



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Illawarra / South-East

– November 2006 –



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers together data¹ about Aboriginal people² and the government services provided to them in the Illawarra/South-East 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 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 the 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 Illawarra/South-East. There is a brief overview of the local economy, in which employment is most commonly in the school education, iron and steel manufacturing, specialised food retailing, government administration, and hospitals and nursing home sectors.

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

² In this report, the term 'Aboriginal' refers specifically to the Aboriginal people of New South Wales. Where 'Aboriginal' is used, it refers to a person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which s/he lives.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focusing on demographics and population projections. This chapter reveals that the Aboriginal population has a very large cohort of young people, with 58% under the age of 25 years. By contrast, the older age group is very small with only 2.8% of the Aboriginal population aged 65 years and over.

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in the Illawarra/ South-East region. This data reveals that the Aboriginal population in this region has relatively high levels of disadvantage in cardiovascular diseases and diabetes; alcohol use and alcohol related trauma; Years 10 to 12 retention and attainment, Year 3 and Year 5 literacy and numeracy; economic development, and diversion of juveniles from court.

Chapter 4 provides a snapshot of the current environment by summarising the needs identified through 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.

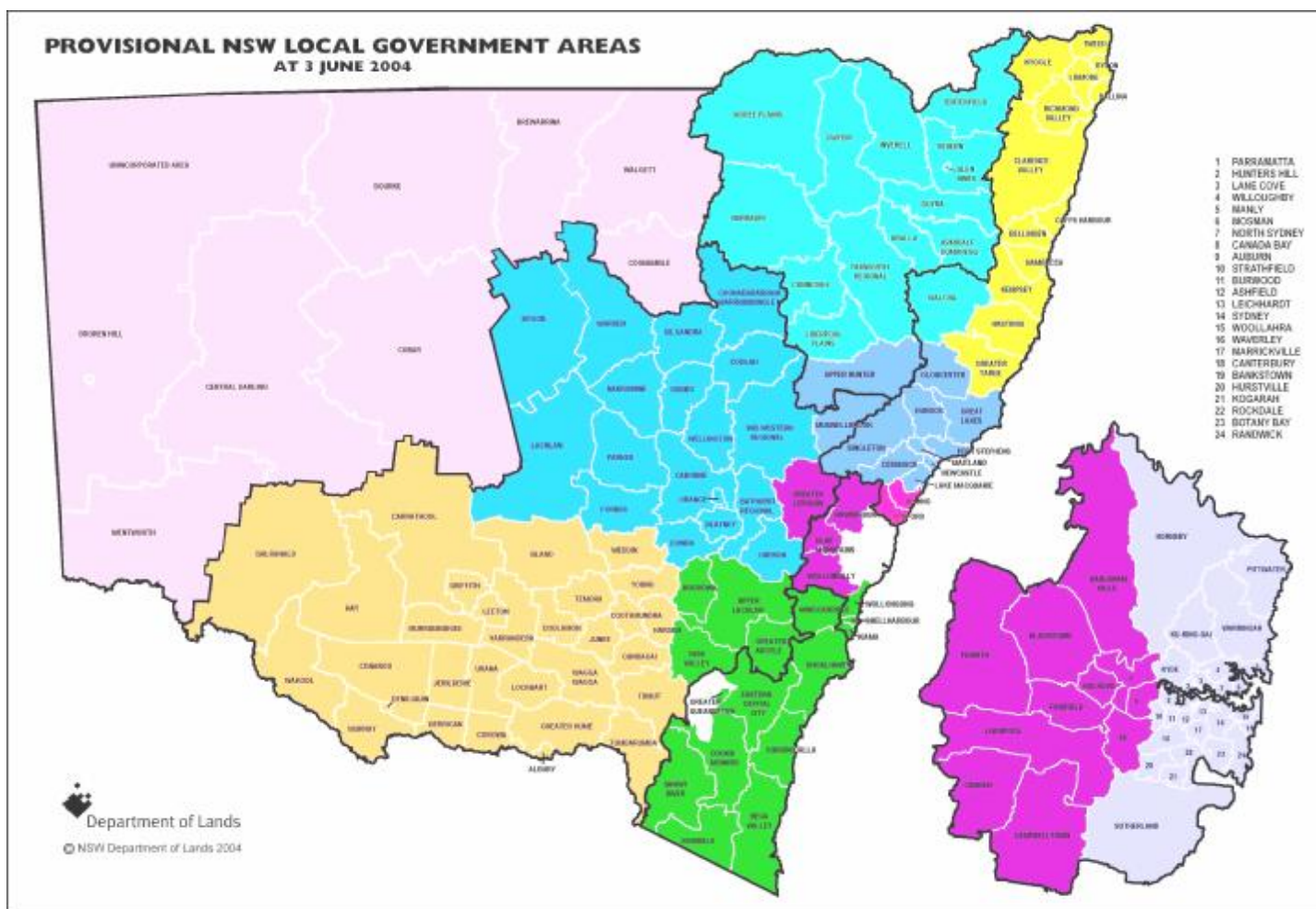


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSC and LGA boundaries

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 region is shown on the map at **Figure 2**. It extends from the Victorian border north to the Royal National Park (which is immediately north of Wollongong), and inland to Queanbeyan. The region covers 7% of New South Wales. It incorporates the former Queanbeyan ATSIIC region, as well as the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley, which were parts of the Sydney and Binala Billa ATSIIC regions.



Figure 2: NSW Local Government Areas in South-East NSW

There are 16 Local Government Areas in the region:

- Bega Valley
- Bombala
- Boorowa
- Cooma-Monaro
- Eurobodalla
- Goulburn-Mulwaree
- Kiama
- Palerang
- Queanbeyan
- Shellharbour
- Shoalhaven
- Snowy River
- Upper Lachlan
- Wingecarribee
- Wollongong
- Yass Valley



Figure 3

1.2 Local Planning for Aboriginal Communities

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. In practice, some plans are out-of-date, some are still being drafted, and newly created councils such as Palerang (an amalgamation of Yarrawlumla and Tallaganda councils) are yet to develop a social plan.

