



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Murdi Paaki

– November 2006 –



TWO WAYS TOGETHER REGIONAL REPORT Murdi Paaki

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report gathers together data¹ about Aboriginal people and the government services provided to them in the Murdi Paaki 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 New South Wales 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 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. In the Murdi Paaki region however, *Two Ways Together* is building on the work of the COAG Trial. As such, all 16 communities participating in the Trial have been identified as Partnership communities for *Two Ways Together* purposes. 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 Murdi Paaki 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 this region. A brief overview of the local economy indicates that employment of Aboriginal men is most commonly in

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

government administration and defence, agriculture, health and community services, education and construction. For Aboriginal women, most of the employment is in the health and community services, education, retail, defence, and property and business service sectors.

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focusing on demographics and population projections. The Aboriginal population of the Murdi Paaki region constitutes 14% of the total population, and is growing slower than expected. However, the median age was 21 years of age, compared to 40 years for the non-Aboriginal population, with 54.8% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being less than 25 years old, compared to only 29.7% of non-Aboriginal people in the region.

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in the Murdi Paaki region. The data reveals that while there have been some improvements in the various health indicators, these improvements were from very high rates above the average for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people throughout the State. The incidence of environmental-related illnesses is also very high in a housing situation for Aboriginal people across the region characterised by overcrowding, high dependence on social housing, and low levels of home ownership. School retention and levels of attainment are amongst the lowest in the State across a number of indicators. Rates of assault, sexual assault and domestic violence are also extremely high, as are the rates of adult incarceration in the region.

