



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Mid-Western New South Wales

– November 2006 –



TWO WAYS TOGETHER REGIONAL REPORT Mid-Western New South Wales

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers together data¹ about Aboriginal people and the government services provided to them in the Mid-West 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 that 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 Mid-West region. There is a brief overview of the local economy, employment is most commonly in manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and mining, construction, retail trade, Government administration (health, education and community services) and defence.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focused on the demographics and population projections. This chapter reveals that out-migration is a key demographic feature of the North West, Northern and Far West. The Aboriginal population is comparatively young with 58% under the age of 25 years and a small population over 65 years.

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

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in the Mid-West region. This data reveals disadvantage for Aboriginal people across the health, justice, education and economic development indicators. The region has the highest rate of low birth weight babies in New South Wales, as well as high rates of cardio-vascular disease, diabetes and alcohol-related hospitalisations. With respect to justice issues, there is a very high victimisation rate for domestic violence involving Aboriginal young people.

Young people are also more likely to receive a community service order, a supervised order or a custodial sentence for similar offences and less likely to receive bail than Aboriginal young people in other regions. The region also has low rates of Years 3 and Year 5 literacy and numeracy and retention rates for Years 7 to 12. While housing in the region is improving, with a high rate of home ownership compared to other regions and lower rates of overcrowding, environmental health problems in the region are on the increase. Access to lands for cultural purposes is problematic where there is no formal title recognised and no formal land use agreements in place.

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
- Mid-West
- North Coast
- New England/North West
- Western NSW/Murdi Paaki
- Mid-Western NSW
- Riverina/Murray

- Illawarra/South East.

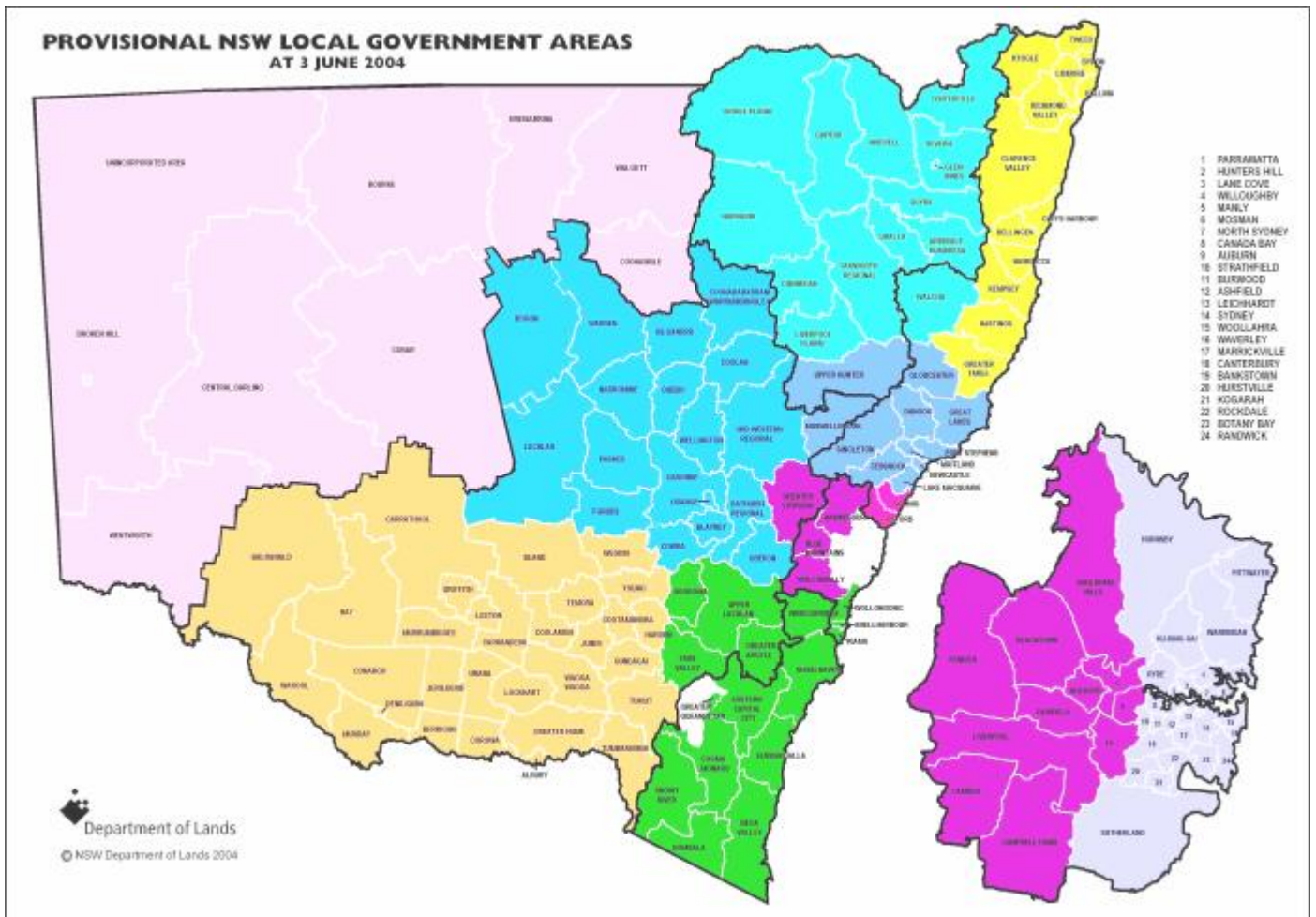


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSC and LGA boundaries

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 majority of the Mid-Western region is what was previously known as the Wirawongam ward of the Binnal Billa ATASIC region. The region, shown on the map at **Figure 2**, covers an area of 124,350 square kilometres in the central inland region of New South Wales. The Mid-Western region commences at the intersection of the Cobar LGA boundary with the track to Tullebung and Eulendool homesteads, through Forbes and Cowra to Oberon, continues along the Great Dividing Range towards Coonabarabran and sweeps back west towards Bourke.