Social plans vary widely in scope, but many include innovative arrangements. For example, the Bega Valley Shire Council has developed a Memorandum of Understanding with native title holders and Local Aboriginal Lands Councils in Eden, Bega and Merrimans on cultural heritage, development, planning, economic and social priorities.³ Eurobodalla Shire has an Aboriginal Consultative Council that assists and advises in planning and resolving issues important to the Aboriginal community.⁴

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

The Illawarra/South-East Region is the traditional country of eleven Aboriginal peoples:

• Dhadaroa	• Dhurga	• Nggunawal	• Walbunga
• Dharawal	• Gundungarra	• Waddi-Waddi	• Wolgal
• Dhawa	• Ngarigu	• Wandanian	

The region includes six main language groups: Yuin, Ngarigu, Nggunawal, Gundungurra, Dharawal, and Monaro.

³ Bega Valley Shire Council, Social Plan, 2006-2009 (www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au).

⁴ Eurobodalla Shire Council, Social Plan 2005-2009 (www.esc.nsw.gov.au).

1.4 Land

There are 15 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) in the region, although most of the Pejar and Onerwal LALCs fall within the Riverina-Murray region:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Batemans Bay • Bega • Bodalla • Cobowra • Eden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illawarra • Jerrinja • Merrimans • Mogo • Ngunnawal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nowra • Onerwal • Pejar • Ulladulla • Wagonga
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1.5 The Regional Economy

The economy of the Illawarra/South-East region has significant variation between the metropolitan areas of the Illawarra, centred on Wollongong, and the South-East and coastal hinterland. Wollongong has the largest share of all jobs (38%), followed by the Shoalhaven (14%). Eurobodalla has the smallest share (5%).

The largest occupation is Sales Assistant (7,740 people). The main employing industries in the region as a whole are (in order) school education, iron and steel manufacturing, specialised food retailing, government administration, and hospitals and nursing homes.

The top five industry employers of **men** are:

<i>Non-Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Aboriginal Men</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing (16%) • Retail (13%) • Construction (13%) • Property & Business Services (9%) • Government Administration & Defence (6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction (12%) • Manufacturing (12%) • Government Administration & Defence (10%) • Retail (10%) • Health & Community Services (8%)

The top five industry employers of Aboriginal men have average or above prospects for future employment and growth. The exception is manufacturing, which has below average prospects.⁵

The top five industry employers of **women** are:

<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (19%) • Health & Community Services (18%) • Education (12%) • Property & Business Services (10%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (9%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Community Services (22%) • Retail (14%) • Education (13%) • Government Administration & Defence (11%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (8%)

⁵ Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Job Outlook 2004* (www.workplace.gov.au).

The top five industry employers of Aboriginal women all have good to very good prospects.⁶

1.5.1 Where are the job vacancies?

In early December 2005, job networks in the Illawarra/South-East listed almost 900 job vacancies. The top five occupations with vacancies were:

- Labourers, Factory and Machine Workers (21% of vacancies)
- Food, Hospitality and Tourism (16%)
- Marketing and Sales Representatives (9%)
- Sales Assistants and Storepersons (8%)
- Social, Welfare and Security (7%)

1.5.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

There are five CDEP organisations that were employing a total of approximately 350 people at the end of 2005. The CDEP organisations are based in Moruya, Nowra, Primbee, Queanbeyan and Wallaga Lake. The majority of CDEP participants are men (65%).

⁶ Ibid.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 Demographics

The 2001 Census estimated the total population in the region as 593,000, of which 13,100⁷ are Aboriginal people. On the basis of these statistics, the Aboriginal population represents 2.2% of the total regional population, and 9.8% of the total NSW Aboriginal population.

The region's population is concentrated in Wollongong (the third largest city in New South Wales), which has 32% of the total regional population (190,000). However, Wollongong has a lower proportion of the region's Aboriginal population: 23.4%. The largest proportion of Aboriginal people live in Shoalhaven (27%).

The total regional population is projected to increase by an estimated 9% between 2001 and 2009.⁸ In contrast, the Aboriginal population is projected to increase from 13,100 in 2001, to between 15,000 and 17,800 (low series and high series, respectively) in 2009 – or between 15% and 36%.⁹

The Aboriginal population is even more unevenly distributed than the total population. Coastal LGAs have the largest Aboriginal populations, especially Bega, Eden, Jervis Bay Territory, Narooma, Nowra and Wollongong. Queanbeyan has the most significant inland community. There are five discrete communities in Bomaderry, Coomaditchie, Jerinja (Orient Point), Wallaga Lake and Wreck Bay (in the Jervis Bay Territory)¹⁰, three of which were former missions.

In 2001, the Aboriginal population in the various LGAs were as follows:¹¹

Shoalhaven	3,402	Bega Valley	734	Palerang	128
Wollongong	2,965	Wingecarribee	554	Cooma-Monaro	95
Eurobodalla	1,543	Goulburn-Mul.	462	Snowy River	47
Shellharbour	1,350	Kiama	217	Boorowa	33
Queanbeyan	929	Yass	205	Bombala	23

Shoalhaven and Wollongong are respectively the sixth and eighth largest LGAs in New South Wales in terms of the total number of Aboriginal residents. The LGA with the largest *proportion* of Aboriginal people in the region is Eurobodalla Shire Council: 4.5% of its population are Aboriginal.