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

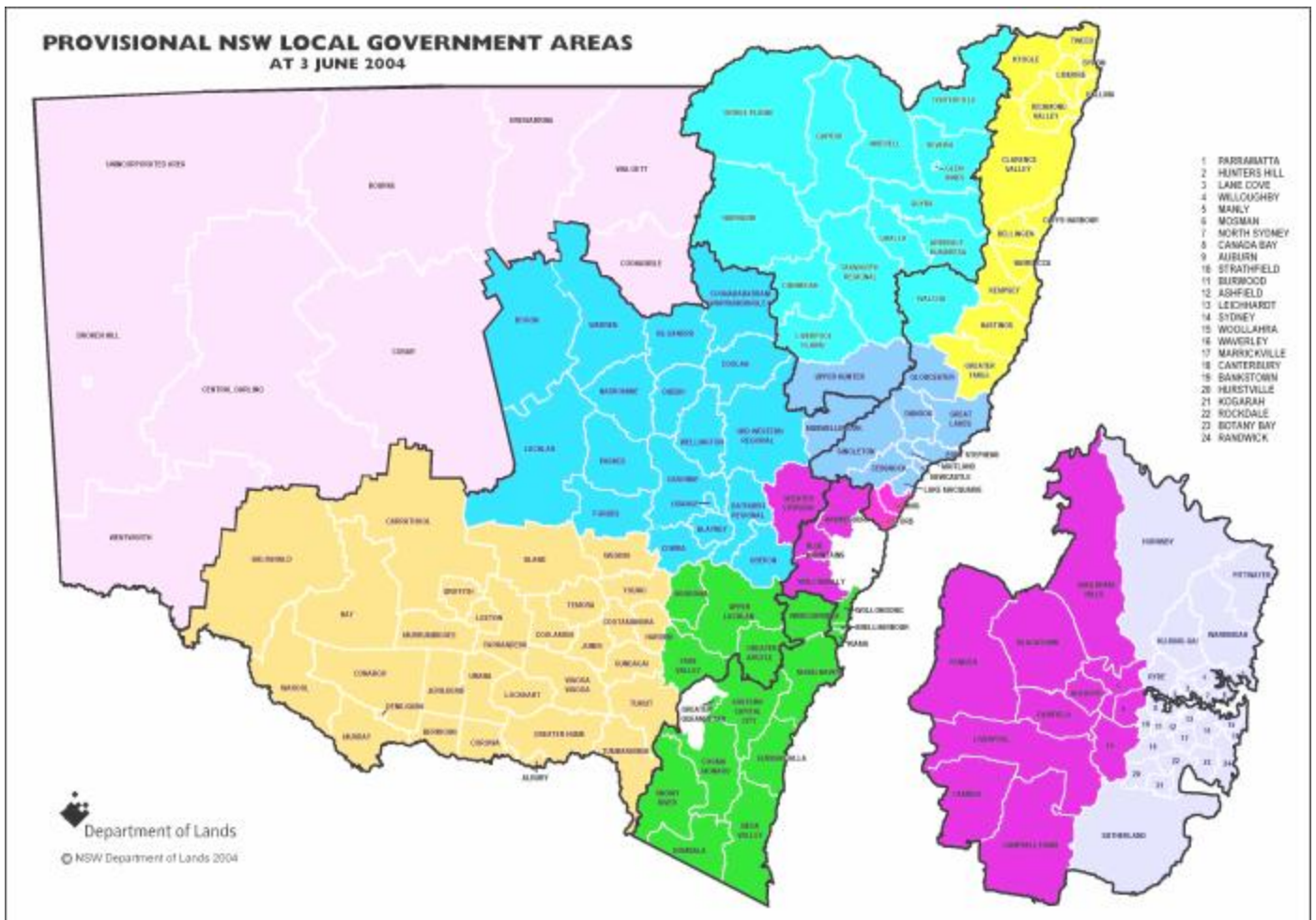


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSiC and LGA boundaries

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 Murdi Paaki region is shown on the map at **Figure 1**. It covers 297,000 square kilometres of the far west of New South Wales, constituting more than 40% of the total landmass of New South Wales. Major Aboriginal communities in Murdi Paaki include Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Dareton, Enngonia, Goodooga, Gulargambone, Ivanhoe, Lightning Ridge, Menindee, Walgett, Weilmoringle and Wilcannia.

The Western and North Western regional boundaries of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council also cross over the Murdi Paaki Region.

The region is home to the Barwon-Darling River system. The landform throughout much of the region comprises alluvial plains, which extend for varying distances from the river system. The southern and western parts of the region are characterised by dunefields and sandplains.

There are several National Parks within the region, most of which are of great significance to the Aboriginal people. These are Kinchega National Park, Mallee Cliffs National Park, Mt Grenfell Historic Site, Mungo National Park, Mootwingee National Park (Mutawintji), Sturt National Park and Willandra National Park.

The region contains many places of significant heritage importance to Aboriginal people. Notably, the tribal grounds and cemetery at Angledool, Lake Mungo, Lake Victoria, Manara, Menindee Mission, Mt Grenfell, Mt Mutawintji, Neckarboo, the old Pooncarie Mission and Carowra Tank Reserve sites, the Mt Gunderbooka gallery, the Brewarrina fisheries and other sites which are associated with Baiame, the Creator. There are also the remaining carved trees at the Bora Ground at Collymungle Farms near Collarenebri, the Brewarrina Mission site, Cuddie Springs, Narran Lake, and some sites in the vicinity of Tibooburra, including Bendigo and Warratta.

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. Some councils also have management plans that cite issues of significance for Aboriginal people under their jurisdiction, such as places of cultural heritage significance.

There are eight Local Government Areas in the Murdi Paaki region:

- Bourke
- Brewarrinna
- Broken Hill
- Central Darling
- Cobar
- Coonamble
- Walgett
- Wentworth