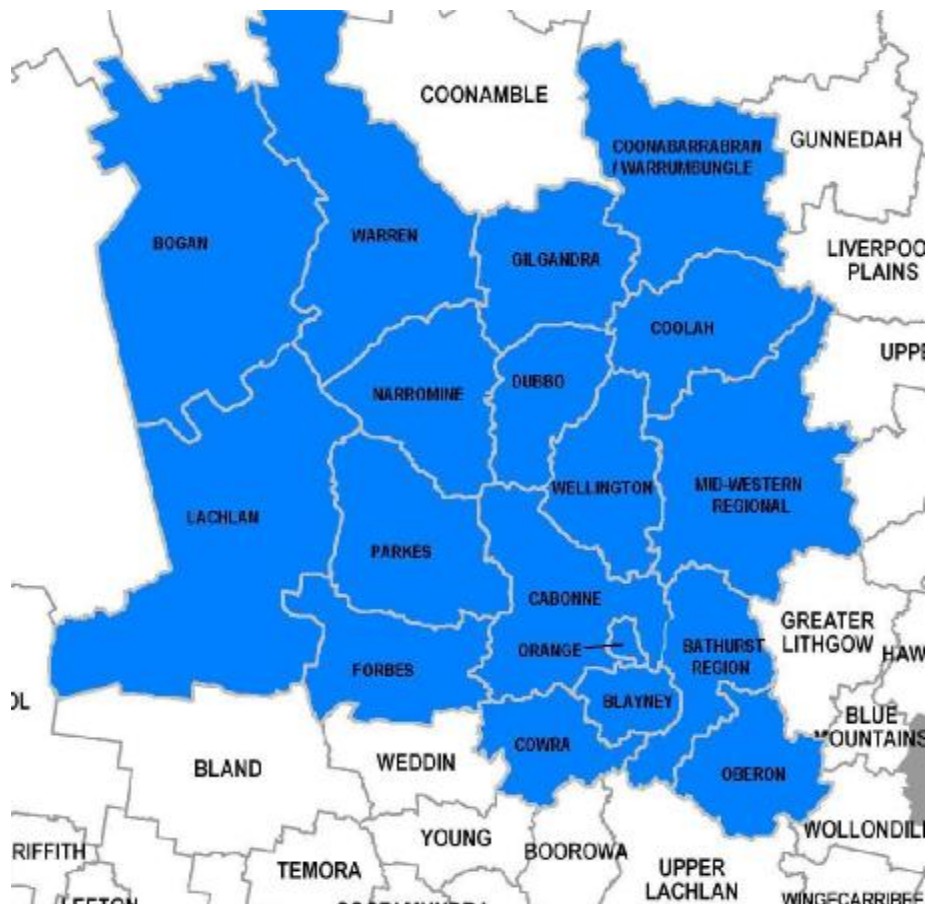


Figure 2: NSW Local Government Areas in Mid-Western NSW

1.2 Local Government Areas

There are 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) within the region:

- Bathurst
- Blayney
- Bogan
- Cabonne
- Coonabarabran/Wurrumbu
- Coolah
- Cowra
- Dubbo
- Forbes
- Gilgandra
- Lachlan
- Mid-Western Regional
- Narromine
- Oberon
- Orange
- Parkes
- Warren
- Wellington

1.3 Demography

In 2001, the total population for the region was 224,681 and the Aboriginal population was estimated at 13,619. The Aboriginal population represents 6% of the total regional population, and 11.4% of the total Aboriginal population in New South Wales. In relation to the gender of the Aboriginal population, there are slightly more males than females.

1.4 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

The Mid-Western region mainly covers the traditional country of the Wiradjuri people. It also covers the traditional lands of the Gamilaroi, Walywanand and the Wongaibon, and touches on the traditional land of the Gwaegal and Wonnarua to the east, and the Ngiyampaa and Ngemba to the west

The largest Aboriginal nation in this region is the Wiradjuri. The country of the Wiradjuri extends from the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range, near Lithgow, and is bounded by three rivers: Macquarie (Wambool), Lachlan (Kalari), Murrumbidgee (retained its original name).

1.5 Land and Local Aboriginal Land Councils

There are 15 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) in the region:

- Bathurst
- Condobolin
- Coonabarabran
- Cowra
- Dubbo
- Gilgandra
- Mudgee
- Narromine
- Nyngan
- Orange
- Peak Hill
- Quambone
- Trangie
- Warren Macquarie
- Wellington

While most of LALCs in this area have large total land holdings as compared to those LALCs on the coast, the value of their property is considerably less (per hectare).

As of December 2005, there were 343 outstanding land claims under the NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1974*.

To date, no Native Title determinations have been sought in this region, although there is a Native Title agreement over Wellington Town Common, which was the first of its kind in New South Wales.

The Aboriginal Land Council has also acquired approximately 2,588 hectares in this region. (*Review of NSW Land dealings provision of the ALRA ACT 1983, Paper 1*)

1.6 The Regional Economy

There are significant regional variations between the economies of the larger population centres of Dubbo, Orange, Bathurst and Cowra, and those towns of smaller size.

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

<i>Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Men</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing (14.2%) • Agriculture, Forestry & Mining (13.4%) • Construction (9.7%) • Retail Trade (9.2%) • Govt Admin. and Defence (8.6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, Forestry & Mining (20.8%) • Manufacturing (14.7%) • Retail Trade (12.5%) • Construction (9.4%) • Transport & Storage (5.3%)

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

<i>Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (14%) • Education (13%) • Health Services (12.2%) • Community Services (10%) • Govt Admin. and Defence (9.2%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail Trade (18%) • Health Services (13%) • Education (12.6%) • Agriculture, Forestry & Mining (9.3%) • Accommodation, cafes & restaurants (7.4%)

1.6.1 Where Are the Job Vacancies?

In late March 2006, job networks in the Mid-West region listed almost 1,200 job vacancies.² The top five occupations with vacancies were:

- Labourers, Factory and Machine Workers (33%)
- Food, Hospitality and Tourism (11%)
- Gardening, Farming and Fishing (8%)
- Electrical and Electronics Trades (5%)
- Sales Assistants and Storepersons (5%)

1.6.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

There are currently seven CDEP organisations employing a total of approximately 556 people. The CDEP organisations are based in the following data collected:

Name of CDEP	No. of Males	No. of Females
Birrang (Griffith)	143	97
Murrin Bridge	38	23
Joblink (Dubbo)	17	15
Erambie	32	23
Wellington/Orana	31	17
Uambi	35	22
Narromine	35	28

Overall the majority of CDEP participants are men.³

² Job Futures NSW website.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 Demographics

The *2001 Census* estimated that there are 13,619⁴ Aboriginal people in the Mid-Western region. This figure represents 6% of the total regional population, and 10.1% of the total NSW Aboriginal population. The Mid-Western region has 3.6% of the total NSW population.

There are nine discrete Aboriginal communities in the region; Boona Road (Condobolin), Erambie, Grong Grong, Gunnedah Hill, Moonacullah, Murrin Bridge, Nanima Reserve, Peak Hill Mission, and Willow Bend.

In 2001, LGAs in the region had the following numbers of Aboriginal people:⁵

Bathurst	1,012	Coolah	580	Lachlan	355
Blayney	n/a	Cowra	1,393	Mid-Western Regional	n/a
Bogan	518	Dubbo	3,399	Narromine	629
Cabonne	n/a	Forbes	509	Oberon	n/a
Coonabarabran	508	Gilgandra	451	Orange	1,391
Parkes	763	Warren	374	Wellington	1,075

Dubbo and Cowra, respectively, have the largest Aboriginal populations in the region.