A comparison of the age structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations illuminates the youthfulness of the Aboriginal population, with 58% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being less than 25 years old. In contrast, only 2.8% of the Aboriginal

⁷ 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.

⁸ NSW Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources, NSW State and Regional Population Projects 2001-2051 (www.planning.nsw.gov.au).

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Experimental Projections of ATSI Australians, ATSI Regions, 2001-2009 (Canberra: ABS: Cat. No. 3238.0.55.002).

¹⁰ Note that Jervis Bay, which includes the Wreck Bay community, is a separate territory and is not legally part of the New South Wales jurisdiction.

¹¹ Figures are not available for Upper Lachlan LGA, which did not exist at the time of the 2001 Census.

population is aged 65 years and over, whereas 15.1% of the non-Aboriginal population is aged 65 years and over.

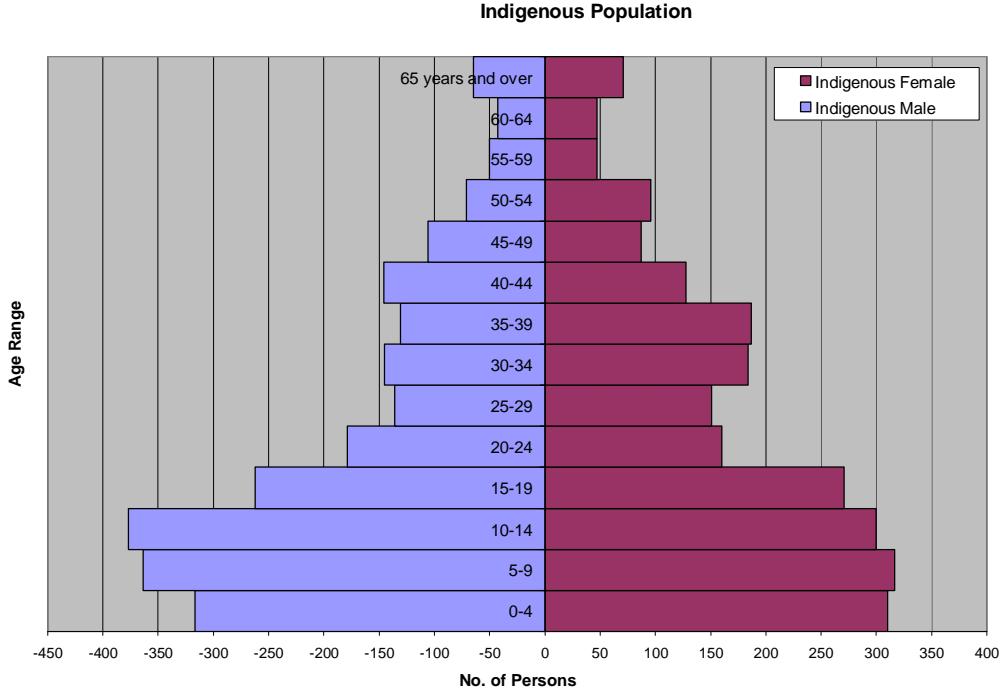


Table 1: Age Distribution by Aboriginal Population

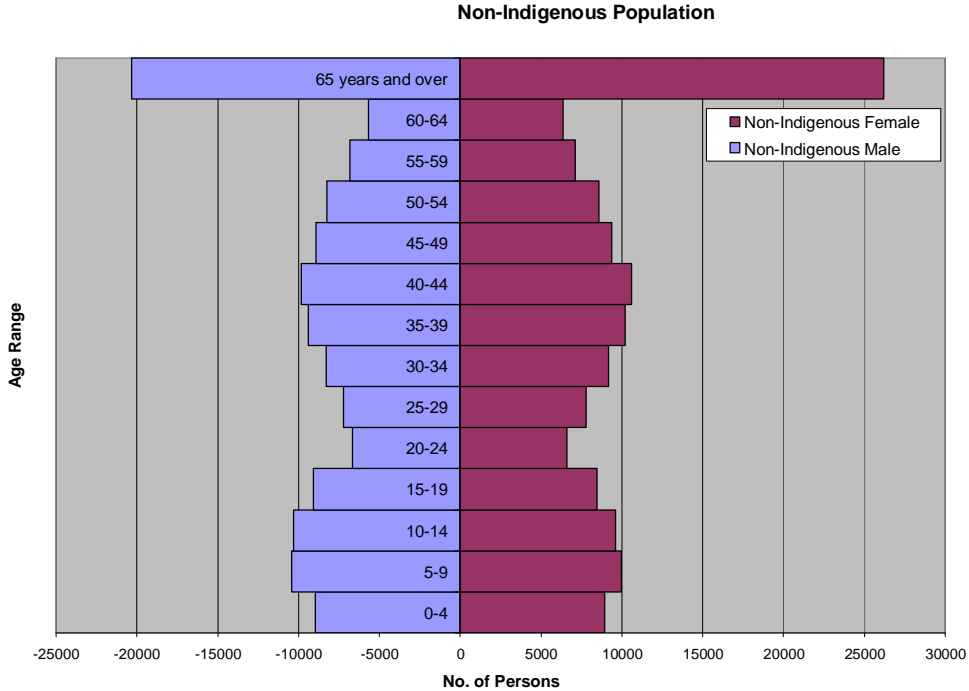


Table 2: Age Distribution by Non-Aboriginal Population

One of the most interesting aspects of the region’s demography is the gender imbalance. In the 0-25 year old age group for the non-Aboriginal population there are 4.5% more males than females, but in the Aboriginal population there are 6.4% more males than females. The fact that there is an imbalance in the larger population suggests that biology may play a role (after all, more boys are born than girls), but it is not clear why this effect is exaggerated for the Aboriginal population.

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East region is complicated. In some respects, the region ranks reasonably well when compared with other RCMG regions, but does quite poorly in other areas.

