related assault, and two to three times more likely to be victims of sexual assault as non-Aboriginal women.¹⁹ These data suggest that while domestic violence and sexual assault is an ongoing problem for Aboriginal women in the Hunter, it is not as serious a problem as in some other parts of the State.

It is not clear from the available information whether there are sufficient family refuges and crisis housing in the Hunter, or whether there is any emergency housing for young people, although Awabakal runs a crisis accommodation project under SAAP/CAP.

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.

¹⁸ The source for all of these data is the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (sp06_3721).

¹⁹ *Two Ways Together Indicator Report*, June 2005, p. 61.

4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community Priorities

At the time of publishing this report, the Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC) and Department of Aboriginal Affairs had been involved in consultations for several months with Aboriginal communities in the Hunter to develop a plan that addresses local priorities. While the consultations are ongoing, it is possible to identify a number of priority areas for the region, and to suggest actions designed to advance Aboriginal interests.

It can also be noted that 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*, although the order of priorities identified by the community more recently does not exactly match those identified under those aforementioned plans. The priority areas identified by the community are:

4.1.1 Housing

As in the Central Coast region, there is insufficient public housing to meet the needs of the community. Some Aboriginal communities in the region, such as the Gloucester community, report little or no access to Department of Housing or Aboriginal Housing Office stock. Racist attitudes in the regional areas also impact upon Aboriginal peoples' ability to access rental properties in the private rental market. A number of communities have pointed out that 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 only Aboriginal Legal Service in the region is in Newcastle), and a lack of cultural awareness training for court workers. Earlier community consultations conducted in the region by other government agencies have identified the need for post-release support programs and services for Aboriginal men and women in the Hunter.

Poor relationships between Aboriginal people and local police officers in the region has also been raised by one of the communities, and require some concerted effort by the relevant agencies to work through the issues involved.

While there are Aboriginal-specific youth services and youth support workers in the Hunter, the region is so large and the communities so dispersed that it seems extremely difficult for the existing services and workers to cover the whole region.

4.1.3 Health and Substance Abuse

Aboriginal people in the rural areas of the region have argued that they either have to travel long distances to gain access to basic medical and dental services, or do not use mainstream medical services in their local areas because they feel that local doctors and nurses are not sufficiently sensitive to Aboriginal cultural issues, and because they feel there is a lack of patient confidentiality in their small communities. Drug and alcohol abuse is also a problem which requires more targeted attention and resources. Earlier community consultations conducted in the region by other government agencies have identified the need for a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre for women in the Hunter.

4.1.4 Families and Young People

A number of communities have complained of a severe lack of access to Aboriginal family support services, some of which relate to the isolation of these services from mainstream organisational networks. Aboriginal families tend not to access mainstream human services because past experience with workers in those services has suggested that they have not been trained to work with Aboriginal people. Earlier community consultations conducted in the region by other government agencies have identified men's programs, grief and loss counselling, and gambling counselling in the Hunter as other priority areas. It can also be noted that some of the rural communities in the region have no community centre in which to meet and organise.

4.1.5 Education and Training

Some Aboriginal communities in the region have argued that their children are discouraged from continuing with school education by their teachers, and that there is a general lack of cultural awareness amongst teachers and within the schools. They have also complained of a high rate of Aboriginal students being expelled from schools and that the schools should be required to have local Aboriginal community input into the school curricula, including local elders being invited to pass on Aboriginal lore to students, and to assist teachers in cultural awareness training. Scholarships and bursaries for children wanting to study outside their local areas have also been suggested. Earlier community consultations conducted in the region by other government agencies have identified the need for an Aboriginal-specific school in the region, along the lines of the Cherbourg model.

4.1.6 Employment

While unemployment for Aboriginal people in most of the region is considerably lower than the state average, some LGAs, such as Lake Macquarie, have Aboriginal unemployment rates of around 25%. Many Aboriginal people throughout the region have complained of limited employment opportunities, a lack of recognition by employers of the value of CDEP training programs, and lack of adequate transport to get to and from work.

4.2 Analysis of Need

An overview of the demographic information detailed previously suggests, with a high proportion (58%) of the Aboriginal population aged 25 years or younger, funding should be directed at 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 Hunter 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">• Cardiovascular disease• Diabetes• Infectious diseases• Alcohol use• Environmental health• Median income• Sexual assault & domestic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Housing• Adult incarceration rates• Services for families• Levels of tertiary education

The areas of greater disadvantage are generally also community priorities, according to the information provided to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the ICC during community consultations. 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. Systemic racism in the education and justice systems has also been identified as a more general problem in the region.

4.3 Issues for Consideration

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

1. The data relating to health suggests that there are a number of areas, such as basic medical services in some of the rural communities, as well as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dental health, which require a review of the resources currently allocated for the Hunter by NSW Health.
2. Opportunities should be explored to work with the Attorney General's Department, NSW Police and the Department of Corrective Services to address the issues of juvenile diversions and more legal and counselling support for juvenile and adult Aboriginal people in contact with the justice system.
3. Considering the community's concerns about the lack of affordable housing in the region and the need for crisis accommodation, the Aboriginal Housing Office, Department of Housing, Department of Community Services and Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare representatives could be invited to discuss these issues with the relevant community organisations and representatives.
4. Manufacturing employs 15% of Aboriginal men in the region, but has below average prospects. This suggests that 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.
5. The data and the community consultations indicate that education and training initiatives should be a higher priority, and some discussion needs to be held with DET about priority areas for funding and resource allocation. Alleged racism and lack of Aboriginal cultural awareness amongst teaching staff in some of the rural schools should also be addressed as a priority.

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. In particular, Aboriginal people often express a lack of confidence in utilising community buses which 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.

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 and some public servants.

“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.

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

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Attachment 1

Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)

As of March 2006, there were two Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) signed with Aboriginal communities in the Hunter, one in Muswellbrook, and the other in Barkuma (Kurri Kurri).

The Muswellbrook SRA is called “Hot Wheels”, and was signed on 24 March 2005. It includes some in-kind support from the NSW Government.

The Barkuma SRA is called “Better facilities for the neighbourhood centre”, and was signed on 11 May 2005. It undertakes to provide Commonwealth funds to refurbish the local community centre, repair the fence and upgrade the walkway. It also ensures that a CDEP position is available for administrative support in the centre. Work on the refurbishment is now completed and a new administrative staffer is currently being sought to replace the previous staffer who recently moved out of area.

Two other SRAs have recently been signed off, the first of which provides funds for expanding existing mobile preschools to work two days per week in the Aboriginal communities of Maitland, Lake Macquarie and Karuah. It includes the employment of a Project Coordinator to work with local parents and carers, and the training and employment of Aboriginal assistants to work with mobile preschool staff in running preschool activities. The other SRA aims to re-engage Aboriginal youth in employment and education. It provides funds to train Aboriginal youth workers for mainstream services, and to support and develop the existing regional youth leadership network and community education partnerships.