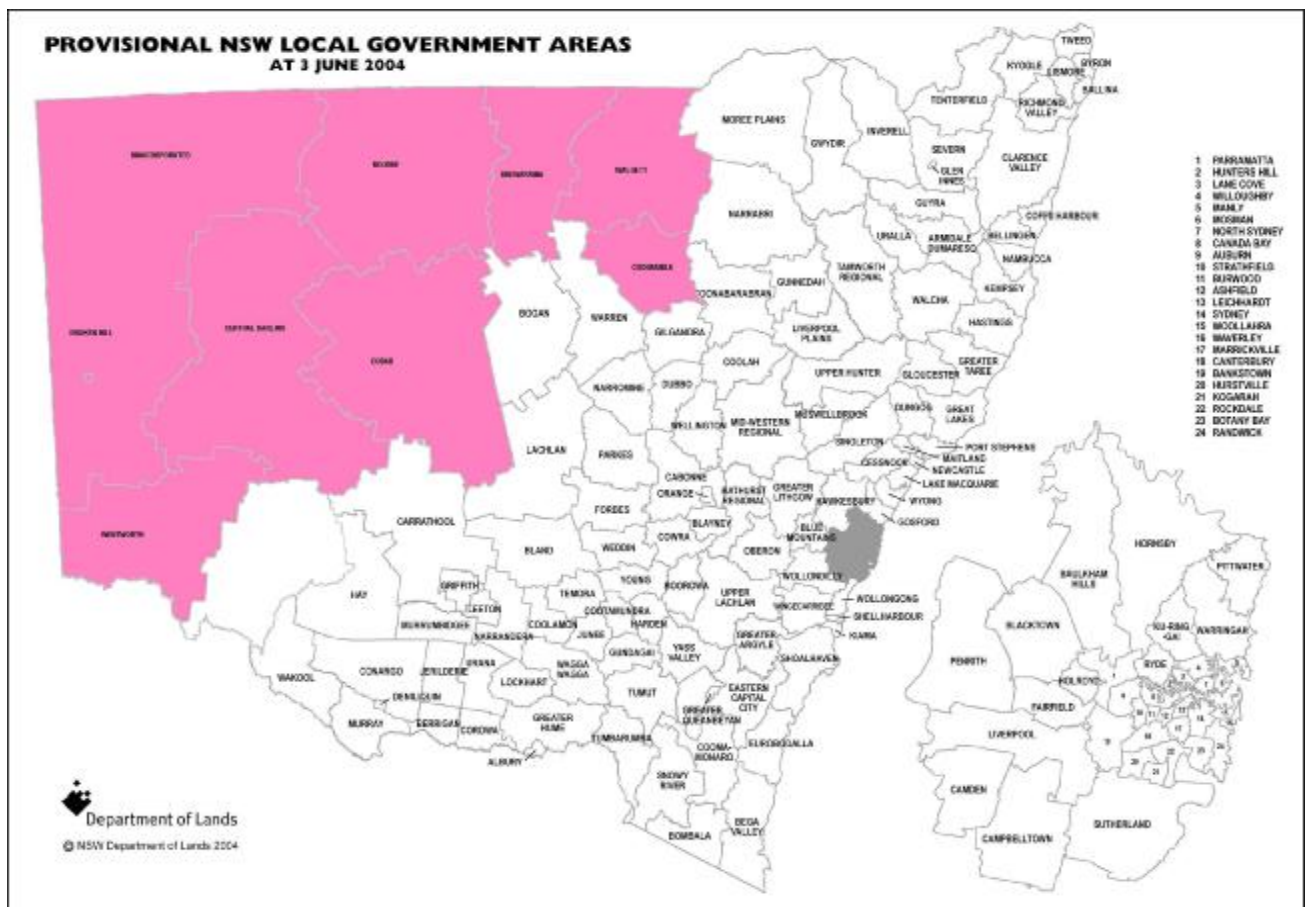


Figure 1: Map of the Murdi Paaki Region

1.2.1 The Bourke Local Government Area

Just under one quarter of the Bourke Shire population identify as Aboriginal (24.8%). Compared to the non-Aboriginal population of the Bourke Shire, the Aboriginal population have:

- higher proportions of people in the younger age groups (50.2% in the 0-4, 5-11 and 12-19 year age groups compared with 34.7% in the 0-19 age group in the total population) – for the Bourke LGA, the median age for the Aboriginal population was 20 years, compared with the median age for the total population of 31 years;
- a higher proportion of single parent families (43.7% compared with 25.1%);
- a higher proportion of households with more than one family (7.2% compared with 2.5%); and
- higher proportions of individuals and households on low incomes; and
- much lower proportions of individuals and households on high incomes.

The Bourke Shire Social Plan identifies two overarching issues:

- the coordination of services and facilities or sources of funding; and

- the appropriateness to the local area of the service solution which is adopted.

The Needs and Gaps Analysis indicated deficiencies in services in the following areas:

- before and after school care
- vacation care
- occasional care
- psycho/social professional counselling services
- drug, alcohol and gambling addiction programs/treatment
- community transport
- cultural activities
- library services.

The plan includes a range of actions to improve relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, including cross-cultural training for council and other staff, cultural events, and public recognition of successful Aboriginal initiatives.

1.2.2 The Brewarrina Local Government Area

The Brewarrina Shire population is 2,060 of which 1,103 are Aboriginal people, or 54% of the total population.

The council's Social Plan contains no specific Aboriginal strategy, as it is waiting on completion of the Community Working Party's strategic plan.

The plan identifies a lack of childcare, recreational, sport and cultural activities for young people as a high priority for action.

The strategy for economic development and tourism identifies the reopening and promotion of the Aboriginal Cultural Museum and the restoration of the Aboriginal Fish Traps by NSW Fisheries and the Department of Environment and Conservation as key areas for the development of tourism and economic activity.