The region's population is concentrated in what was the Wirawongam ward of ATSI's Binaal Billa region. This ward had the highest total number of people in the Mid-Western region, with 12,310 (90.4%) identified as Aboriginal in the *2001 Census*.

These data do not include the areas of Central Tablelands, Cowra and Lachlan, but would reflect the Aboriginal population distribution across the region.

As with other regions, the Aboriginal population has a large proportion of young people. The two largest Aboriginal populations are the 5-14 at 28% and 25-44 at 25.4% of the region. 60.1% of the population is under 25 and 85.5% is under 45 years old. The following graphs illustrate the population distribution in the mid-West.

Table 1: Population distribution by age (ABS Census 2001) in the Wirawongam Ward of ATSI's Binaal Billa Region

Persons	Actual numbers	As a % of total Aboriginal population
0 – 4 years	1,761	14.3
5 – 14 years	3,471	28.2
15 – 24 years	2,172	17.6
25 – 44 years	3,127	25.4
45 – 64 years	1,468	11.9
65 years +	311	2.5

³ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations website, at: www.dewr.gov.au

⁴ 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.

⁵ Figures are not available for Blayney, Cabonne, Mid Western Regional and Oberon LGA's, which did not exist at the time of the *2001 Census*.

Figure 3: Age Distribution by Aboriginal Population

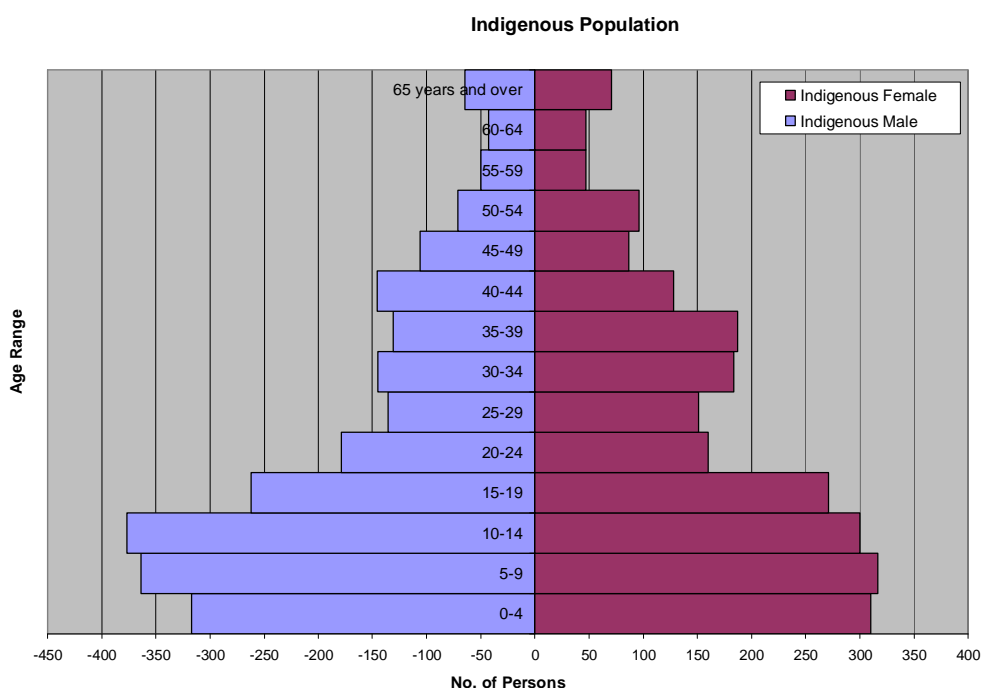
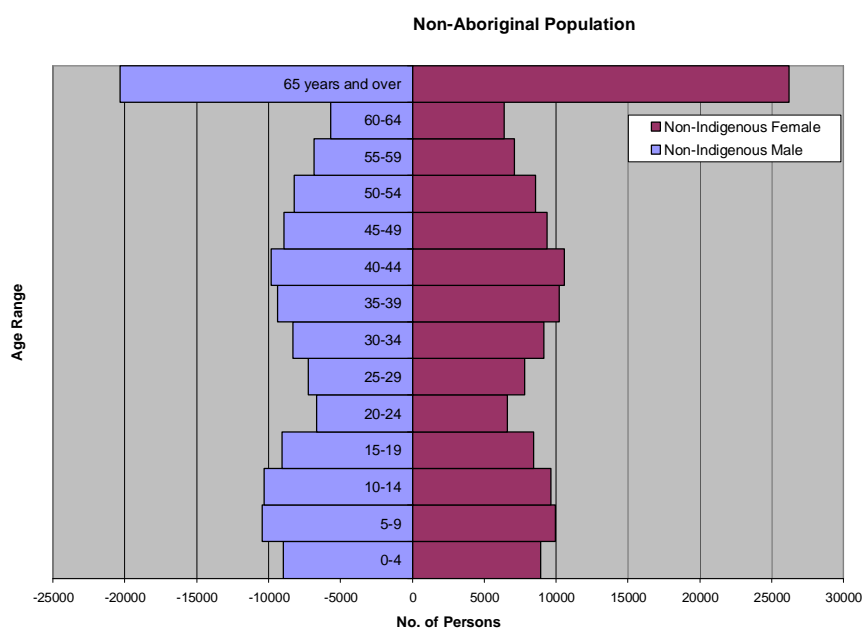


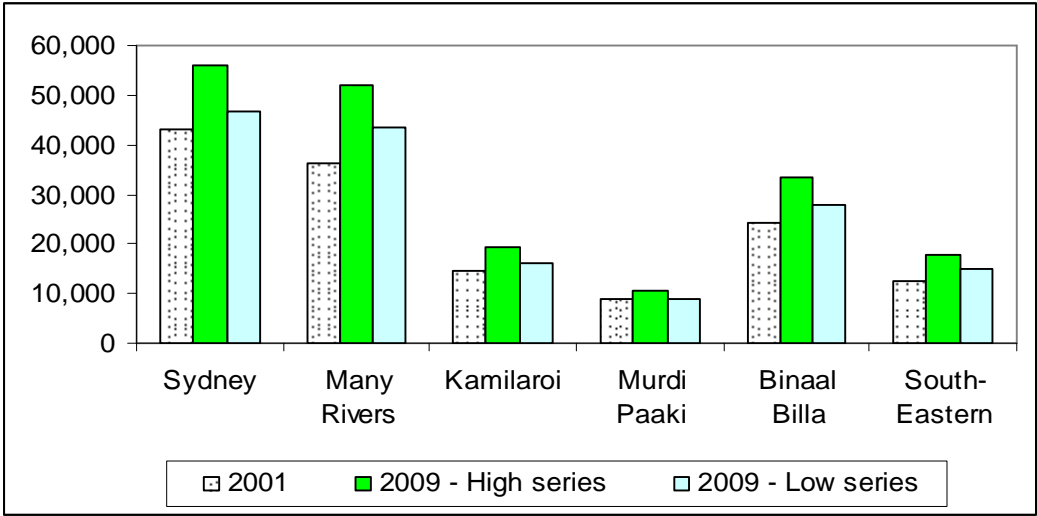
Figure 4: Age Distribution by Non-Aboriginal Population



2.2 Population Projections

The Aboriginal population has increased in all areas of Australia since the 1996 Census. This is attributed to both a greater likelihood of individuals identifying as Aboriginal (ABS 2001) and to an increasing birth rate (NSW Health 2003).