For example, rates of cardiovascular disease in the Aboriginal population are only slightly lower than the average for the rest of the State, but considerably higher than those for the non-Aboriginal population in the Illawarra/South-East and throughout the State. Diabetes and hospital separation¹² rates for infectious diseases and skin infections are much lower than the state average for Aboriginal people, but also still considerably higher than those for the non-Aboriginal population. On the other hand, hospital separation rates for alcohol and trauma attributed to alcohol are around the average for the Aboriginal population in the rest of the State, but much higher than the rate in the non-Aboriginal population. Maternal health is another issue which requires more attention in the region.

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 2006.¹³

The data below provide clear evidence that more needs to be done to address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East 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 Illawarra/South-East region that were born with a low birth weight remained virtually static over the period between 1993 and 2004, with some minor fluctuations. Over the same period, the numbers of Aboriginal babies born in the region also remained fairly stable.

Between 1999 and 2001, 11.4% of Aboriginal babies in the Illawarra/South-East region were born with low birth weight, which is somewhat lower than the rate for all Aboriginal babies born in New South Wales during that period. Between 2002 and 2004, 10.7% 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 third lowest figure for RCMG regions in the State after the Central Coast and Hunter regions, 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.

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

¹² 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 change of separation occurs when an episode of care ends because the type of care provided to the patient changes.

¹³ 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.

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 Illawarra/South-East had the equal second highest figures in New South Wales for visits to antenatal clinics, with 74.7% 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 significantly 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 Illawarra/South-East, which is actually the third highest in the State for non-Aboriginal women, at 92.8%. These data suggest that more needs to be done to raise the awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst Aboriginal mothers in the Illawarra/South-East.

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 separation for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East region were around 5% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 2,899 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. This rate is around 34% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 25% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in the Illawarra/South-East (2,318 per 100,000).

While the rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has risen by around 23% between 1993 and 2005, this overall trend is consistent with that seen in the Aboriginal population 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 Illawarra/South-East region rose dramatically between 1993-96 (256 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (494 per 100,000). The rate in the period from 2002 to 2005 was therefore almost double the rate from 1993 to 1996. However, it is still around 50% lower than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, but is more than double the rate for the total NSW non-Aboriginal population (236 per 100,000).

Given the across-the-board increases in the incidence of the disease amongst both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people between 1993 and 2005, it seems likely that the diabetes rate is genuinely increasing amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East 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 Illawarra/South-East region during the period from 2002 to 2005 is significantly lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 2.5 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000, although it is somewhat higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (1.5 per 100,000). It is, however, about 20% lower than 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 28% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 25% higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 312 per 100,000, compared to 249 per 100,000. It is around 29% higher than the rate for the total NSW population (242 per 100,000), and is almost half the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

The worsening of the statistics amongst the general population with respect to the rate of hospital separations for skin infections in the Illawarra/South-East and across the State between 1993 and 2005 suggests that the increase in the rates amongst Aboriginal people over the same period is not an artefact of under-reporting of Aboriginality by Aboriginal people in the region.

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. Hospital separation rates attributed to trauma from alcohol throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by around 30% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East region during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 6% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 1,889 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000. However, it is three-and-a-half times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region and throughout the State during the same period (546 and 537 per 100,000, respectively).

The rate of hospital separations for trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East during the period from 2002 to 2005 is only slightly lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 482 per 100,000, compared to 497 per 100,000. However, it is around double the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (246 per 100,000), and 125% 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 trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 is consistent with the worsening of the statistics across the general population for this indicator. This 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.

The statistics on housing cited below apply to the former Queanbeyan ATSI region, and are therefore not necessarily representative of conditions in the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley, which were parts of the Sydney and Binalong Billa ATSI regions. However, the environmental health data at 3.2.1 does apply to the Illawarra/South-East RCMG region.

In 2001, 37% of Aboriginal people in the former Queanbeyan ATSI region owned or were purchasing their homes, compared to 72% of non-Aboriginal people. The proportion of Aboriginal people who are home owners or buyers is 3% higher than in 1996.

The average size of a household with Aboriginal occupants was 3.2 persons per dwelling, compared to 2.6 for dwellings with no Aboriginal occupants. These figures remain unchanged from 1996 to 2001.

In 2001, 0.7% of Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) dwellings occupied by Aboriginal people and 6% of 'social dwellings' (mostly public housing) occupied by Aboriginal people were considered overcrowded. The figure for AHO dwellings is the lowest of all ATSI regions. The figure for social housing is marginally below the rate for New South Wales (6.3%), but still 2.4 times that for non-Aboriginal households (2.5%). Nevertheless, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal households that are over-crowded is the smallest of any ATSI region.

Further analysis of these housing issues will be reliant on the availability of data from the AHO and the Department of Housing (DoH).

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 in the Illawarra/South-East are comparatively less crowded than elsewhere, and environmental health standards appear to reflect this fact, although there has still been an increase in the rates of the relevant infections over the period 1993 to 2005.

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 825 per 100,000, but had risen to 993 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a 20% increase over twelve years. The

Illawarra/South-East figures for the period 2002-05 are 50% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), but are 60% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (623 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people in the Illawarra/South-East during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 103 per 100,000, but had risen to 188 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a more than 80% increase over twelve years. The Illawarra/South-East figures for the period 2002-05 are around a third lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and around 13% lower than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (217 per 100,000).

3.3 Justice

The former Queenbeyan ATSI Region has some of the lowest rates of victimisation and adult contact with the justice system in New South Wales. The exception is juveniles, which have more contact with the justice system compared to juveniles in other regions.