Figure 5: Aboriginal Population Projections by ATSI region, 2001 and 2009 (high and low series)



Research by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) indicates that out-migration by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people between 10 and 29 years old is a key demographic feature of the North West, Northern and Far-West SDs of New South Wales, with “access to jobs and training seen as contributing to movement into the city, and lower costs of family housing seen as stimulating a movement back in later years”.

This pattern would contribute to the low series projection in **Figure 5** of a 2% decline in the Aboriginal population from 2001 to 2009 in the Murdi Paaki region

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Mid-Western region is generally average to below average when compared to Aboriginal people in other areas of the State.

For example, rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and alcohol-related hospital admissions in the Aboriginal population are significantly higher than the average for the rest of the State. The rate of hospital separations⁶ in the region for skin infections and for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenza meningitis are two of the few health indicators which are better for Aboriginal people than the state averages.

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 2006.⁷

The data below provide clear evidence that more needs to be done to address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Mid-Western 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 Mid-West that were born with a low birth weight increased between 1993 and 2001, but has decreased between 2001 and 2004. The period between 1993 and 2004 saw an overall 25% increase in the number of Aboriginal babies born in the region, although the numbers of babies actually born remained fairly stable.

Between 1999 and 2001, 15.9% of Aboriginal babies in the Mid-West were born with low birth weight, which is significantly higher than the rate as for all Aboriginal babies born in New South Wales during that period (12.6%). Between 2002 and 2004, 12.1% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.7% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. This figure is almost double that 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 marginally 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).

⁶ 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 separation occurs when an episode of care ends because the type of care provided to the patient changes.

⁷ 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.

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.

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 Mid-West had slightly above average figures for visits by Aboriginal mothers to antenatal clinics, with 73.8% of pregnant Aboriginal women having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is slightly higher than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), but is 15% 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 Mid-West, which is the third highest 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 Mid-West.

3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease

Between 2002 and 2005, rates of hospital separation for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West were around 27% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 3,903 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. This rate is around 80% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 46% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in the Mid-West (2,671 per 100,000).

The rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has increased by about 10% between 1993 and 2005, reflecting similar increases in the Aboriginal population across the State over the same period. 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 Mid-West rose dramatically between 1993-96 (488 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (1,062 per 100,000). The rate in the period from 2002 to 2005 was therefore more than double the rate from 1993 to 1996. It is also 42% higher than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, and is four-and-a-half times 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 Aboriginal people between 1993 and 2005, the more than two-fold worsening of the statistics over this period suggests that the diabetes rate is genuinely increasing amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West, 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, a fact which is reflected in the far lower rates of occurrence of these diseases in the Mid-West region over this period.

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West during the period from 2002 to 2005 is significantly lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 2 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000, and is actually lower than that of non-Aboriginal people in the region (2.9 per 100,000). It is also more than 30% 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 16% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 140% higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 670 per 100,000, compared to 280 per 100,000. It is 177% higher than the rate for the total NSW population (242 per 100,000), and is 15% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

The worsening of the statistics amongst both the general population and the Aboriginal population during this period indicates that the 80% increase in the rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West between 1993 and 2005 is a genuine trend in need of urgent attention.

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 Mid-West during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 20% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 2,187 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000, but is almost five times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (461 per 100,000), and four times 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 Mid-West during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 30% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 653 per 100,000, compared to 497 per 100,000, but is more than three times higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region and throughout the State (208 and 214 per 100,000, respectively) over the same period.

The worsening of the statistics across the Aboriginal and the general population for this indicator suggests that the slight decrease in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and 40% increase in trauma attributed to alcohol amongst

Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 indicates a genuine deterioration of the situation for Aboriginal people in the region during this period.

3.1.6 Health Services

There are three Area Health Services in the Mid-West region. The Greater Murray Area Health Service covers the southern part of the region, with its head office in Wagga Wagga. The Mid-Western Area Health Service (MWAHS) covers the central part of the Mid-West region, with its head office in Bathurst. The Macquarie Area Health Service covers the northern part of the region, with its head office in Dubbo.

The most frequent cases of hospital admission for the Aboriginal population are with respect to renal dialysis and respiratory medicine. Gynaecology, non-subspeciality surgery (e.g. appendix removals, stitches, etc.) and non-subspeciality medicine (e.g. emergency presentations, poisonings) also have high numbers of separations in comparison with other groups. These areas are similar to data from other areas of New South Wales. Acute psychiatry also has high numbers of separations, but these statistics are affected by the location of Bloomfield Hospital in Orange within the MWAHS boundaries. Bloomfield admits patients from a large area of the State.

3.1.7 Macquarie Area Health Service Data

Separation data from Macquarie Area Health Service shows similar patterns of treatment for Aboriginal people in this area of the Mid-Western region. The renal dialysis numbers have increased significantly in the past three years, indicating changing facilities available in the area.

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 main housing tenure type for Aboriginal people in the Mid-Western region is rented accommodation. The *2001 Census* indicates that between 34% and 40% of Aboriginal people in the region are buying their own homes. However, this data has proven to be unreliable in the past. Data from the Aboriginal Housing Office needs to be used in comparison with ABS data. This was unable to be supplied for this report, although it is available on a regional level.

In 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal households who own or are buying their own home in the Wagga Wagga region was approximately 25%. The proportion of Aboriginal people who own or are purchasing their own homes in the Wagga Wagga region was less than half the average for the region.

In the Wagga Wagga region, 1.4% of households in Aboriginal Housing Office dwellings were overcrowded in 2002/2003. This is the equal second lowest proportion of overcrowding in New South Wales.

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.

The worsening Mid-West statistics for both acute respiratory infections and gastrointestinal infections may be partially attributable to increased self-identification of Aboriginal people in the region, but given the across-the-board increases in the Aboriginal population throughout the State over this period, they would appear to indicate 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 1,796 per 100,000, but had risen to 2,049 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a 14% increase over twelve years. The Mid-West figures for the period 2002-05 are around 20% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), and more than double the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (980 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people in the Mid-West during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 149 per 100,000, but had risen to 335 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: more than doubling over twelve years. The Mid-West figures for the period 2002-05 are 18% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and almost 30% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (262 per 100,000).