The information below was sourced from the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, June 2005, and applies to the Queenbeyan ATSI Region. It is therefore not necessarily representative of conditions in the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley

3.3.1 Victim Rates

In 1999/2000, the rate of hospital separations for assault-related injuries for Aboriginal people in the Queenbeyan ATSI region was approximately 350 per 100,000, compared to approximately 60 for non-Aboriginal people. This is approximately 30% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (around 530 per 100,000) and is the second lowest for an ATSI region.

Rates of assault victimisation show a similar pattern. The rate for Aboriginal people is approximately 3,400 per 100,000, compared to approximately 1,140 for non-Aboriginal people. The rate is approximately 25% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales.

3.3.2 Adults

In 2002 and 2003, the rate of imprisonment of adults and the rate of adults on remand were the lowest of any region in New South Wales for both Aboriginal *and* non-Aboriginal people. However, Aboriginal adults in the region still have far more contact with the justice system compared to the non-Aboriginal population:

	Adult Imprisonment Rate per 100,000	Adults on Remand Rate per 100,000
Aboriginal Adults in Illawarra/South-East	480	150
Non-Aboriginal Adults in Illawarra/South-East	40	10
Aboriginal Adults in NSW	980	250

Circle sentencing

New South Wales has seen the development of 'Circle Sentencing' as an alternative sentencing court for adult Aboriginal offenders. Circle Sentencing involves local Aboriginal people and Elders deciding the sentence that will be given to an Aboriginal community member found guilty of an offence by a magistrate. The aim of Circle Sentencing is to make it more meaningful and to improve the Aboriginal communities' confidence in the criminal justice system. Circle Sentencing also empowers Aboriginal people to directly address criminal behaviour within their local communities.

Circle Sentencing was introduced in Nowra in February 2002. It aims to:

- prevent crime and reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in courts and jails;
- allow greater Aboriginal involvement in the criminal justice process, particularly at the community level;
- provide support to Aboriginal victims of crime; and
- increase Aboriginal satisfaction with the operations of the criminal justice system.

As a result of the success of Circle Sentencing in Nowra, it has been expanded to six other towns (Armidale, Bourke, Brewarrina, Kempsey, Lismore and Walgett) and is soon to expand into Western Sydney.

The evaluation reveals that circle sentencing at Nowra has succeeded on a number of levels. For example, this novel procedure:

- reduces the barriers that currently exists between the courts and Aboriginal people
- leads to improvements in the level of support for Aboriginal offenders
- incorporates support for victims, promotes healing and reconciliation
- increase confidence and generally promotes the empowerment of Aboriginal persons in the community
- introduces more relevant and meaningful sentencing options for Aboriginal offenders, with the help of respected community members, and
- helps to break the cycle of recidivism.

The penalties imposed by the circle (were found to be) no less onerous than those imposed for similar offences in conventional courts. However, as the procedure is less formal, the offenders are more likely to "sit up and take notice" and appreciate the harm caused to the victim. In this regard there is generally an acceptance of responsibility as well as an apology for the offending behaviour – a platform upon which rehabilitation can be built.

Members of the community participate, not only in the sentencing decisions, but with a preparedness to assist offenders to develop pride in their culture and confidence in themselves long after they leave the circle. A survey of the key participants (offenders, victims, lawyers, community representatives and support persons) revealed a high level of satisfaction with circle sentencing.

Ultimately, circle sentencing provides a recipe for changing offending behaviour and reclaiming offenders who might otherwise pursue a life of crime. Having succeeded in Nowra it seems appropriate that the circle sentencing should now be expanded to other regions of the State where there are viable Aboriginal communities and offenders with ties to the community.

3.3.3 Juvenile Diversion¹⁴

In contrast to adults in the region, juveniles appear to have more contact with the justice system compared to other parts of the State.

For example, in 2002, only 50% of juveniles were diverted from the court system – the second lowest rate after Sydney and below the NSW average of 58% for Aboriginal juveniles. The gap between the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal juveniles diverted from court was also larger than in any other region except for Sydney, with 84% of non-Aboriginal juveniles being diverted from court in the Illawarra/South-East.

3.4 Economic Development

The statistics on economic development cited below apply to the former Queanbeyan ATSI region, and are therefore not necessarily representative of conditions in the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley.

3.4.1 Employment and Unemployment

In 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal persons aged 15 years or more who were employed (39%), was slightly higher than the average for Aboriginal people in non-Sydney New South Wales (36%). However, the employment rate was much lower than the proportion of non-Aboriginal persons employed in the Illawarra (52%) and South-East (57%).

Aboriginal people also had lower rates of participation in the workforce in 2001: 52% in the Illawarra (compared to 57% for non-Aboriginal people in the Illawarra) and 51% in the South-East (compared to 61% for non-Aboriginal people in the South-East). Lower participation rates can partly be accounted for by the younger, school-aged, population, which is not looking for work and hence not participating in the workforce.

In 2001, there was an average Aboriginal unemployment rate of 25.5%, compared to an average total unemployment rate of 6%. The Local Government Area (LGA) with the highest Aboriginal unemployment was Nowra-Bomaderry (34.3%). The LGA with the lowest unemployment was Wingecarribee (Southern Highlands; 17.4%), closely followed by Queanbeyan (17.8%).

3.4.2 Income

In 2001, the median Aboriginal *family* income for the Illawarra/South-East region was \$708 per week – 32% less than the median non-Aboriginal family income (\$1,030). Lower incomes are a product of lower employment rates, employment in lower paying occupations and the younger age of the Aboriginal population.

In 2001, the median Aboriginal *household*¹⁵ income state wide was \$676 per week – 21% less than the median non-Aboriginal household income (\$858). 28% of

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.

Aboriginal households in the region were below the poverty line. 40% of Aboriginal children lived in households with incomes below the poverty line.

3.4.3 Businesses

In December 2003, there were 12 Aboriginal businesses in the Illawarra and ten in the South-East, making a total of 22 for the region.