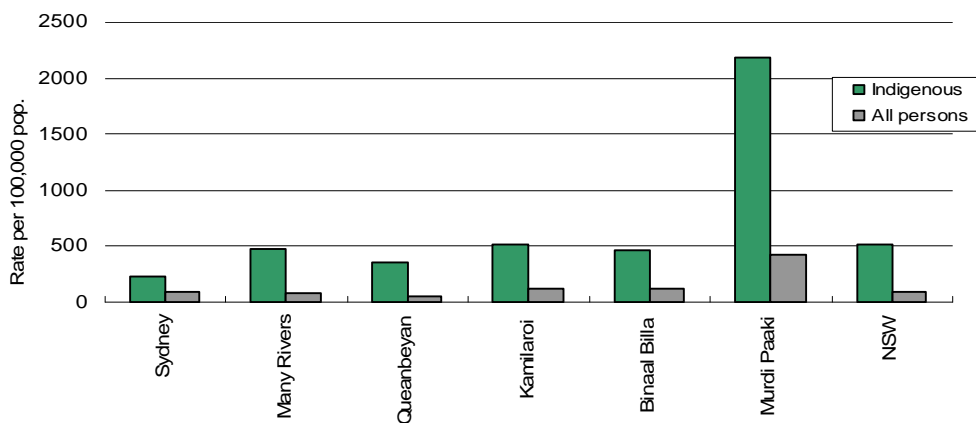
3.3 Justice

The following data was sourced from the Department of Juvenile Justice's *Report into Aboriginal Over-Representation* (2001), or from the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators* (June 2005), or the *Two Ways Together Wagga Wagga (Binaal Billa) Regional Data Report* (December 2005), and refers to the former ATSI regions, rather than the RCMG regions, unless otherwise specified.

3.3.1 Victim Rates

In all ATSI regions, the rate of assault victimisation per 100,000 population was higher by Aboriginal status compared to the total population. The Binaal Billa region had the equal second highest rate of assault victimisation in New South Wales, equal to the Kamilaroi region. In 2002, the rate of assault victimisation in Binaal Billa was just below 6,000 per 100,000 by Aboriginal status. This was approximately triple the average rate for the Binaal Billa region.

Figure 6: Rate of hospital separations for assault related injuries per 100,000 population by Aboriginal status, ATSI regions 1999/2000



Source: Injury Risk Management Research Centre at the University of New South Wales who sourced the data from the NSW Health Department's Inpatient Statistics Collection

In all regions, the rate of hospitalisation for assault related injuries is higher by Aboriginal status compared to the total population. The rate of hospitalisations for assault-related injuries by Aboriginal status in the Binaal Billa region is just under 500 per 100,000 population.

3.3.2 Adults

Aboriginal people continue to experience significantly higher rates of imprisonment per head of population as compared with the rest of the population. In 2003, the rate for Aboriginal people across the State was around 975 per 100,000, compared with around 100 per 100,000 for the total population. Furthermore, the rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people between 1998 and 2003 increased steadily, from 13% to 18% of the male prison population, and from 18% to 27% for the female prison population.⁸

While the rate of imprisonment by Aboriginal status in the Binaal Billa region was significantly lower than the state average, at around 760 per 100,000, and similar to the Many Rivers and Kamilaroi ATSI regions, these figures provide little cause for optimism, and present a serious and ongoing challenge to the NSW justice system to reduce the number of Aboriginal people going to jail.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services provide the majority of legal representation to Aboriginal people involved in the justice system. ATSILS reports to ATSI include outcome data for the particular region served. Custodial and non-custodial sentences are recorded in these reports. If the data could be linked to a particular local area it may indicate any changes in custodial sentencing options for Aboriginal people where new jails are located.

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. Dubbo and Orange are identified hot spots within the

⁸ *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, p. 64.

Mid-Western region. 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, at around 30 per 100,000.⁹

In 2002, the rate of juvenile persons diverted¹⁰ from court by Aboriginal status was the second highest in the State for all ATSI regions, at around 62%. While the rate across the State rose slightly between 2001 and 2002, from 56.3% to 58.2% (compared to 77.6% and 81.6%, respectively, for all juveniles), the gap between the proportion of juveniles diverted from court by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal status in Binaal Billa was smaller than in other ATSI regions, except for Kamilaroi and Murdi Paaki.¹¹

In 2000, 107 Aboriginal juveniles were in custody in the region, 93 (87%) of whom were males and 14 (13%) females. The most common offences in 2000 were break and enter (29%), robbery (27%) and assault (13%).

Aboriginal young people are more likely than non-Aboriginal young people to receive a community service order, a supervised order or a custodial sentence for similar offences. This is in spite of the *Young Offenders Act 1997* encouraging the use of diversionary programs. Aboriginal young people are less likely to be granted conditional release from custody than non-Aboriginal young people. Assessments for conditional release were found to be culturally biased.

Of the 123 Aboriginal young people incarcerated by the Department of Juvenile Justice as at June 30, 2003, 18 were from the Mid-Western region. Many more were subject to court orders under the supervision of the Department.

In the Mid-Western region there are two juvenile detention centres, Orana Juvenile Justice Centre at Dubbo, and Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre at Wagga Wagga. Young people can also be detained in any of the other centres in New South Wales depending on where they were apprehended, if they are on remand or where vacancies exist. Dubbo and Wagga also have Offices of Juvenile Justice where Community Treatment orders are supervised and support services and assessments organised.

An early intervention program funded through the *Two Ways Together* \$40 million package, Tirkandi Inaburra, has recently been established for Aboriginal young people over 12 years of age. While Aboriginal community attempts to establish the program were initially hampered by lack of funds, the NSW Attorney General's Department agreed to fund and implement the program in consultation with

⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 71-2.

community leaders. Opened in January 2006, this is the only diversionary option in the Mid-Western region for young people at risk of entering the justice system.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Income Levels

According to the 2001 Census, there were a total of 81,045 households in Wirawongam ward. Of these 3,668 were Aboriginal and 77,377 non-Aboriginal. The greatest proportion of Aboriginal households earn between \$300 and \$399 per week, as do non-Aboriginal households. However the average income of Aboriginal households is \$400 to \$499 per week and non-Aboriginal households have a higher weekly average income of \$700-\$799 per week because they have a greater proportion of households in the higher income brackets.

More males earn incomes in the higher income groups than females, however, the greatest proportion of the population earns significantly less than the non-Aboriginal population. The figures below also show that a large percentage of the population in all wards did not state their income level. Females are more likely to state their income than males are.

3.4.2 Employment

Rural areas have higher and increasing unemployment rates than urban areas. Employment opportunities in many rural areas are limited as both populations and business development decline. Furthermore, employment participation rates in the Mid-Western region vary according to the level of CDEP activity in the area.

Overall, however, employment participation rates are lower than those for the non-Aboriginal population and unemployment rates are significantly higher. Unemployment reaches 41% for Aboriginal people in some localities when CDEP participation is excluded from employment figures.

The labour market is the most significant factor in employment outcomes. Educational attainment is the other most significant factor affecting employment opportunities for the Aboriginal population. Its rural setting and the range of seasonal work available influence Binaal Billas' labour market. In addition, an overall rural decline is affecting private and public sector investment and development. A skills audit of the Aboriginal population and identification of labour market potential in different localities across the region would be a proactive means of developing employment opportunities.

Table 5: Wirawongam ward indigenous labour force status (DEWR 2003)

LGA	Total employed	35+ hours	Labour force participation	Unemployment rate
Nyngan Bogan	39	42%	43%	41%
Warren	97	38%	57%	27%
Gilgandra	85	38%	42%	21%
Coonabarabran	80	63%	40%	34%
Dubbo	696	67%	50%	25%
Wellington	216	54%	46%	24%

Peak Hill/Parkes	115	62%	42%	36%
Mudgee	99	65%	58%	21%
Forbes	105	74%	50%	23%
Orange	243	70%	50%	32%
Bathurst	185	69%	39%	27%
Lithgow	109	69%	41%	26%
Lake Cargellico/Co Lachlan	145	54%	44%	35%
Cowra	134	61%	51%	33%

Current programs to encourage labour market participation have had some success, however they fail to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged job seekers. This includes many unemployed Aboriginal people.

Table 5 shows that Forbes has the highest proportion of the Aboriginal population working full-time (35 or more hours per week) followed by Orange residents. Warren and Gilgandra have the lowest percentage of the Aboriginal population working full-time yet have relatively low unemployment rates compared to other LGAs. This would indicate a higher rate of CDEP activity in these locations, which is included in the employment rates. Warren has one of the highest labour force participation rates in the ward. The highest unemployment rate is in the Bogan LGA followed by Parkes LGA. Mudgee has a relatively high participation rate and number of individuals working full-time and one of the lowest unemployment rates of the ward.

Unemployment rates are high across the Binaal Billa region, while participation rates are low in comparison to the non-Aboriginal population. While the region had the third lowest Aboriginal unemployment rate in New South Wales in 2001, it was still almost four times higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people, at 25.2% compared to 6.9%. Furthermore, if figures were available that did not count CDEP participation, the unemployment rate would be significantly higher. CDEP participation accounts for many of the differences in unemployment rates across LGAs.

	NSW	Sydney	Many Rivers	Queanbeyan	Kamilaroi	Binaal Billa	Murdi Paaki
Aboriginal	23.1	16.7	27.4	26.4	30	25.2	23.9
Non Aboriginal	7.2	6.1	10.7	7.5	8.6	6.9	9.8

Table 6: Unemployment rate by Aboriginal status (%), NSW and ATSI regions, 2001

Employment programs including CDEP, Job Network and IEP need to be targeted to local labour markets more effectively than they have been. The labour market is the most significant factor in employment outcomes. Educational attainment is the other most significant factor affecting employment opportunities for the Aboriginal population. The region's rural setting and the range of seasonal work available influence Binaal Billa's labour market. In addition, an overall rural decline is affecting private and public sector investment and development. A skills audit of the Aboriginal population and identification of labour market potential in different localities across the region would be a proactive means of developing employment opportunities.

Labour market programs aimed at disadvantaged job seekers have had some success in reducing unemployment rates among this group. However, the most

disadvantaged are the least likely to be assisted by these programs. Many Aboriginal job seekers fall into this category. Additional assistance is required, particularly by Aboriginal specific services, and a level of unemployment to be expected, particularly in rural areas with few opportunities. Lack of participation in the labour market will result in no income for those individuals excluded from Centrelink benefits.

3.5 Education

The Mid-Western region ranks below average in most aspects of Aboriginal educational achievement compared to other regions of New South Wales, especially with respect to Year 3 and Year 5 literacy and numeracy.

The data below were sourced from the *2001 Census*, the Department of Education and Training's Planning and Innovation Directorate *Mid-Year Census 2003-2005*, or the *Two Ways Together Wagga Wagga (Binaal Billa) Indicator Report* (December 2006).

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Year 3 for Aboriginal students in the Mid-West in 2005 are three to four percentage points lower than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are 17 to 23 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 Mid-West in 2005 are to seven percentage points lower higher than the state average for Aboriginal students, but are 17 to 21 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, 11.2% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 17.2% 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, 30.9% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 36.6% 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, 12.3% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 14.4% 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, 41.5% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

There is a significant gap between the proportion of Aboriginal young people and non-Aboriginal young people who complete certificate level tertiary education. This gap is widest in the Kamilaroi ATSI region, at 8.7% compared with 16.1%, Binaal Billa (9.5% compared with 17.1%) and Murdi Paaki (5.5% compared with 14.4%). There is also a much lower proportion of Aboriginal people who complete tertiary education at Bachelor level, although the gap is less than for certificate level. The gap at post-graduate level is narrower than all other categories.

In the Wagga Wagga region, 0.2% of Aboriginal people compared to 0.8% of the total population had a postgraduate degree in 2001, 0.3% compared to 1% had a graduate

degree, and 1.5% compared to 6% had a Bachelor degree. The Wagga Wagga region was third lowest in New South Wales compared to the Aboriginal populations in all other regions with respect to all levels of training.

3.5.1 School Retention Rates

In 2002, the Binaal Billa ATSIC region had the third highest retention rate of Aboriginal students for Years 7 to 10 (approximately 80%) and the fourth highest retention rate for Years 7 to 12 (approximately 28%).¹² Both figures were slightly lower than the state averages for Aboriginal students in that year.

The region is in the top group (with Coastal Sydney, the Hunter 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 Binaal Billa region had a higher retention rate than most other regions.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate for Mid-West Aboriginal students in all schools for Years 10 to 12 was 43.1%, compared to 66.3% for all students in the region. This figure was the third highest for all RCMG regions in that year. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students in the Mid-West are performing slightly better than the state average for Aboriginal students.

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

3.5.2 Tertiary Education

Approximately 14% of the Aboriginal population of the region has tertiary qualifications. This varies slightly but not significantly across the three wards, from 13% in Murrumbidgee/ Lachlan and Wirawongam, to 15.4% in Deniliquin ward.

Statistically, the distribution of tertiary qualifications across the region is relatively even-spread. More males than females hold tertiary qualifications but they tend to be at a certificate level. Females are more likely to hold qualifications from advanced diploma to degree level than males. Post-graduate qualifications are the least common type of qualification held by Aboriginal people. Only 52 respondents from a total of 13,964 (approximately 0.8%) in the *2001 Census* reported that they had postgraduate qualifications. However, this is only marginally less than the non-Aboriginal population in the region, where an average of 1% of the population had postgraduate qualifications. Slightly more Aboriginal women than men have postgraduate qualifications in the 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

¹² *Two Ways Together Wagga Wagga (Binaal Billa) Indicator Report*, p. 12.

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 4,654 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the 18 LGAs in the region.