3.5 Education

The region ranks comparatively well in some aspects of education, but poorly in others. These contradictions are not easy to explain from the data available.

The statistics below were sourced from either the *2001 Census*, the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators* (June 2005) or from the Department of Education and Training's Planning and Innovation Directorate *Mid-Year Census 2003-2005*. While the latter information applies to the Illawarra/South-East RCMG region, the Census and Indicators Report information applies to the Queanbeyan ATSI region, and does not necessarily represent conditions in the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley. Where statistics for 2001 are provided, these are sourced from the Census or Indicators Report.

Over the last four years in the former Queanbeyan ATSI region and the last three years in the Illawarra, a number of specific initiatives have been funded for Aboriginal children in primary and high school through Families First, the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy and Better Futures. Both Illawarra and the South East made the decision to allocate 25% of their overall Families First budget to funding specific services for Aboriginal communities. In addition, Better Futures and the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy are committed to providing specific services to Aboriginal communities with an early intervention focus; particularly for transition to school and school retention in line with the outcomes and recommendations of the Aboriginal Education Review.

3.5.1 Years 3 and Year 5 Literacy and Numeracy

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 3 for Aboriginal students in the Illawarra/South-East in 2005 are marginally higher than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are seventeen 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 slightly higher than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are still eight to ten 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, 16.2% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 21.3% 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, 38.9% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 42.9% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 42.2% and 46.2% respectively, for all students across the State.

¹⁵ 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.

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 5 students in the region, 15.1% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 22.9% 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, 46.4% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 48.6% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

3.5.2 School Retention Rates

The Queenbeyan ATSIC Region was in the bottom group (with Kamilaroi and Murdi Paaki) of ATSIC regions for retention rates for Years 7-10 Aboriginal students in 2002. Approximately 73% of Year 7 Aboriginal students remained in school in Year 10 in 2002, compared to approximately 93% of non-Aboriginal students (a rate that is also below the average for New South Wales). However, retention rates to Year 12 *improved* compared to Aboriginal students in other ATSIC regions: 28% of Aboriginal Year 10 students remained in school until Year 12 (compared to 56% of non-Aboriginal students).

The region was just behind Sydney for the percentage of Aboriginal Year 12 students who met the requirements for a Year 12 certificate in 2002. However, the percentage of Aboriginal Year 10 students who met the requirements to attain a Year 10 Certificate is *below* the average for Aboriginal students in New South Wales.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate for Illawarra/South-East Aboriginal students in all schools for Years 10 to 12 was 32.2%, compared to 65.4% for all students in the region. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students in that year was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students in the Illawarra/South-East are remaining in school at well under half the state average for all students, and are also performing worse than the state average for Aboriginal students. These figures were the second worst for all RCMG regions in the State.

The above data suggest that while there are comparatively high drop-out rates before Year 10, Aboriginal students who remain in school after that year are slightly more likely to remain until Year 12 and meet the requirements of the Year 12 certificate. These data suggest that the Illawarra/South-East region needs to do considerably more to keep students at high school.

At the local level...

Schools as Community Centres have been introduced at three pilot schools in the Illawarra: Albion Park Rail, Berkley/Farmborough and Sanctuary Point. A steering committee has been formed and coordinators for each school have been appointed. Purpose built centres have been established at both Albion Park Rail and Sanctuary Point. Berkley/Farmborough will utilise space in a current school building. These centres will focus on engaging families to use the centres for playgroups, a visiting health nurse, forums, etc, whilst ensuring a family-friendly transition into the school arena.

The Transition to School (TTS) program has grown significantly in the past twelve months in Wollongong and Shellharbour. Big School Expos, a purpose-built website, Billy Back Pack – TTS Mascot, and forums for the region have lifted the profile of this

service in the Illawarra. An Aboriginal TTS pilot program was funded through an Aboriginal Early Childhood Centre. This program has just produced an evaluation report of the pilot. Thirty-five children attended the program, with a take-up rate to school of 31 children. The program has been very successful in achieving positive outcomes for children and families.

Bega Valley: In response to low retention rates and high unemployment for Aboriginal young people in the Bega Valley, the Shire Council developed an Aboriginal Education Scholarship for high school students and created Aboriginal traineeships as part of its Aboriginal Employment Program.

Eurobodalla Shire: 90% of Aboriginal primary school students attend school and 80% of Aboriginal high school students attend school. These rates are comparable to the non-Aboriginal population. 25% of Aboriginal students have a full attendance record, which is similar to non-Aboriginal students with a full attendance record (24%). However, Aboriginal students are over-represented in the group of students with very poor attendance records.

Noogaleek: The Noogaleek Transition to School Project was funded for the 2004-05 and 2005-06 financial years. The proposal supported Aboriginal children and their families in the transition from the Noogaleek Children's Centre to various primary schools, and built on the relationship between the families and education, both of which are vitally important to improving educational outcomes.

Shoalhaven: The Shoalhaven has just received funding to investigate Transition to School in the Shoalhaven. The first community forum was held in Nowra with over 60 parents, teachers and early childhood workers attending, thus demonstrating the importance and commitment of the community to this concept.

3.5.3 Tertiary Education

In 2001, an estimated 22% (1,476) of Aboriginal people aged 15 years or over had tertiary qualifications, compared to 42% of the non-Aboriginal population. This represents an increase of almost 50% (487) since 1996, when 18% of Aboriginal people reported having a tertiary qualification. In 2001, a further 669 Aboriginal people aged 15 years or over were studying for a tertiary qualification, suggesting that the Aboriginal population is both increasingly educated and educated to a higher level.

Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
Men	Women	Men	Women
Bachelor or + (5%)	Bachelor or + (6%)	Bachelor or + (18%)	Bachelor or + (17%)
Adv. Dip/Dip. (3%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (4%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (6%)	Adv. Dip/Dip. (8%)
Cert. Lev 3/4 (16%)	Cert. Lev 3/4 (5%)	Cert. Lev 3/4 (20%)	Cert. Lev 3/4 (5%)
Cert. Lev 1/2 (1%)	Cert. Lev 1/2 (3%)	Cert. Lev 1/2 (3%)	Cert. Lev 1/2 (4%)
Not Qualified (61%)	Not Qualified (68%)	Not Qualified (46%)	Not Qualified (55%)
Unclear (14%)	Unclear (13%)	Unclear (8%)	Unclear (11%)

Table 7: Tertiary qualifications of people in the Illawarra/South-East

Aboriginal women are more qualified than Aboriginal men, with the exception of the Certificate Levels 3 and 4, which are mostly for apprenticeships and traineeships in trades. Three times as many Aboriginal men have this level of qualification compared to Aboriginal women.

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 are more than three times more likely to have a Bachelor's degree, and more than twice as likely to have a Diploma or Advanced Diploma, than Aboriginal men.

Aboriginal men are 33% more likely to have no qualification compared to non-Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women are 24% more likely to have no qualification compared to non-Aboriginal women.

3.6 Culture and Heritage

The Illawarra/South-East is a 'hot spot' for new developments in, and issues affecting, Aboriginal culture and heritage. In particular, the region has become the site of a conflict between cultural values relating to land and cultural items found on that land (such as scar trees or middens) on the one hand, and development of land for residential and commercial purposes on the other.

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 resource 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).

According to the Department of Environment and Conservation, there are 9,130 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the 16 LGAs in the region.

There is a state-wide trend towards greater Aboriginal involvement in the management of National Parks, and the South-East has been at the forefront of these developments. In April 2006, the Biamunga and Gulaga National Parks in the Far South-East were handed back to their traditional Yuin Owners, who will jointly manage the Parks in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). This will make Biamanga-Gulaga the third jointly managed National Park in New South Wales.

Elsewhere in the region there are opportunities for co-management of the Jervis Bay Marine Park and potential for the Illawarra escarpment to be listed under Schedule 14 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The latter would mean it can be returned to traditional owners for leasing back to DEC.

There are six Aboriginal Places declared within the region:

- 1) Merriman Island Aboriginal Place
- 2) Two Sisters Aboriginal Place
- 3) Biamanga Aboriginal Place
- 4) Fox Ground Aboriginal Place
- 5) Barlings Beach Aboriginal Place
- 6) Dharawal Resting Place – North Era Beach

There is also one Aboriginal Area declared within the region, i.e., Murramarang Aboriginal Area.

With respect to the coastal areas of the Illawarra/South-East region, as with other coastal areas of the State, there is an ongoing dispute/tension 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.

In 2005, in a legal test case of state fishing laws and the rights of Aboriginal people to harvest traditional foods, 11 South-East men were fined or given suspended jail sentences as punishment for breaching fishing laws on the quantity and size of abalone they were harvesting. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs is advocating the use of Circle Sentencing for fishing offences.

3.6.2 Coastal Development

Increased migration to coastal areas – a national trend – is creating new demand for land and therefore new demands on Aboriginal communities. Much of the South-East is important to traditional Aboriginal communities for cultural and heritage reasons, and Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) also own some significant tracts of land. There are pressures on LALCs 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 statistics on families and young people cited below apply to the former Queanbeyan ATSI region, and are therefore not necessarily representative of conditions in the Local Government Areas of Boorowa, Greater Argyle, Kiama, Shell Harbour, Upper Lachlan, Wollongong and Yass Valley.

The profile of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal families is markedly different in key respects to that of non-Aboriginal people. While the proportion of Aboriginal families that are a couple with dependents (including children or students) is similar in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, there are far greater proportions of single parent families with dependents in the Aboriginal community, and far fewer couple families without children:

	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal
Couple family with dependents (children or students)	36%	40%
Single parent family with dependents	24%	10%
Couple family without children	40%	23%

At the local level, there are even greater differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. For example, in Eurobodalla Shire, 35% of all Aboriginal families are single parent families, compared to 15% of non-Aboriginal families – higher than regional averages for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.¹⁴

3.7.1 Services for Families

Over the last four years in the former Queanbeyan ATSI region and the last three years in the Illawarra, a number of specific initiatives have been funded for Aboriginal children and their families which have aimed to improve health outcomes. The Families First program has funded NSW Health to undertake a number of projects involving speech therapists visiting Families First playgroups to engage parents in discussions about their child’s speech. A book will now be produced for services from 2005-06 utilising one-off slippage funding to support the work of the speech therapist in early childhood services.

In addition, the Aboriginal Child, Youth and Family Strategy, while maintaining a focus on education for young children, has also supported a number of projects on parenting, with a particular focus on engaging very young parents. The areas covered in parenting projects have focused on good nutrition, speech and hearing for children and encouraging mums to quit smoking. Slippage funds for 2005-06 will have been allocated across all the region to produce a range of parenting books specific to local Aboriginal communities.

Local government also plays an important role in providing services for some Aboriginal communities in the region. For example, the Bega Valley Shire Council has made additional services for Aboriginal families a priority in its 2006-2011 Social Plan. Unfortunately, playgroups for Aboriginal children that previously operated in Eden and Bega have struggled since the cessation of funding from the Australian Government’s Families First Initiative.

3.7.2 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

In 2002, the victimisation rate for domestic violence (including assault and sexual assault) for Aboriginal people in the region was approximately 6.5 per 1,000. This is

more than three times the non-Aboriginal rate (approximately 2 per 1,000), but below the NSW average for Aboriginal people (8 per 1,000).