Across the Binnal Billa region, there is a strong sense of responsibility and continuity of culture between the current generations through the activities of the Councils of Elders at regional and local levels.

The *Binaal Billa Regional Council Strategic Plan 2004-07* identifies the preservation, protection and reinforcement of Aboriginal cultures in the region as a high priority. The ATSiC Regional Council has begun developing a regional Cultural Centre and keeping place to safeguard stories, history and language, and is currently promoting the inclusion of Aboriginal culture and heritage studies in education curricula across the region from the pre-school to tertiary levels, as well as cross-cultural education programs for those in the wider non-Aboriginal community working with Aboriginal communities throughout the region.

There is a strong interest across the region for recognised access to land and water for cultural reasons, for sustainability of the environment, and for reasons of livelihood.

In particular, Aboriginal people in Binaal Billa have a strong sense of responsibility to the environment, and feel that they can contribute positively to regional and local activities that focus on sustainable resource management, restoration and protection of the environment. They have identified land ownership and its sustainable management as a high priority in the Mid-Western region, including the development of a regional land assessment and strategy.

These various objectives are reflected in the Regional Council's strategic plan, and include:

- increasing management involvement in the protection and preservation of native biodiversity;
- developing and implementing partnership agreements with all key government agencies and non-government organisations;
- utilising Community Working Parties as natural resource management reference groups; and
- developing an 'open-gate' policy with the farming community to increase access to land.

There is one Aboriginal Place declared within the region, i.e., Dandaloo Reserve Aboriginal Place, one Aboriginal Area, i.e., Snake Rock Aboriginal Area, and one Community Conservation Agreement declared within the region, i.e., Dandry Gorge CCA.

There are also two Historic Sites declared within the region:

- 1) Maynggu Ganai Historic Site
- 2) Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site.

In addition, there is one Voluntary Conservation Agreement declared within the region, i.e., Windradyne Grave VCA, consisting of a 3 hectare site.

3.6.2 Inland Development

Increased migration into the regional centres of Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Parkes and Wellington 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 urbanized parts of the State, 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.

There are no registered Aboriginal Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) in the Mid-Western region.

The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) is a Commonwealth statutory authority which assists Aboriginal people to acquire land and manage Aboriginal-held land in a sustainable way to provide cultural, social, economic or environmental benefits for themselves and future generations. The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) has granted three properties in the Mid-Western region: Hillford, Bulgandramine mission and Wondaby. The ILC owns another two properties, i.e., Jinchilla Gardens and Penryn and Consut.

Native title applications using the criteria 'applications and determinations' lodged in New South Wales lodged between January 1994 and May 2006 returned 420 results. The Mid-Western region currently has 17 active applications. Five are non-claimant, 12 are active claimant applications, and one is a compensation application.¹³

¹³ There are three main types of native title applications, i.e., claimant applications, non-claimant applications and compensation applications. The first type is an application made by Aboriginal people for a determination that native title exists in a particular area of land or waters. A native title determination is the legal recognition of the rights and interests held by Aboriginal Australians

3.7 Families and Young People

The 2001 Census counts families in several ways. The four main categories are couple families, couple families without children, one-parent families and other families. Couple and one-parent families are further broken down into seven separate categories which count dependents in a number of ways: those under 15 years of age, students (15-24 years), and non-dependent children in various combinations. When the population of each ward is divided in these ways the actual numbers of families are very small.

For this reason, this report has grouped the families into six separate categories - couples with dependent children, couples with non-dependent children, one-parent families with dependent children, one-parent families with non-dependent children, couples without children, and other. The charts below show the family distributions across the three wards.

The most common family type in the Mid-Western region is a couple with dependent children. However, one parent families with dependent children also make up a significant proportion of the population – 19.82% in Wirawongam ward. This is at least double the rate of single parent families occurring in the non-Aboriginal population (10%, 9.18% and 9.7% respectively). Single parent status has a negative effect on a family's income levels, resulting in diminished access to housing, education and health services.

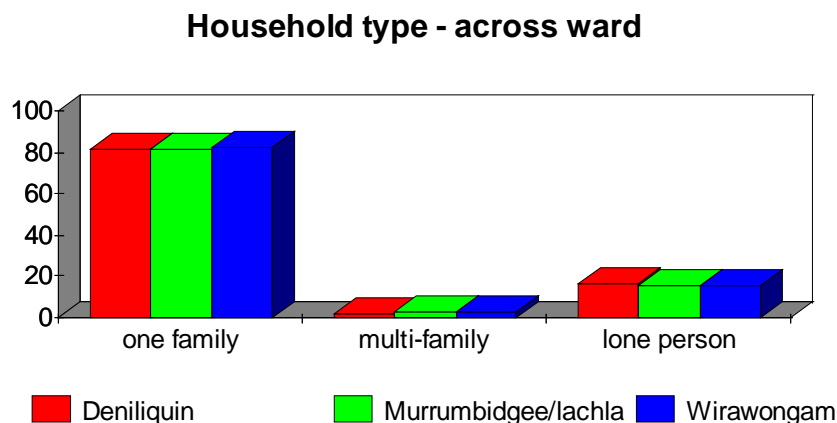


Figure 7: Distribution of Family Types by Ward – Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal

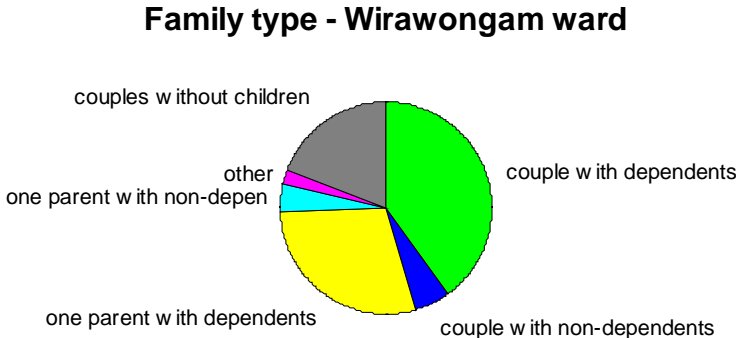
Figure 7 shows the distribution of family types across the three wards in Binaal Billa. The majority of Aboriginal people live in one parent family households. It is not clear from the data if multi-generational families are included in this particular count, or if the narrow definition of family as one or two adults with dependent or non-dependent children is used. Consideration of a variety of family forms is important in needs

according to traditional laws and customs. Claimant applications are often also referred to as 'native title claims' or 'native title determination applications'. They are usually filed with the Federal Court of Australia. The second type is an application made by a person who does not claim to have native title to an area but who seeks a determination that native title does or does not exist in that area. The third type is an application made by Aboriginal Australians seeking compensation for loss or impairment of their native title.

analysis and service planning. For this reason, additional qualitative data should be considered when planning for family services.