At the local level, the Queanbeyan City Council estimates that Aboriginal women comprise 43% of female crisis housing tenants in the city, even though Aboriginal people comprise only 2.9% of the Queanbeyan LGA population.

The number of Aboriginal children and young people involved in child protection reports for reasons of abuse or neglect is better for Aboriginal children in the region than for the rest of New South Wales, but is still higher than for non-Aboriginal children and young people. In 2002, the rate for the Illawarra/South-East was 16 per 1,000 – twice the non-Aboriginal rate (8 per 1,000), but substantially lower than any other ATSI region (including 20% lower than the Sydney region, which had the second lowest rate).

4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community priorities

The Queanbeyan ATSIC Regional Council consulted with Aboriginal communities to develop a plan that addressed their priorities.¹⁶ Seven priority areas were identified, and each has specific actions designed to advance Aboriginal interests. While the priority areas of the regional plan do not exactly match the priority areas of *Two Ways Together*, the plan notes that outcomes in one area will have an impact across Aboriginal society.¹⁷ It should also be noted that as there are seven LGAs which are part of the Illawarra/South-East RCMG region that were not part of the Queanbeyan ATSIC Region, the priorities identified by the ATSIC Regional Council do not necessarily apply to the other seven LGAs. These shortcomings will be addressed in future versions of this Report. The priority areas identified in the ATSIC plan are:

4.1.1 Health and Substance Abuse

Actions related to health and substance abuse focus on the ATSIC Council promoting, advocating and supporting Aboriginal interests through agreements, improving data collection and – in the case of substance abuse – seeking representation on related committees and meetings to ensure Aboriginal interests are considered.

4.1.2 Housing

Housing actions under the plan focus on ensuring sufficient funds are available to provide quality housing stock, promoting and monitoring ATSIC's home loan scheme (now taken over by Aboriginal Business Australia), and improving data collection.¹⁸

4.1.3 Law and Justice

This priority area focuses on reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the correctional system by supporting culturally appropriate legal services.

4.1.4 Employment

The 'employment' priority area includes economic development more generally as well. Actions focus on facilitating self-employment and enterprise development, developing a business loans policy, and collecting better data on employment issues.

4.1.5 Education, Training and Capacity Building

Actions focus on:

- building collaboration between education committees and organisations;
- undertaking a needs analysis of Aboriginal education; and
- determining whether education in the region is sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate regional education policy.

¹⁶ *Priority Actions: ATSIC Queanbeyan regional and operational plan 2004-2007* (Queanbeyan: Queanbeyan ATSIC Regional Council, 2004)

¹⁷ Queanbeyan ATSIC Regional Council, *Consultation Responses: ATSIC Queanbeyan regional and operational plan 2004 to 2007*, Queanbeyan, 2004, p. 6.

¹⁸ The home loan scheme was transferred to Aboriginal Business Australia (which falls under the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations) when ATSIC was abolished.

4.1.6 Governance

Actions for this priority are:

- clarifying and promoting the roles and responsibilities of the ATSIC Regional Council;
- educating Aboriginal organisations about their obligations under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1991*;
- building communities' capacity for community development; and
- improving the collection of data related to community organisation governance.

4.2 Analysis of Need

On the basis of community consultations and the socio-economic data contained within this report indicating on-going disadvantage (relative to other regions), it is apparent that the following areas warrant further evaluation:

4.2.1 Health

Need is most pressing for Aboriginal adults in this region, who generally have average or poorer health when compared with Aboriginal adults in other regions. Aboriginal children in this region, however, have relatively better health outcomes than many Aboriginal children in other regions.

4.2.2 Youth Development

An overview of the demographic information detailed previously suggests that, 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.

4.2.3 Justice

The data reveals that the low rate of juvenile diversions are an issue in the Illawarra/South-East, as Aboriginal children in this region are less likely to be diverted from court once they come into contact with the justice system, and law and justice is one of the community priorities.

4.2.4 Education

Education is a priority for the community and the data indicates particular disadvantage in relation to literacy and numeracy, and high school retention rates between Years 10 and 12.

4.2.5 Employment and Training

The community consultations indicate that employment programs and training should be given a higher priority.

4.2.6 Summary

The socio-economic indicators also identify the Illawarra/South-East 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"> • Infectious diseases • Housing • Environmental health • Sexual assault & domestic violence rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult incarceration rates • Services for families • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy • Years 10 to 12 retention rates • Levels of tertiary education • Maternal and infant health

These areas are also community priorities according to the ATSI consultation information. In addition to health, education, employment, training and justice, the community has also given high priority to community organisation governance, capacity building and housing. The first two of these are difficult to obtain comparative data on, so the extent of disadvantage in these areas is difficult to ascertain.

4.3 Issues for Consideration

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

1. The data relating to education suggests that Aboriginal children in this region are less likely to complete Years 10 and 12 than Aboriginal children in other regions. This suggests that the region needs to develop programs and services supporting students in school between Years 10 and 12.
2. The employment figures showed that manufacturing employed 12% of Aboriginal men in 2001 (and 16% of non-Aboriginal men – it is a negligible employer of women), but has below average prospects. This suggests that young Aboriginal men should be encouraged to seek careers in other industries.
3. There appears to be a need to address the lack of programs supporting community organisation governance and capacity building, in spite of it being a community priority.
4. The relatively low number of employment initiatives, which the data and the community consultations indicate should be a higher priority, suggests that more needs to be done in this area.
5. The low rate of juvenile diversions and continuing high levels of community concern about justice, in spite of there being a number of justice initiatives, especially juvenile diversion programs, also suggests more needs to be done in this area.
6. The continuing high levels of diabetes and cardiovascular problems in the region raises questions as to whether the existing programs to address these health issues are adequate and effective.

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 that are not 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.

“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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