In addition, one parent families frequently have several children and, given the age profile of the population, these children are likely to be under 15 years of age or younger and dependent on parental income and support for some time. For example, in Wirawongam ward there were 370 one-parent families with children under 15 in 2001, with 1,156 individuals in these families, meaning that there was an average of two to three children under 15 years of age in each one-parent family. Policy decisions and service plans relating to families should consider family types and in particular the needs of single parent families.

Figure 8: Family Distribution in Wirawongam Ward



The Aboriginal population in the region, as in the rest of the State, is much younger than the non-Aboriginal population. The largest section of the population across the region is under 15 years of age. This group comprised approximately 43% of the Aboriginal population in 2001. Although there may be small differences, this age profile does not vary from community to community. The age profile reflects shorter life expectancy, higher birth rates and higher death rates than the non-Aboriginal population.

The profile of the population has considerable implications for planning services and assessing current and future needs of the population. For example, all government services should prioritise the needs of Aboriginal children and young people as the largest group in the Aboriginal population. Health and welfare services should also consider older Aboriginal people as part of the aged population at 50 years of age and meet their needs accordingly.

Figure 9: Age profile – Wirawongam ward

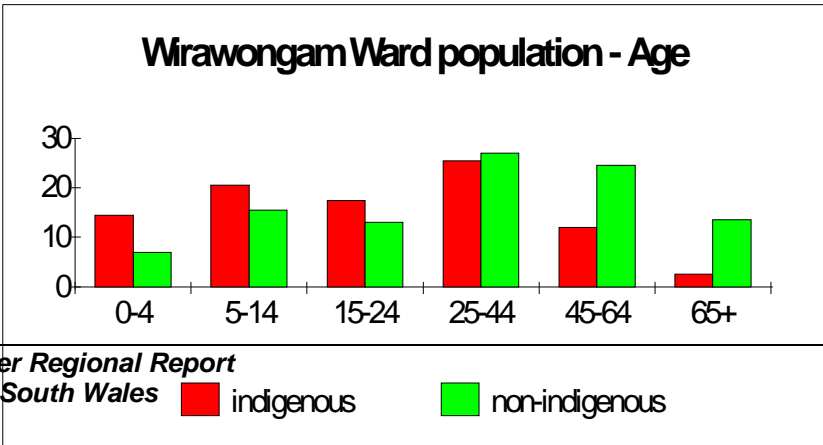


Figure 9 presents the age profile of Wirawongam ward. This ward has the highest total number of indigenous people of the three Binaal Billa wards with 12,310 identifying as indigenous in the 2001 Census. Murrumbidgee/Lachlan ward has 5,976 and Deniliquin ward 1,850 people identifying as indigenous in the 2001 Census. While the population numbers vary according to the size and location of the ward, the age profile of indigenous and non-indigenous population remains the same across the Mid-Western region.

3.7.1 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

The rate of assault victimisation of Aboriginal people per 100,000 people in the Binaal Billa region was the equal second highest of all ATSIC regions in 2002, at around 5,800 per 100,000, compared to around 4,800 per 100,000 for the total Aboriginal population. The rate of victimisation in the region for Aboriginal people was more than three times that of the total regional population, and was slightly higher than the state average for all Aboriginal people.¹⁴ The overall trend in these figures across the State was upward between 1998 and 2002, indicating that more needs to be done by government to address this issue.

The victimisation rate for domestic violence amongst Aboriginal young people in the Binaal Billa ATSIC region in 2002 was the second highest of all ATSIC regions, and is around the same as the Kamilaroi region, at around 8.4 per 100,000 people. The rate of victimisation in the region for Aboriginal young people was more than double that of the total regional population, and was slightly higher than the state average for all Aboriginal people.¹⁵ The overall trend in these figures across the State doubled between 1998 and 2002, indicating that more needs to be done by government to address this issue.

¹⁴ *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, p. 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community Priorities

The Binaal Billa Regional Council conducted 19 community consultations throughout the region in late 2003. Although the Mid-Western region mainly includes the Wirawongam Ward within the former ATSIC Binaal Billa region, the majority of the Aboriginal population resides in this area. Therefore, the priorities identified through the Binaal Billa consultations, as outlined below, reflect those for the majority of the Aboriginal population in the Mid-Western region. Councillors are confident that through the many contributions and debates that have taken place to date, community priorities are clearly and honestly presented in the list below. It was very clear from these consultations that the most important priority now and for the future is education. Aboriginal people see education as the key to overcoming disadvantage, leading to the enhanced wellbeing of Aboriginal communities and creating a confident future for Aboriginal children.

The priority outcomes sought by Aboriginal people in Binaal Billa are:

1. Education
2. Employment and self-generated income
3. Housing and infrastructure
4. Health
5. Culture and heritage
6. Land and water
7. Strong families
8. Crime prevention and justice

These areas are linked closely and causally. For example, by improving outcomes in education, there will be better prospects for good full-time jobs and a better chance to work towards home ownership. While most of the priorities this community seek are long-term, education can also work in the short term to make an immediate difference.

4.2 Analysis of Need

This section is based on an analysis of need identified from the socio-economic and demographic data, as well as those needs identified by Aboriginal communities in the region. There is a relatively high correlation between Aboriginal community priorities and areas of need identified through the data.

The socio-economic indicators also identify the Mid-Western 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 • Juvenile diversions from court • Adult incarceration rates • Overcrowded housing • Home ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and infant health • Cardiovascular disease • Diabetes • Environmental health • Sexual assault & domestic violence rates • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy • Years 7-12 retention rates • Sole parent families • Employment & unemployment • Alcohol-related problems

4.3 Issues for Consideration

In program terms, government services for Aboriginal people in this region are particularly focused on health, families, and economic development.

As noted above, Aboriginal people in the region are less disadvantaged in respect of housing than Aboriginal people in other regions. However home ownership is low relative to non-Aboriginal people.

The areas which the community consultations and the socio-economic data indicate require additional government focus include:

1. Improving Aboriginal health, particularly for cardiovascular disease, diabetes and maternal health particularly low birth weight babies.
2. Improving educational outcomes to ensure Aboriginal young people achieve reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks. The region had the highest retention rate for Aboriginal students from Years 7-10. Educational outcomes in the region are improving relative to Aboriginal people in other areas. However, the gap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population is significant.
3. Family violence strategies are needed to address the high rate of victimisation of young people in a domestic violence in the context of a high proportion of sole parent families in the region.
4. Providing cross-cultural awareness training within the non-Aboriginal community as noted in the Binaal Billa Plan.
5. Employment programs including CDEP, Job Network and IEP need to be targeted to local labour markets more effectively than they have been in the past.
6. Family violence programs are needed to address the high victimisation rate of Aboriginal youth in domestic situations.
7. Aboriginal culture and heritage studies should be included in education curricula in the region for all the years from pre-school to the tertiary level.

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 concerns when developing a response to the issues identified in this report.

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