1.2.3 The Wentworth Local Government Area

The total population of of the Wentworth shire is 6,984, of which 545 (or 7.8%) are Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal population has increased by 13.9% over the decade 1991-2001, with 55.4% of the population in the 0-24 age bracket.

The council's social plan contains actions to develop a crime prevention plan and the implementation of a community plan to support Aboriginal wellbeing and leadership. It includes improving facilities at the Dareton Neighbourhood Centre to allow it to offer programs and activities for the Aboriginal community.

1.2.4 The Broken Hill Local Government Area

The total population of the Broken Hill Shire is 20,274, of which 1,039 are Aboriginal people or 5.1%. The number of Aboriginal people has increased by 370% since 1981. Aboriginal children (0-10) are 36% of the total Aboriginal population.

There are no specific Aboriginal actions in the community plan.

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups

The Murdi Paaki Region covers the traditional lands of fifteen Aboriginal nations or language groups.

- Baranbinja
- Budbadjui
- Gamilaroi
- Gunu
- Kuja
- Malyangapa
- Murrawari
- Mutthi Mutthi
- Ngemba
- Ngiyampaa
- Paakantii
- Ularai
- Wangaaybuwan
- Wangkumara
- Wayilwan

1.4 Land Councils

There are 18 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the Murdi Paaki region:

- Brewarrina
- Broken Hill
- Cobar
- Collarenebri
- Coonamble
- Dareton
- Goodooga
- Ivanhoe
- Lightning Ridge
- Menindee
- Murrawari
- Nulla Nulla
- Tibooburra
- Walgett
- Weilan
- Weimija
- Weilmoringle
- Wilcannia

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council also has a North West Branch in the region.

1.5 Regional Economy

The economic base of the communities in Murdi Paaki is varied. Generally, the regional economy revolves around grazing of both sheep and cattle; farming of cotton, wheat, grape and citrus; and mining of silver, lead, zinc and opal.

The most common industry employers in the Murdi Paaki region are:²

<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock farmers • Shop Managers • Miners • Sales Assistants • Farmhands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Administration & Defence (23%) • Agriculture (19%) • Construction (14%) • Education (7%) • Health and Community Services (7%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health & Community Services (28%) • Education (20%) • Retail (17%) • Government Administration & Defence (17%) • Property & Business Services (7%)

Table 1: Industry Employers, Murdi Paaki

The proportion of Aboriginal males employed in the private sector in the Far West was the lowest in New South Wales, whilst the proportions employed in both the

² NSW Labour Economics Office, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Profile of Indigenous Persons Far West Region*, p. 4.

state and local government sectors were the highest. The proportion of Aboriginal males employed in CDEP was just above the average for non-Sydney New South Wales.

1.5.1 Where are the job vacancies?

In mid-March 2006, job networks in the Murdi Paaki region listed 111 job vacancies. The top five occupations with vacancies were:

- Food, Hospitality and Tourism (18%)
- Social, Welfare and Security (13%)
- Sales Assistants and Store persons (9%)
- Accounting, Finance and Management (7%)
- Metal and Engineering Trades (7%)

1.5.2 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

There are eight CDEPs in Murdi Paaki with a total of 1,216 participants. The CDEPs are based in Brewarrina, Gulargambone, Lightning Ridge and Walgett. Murrawari CDEP is based in Engonnia and also covers a CDEP cell in Weilmoringle. The eighth CDEP is a Regional Enterprise, Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation Limited, which covers the communities of Bourke, Broken Hill, Cobar, Collarenebri, Coonamble, Goodooga, Ivanhoe, Menindee, Wentworth and Wilcannia.

CDEP	Number of participants
Barriekneal Housing & Community Ltd	180
Gular CDEP Aboriginal Corporation	68
Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation Ltd	501
Murrawari Aboriginal Corporation (Enngonia)	51
Northern Star Aboriginal Corporation (Brewarrina)	143
Walginnam Employment and Training Aboriginal Corporation (Walgett)	124

Table 2: CDEP Participation, Murdi Paaki

1.5.3 Shared Responsibility Agreements

A list of Shared Responsibility Agreements for the Murdi Paaki region forms Attachment 1.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

2.1 Demographics

The Aboriginal population of the Murdi Paaki Region in 2001 was 7,542³, representing 14% of the total population. The Aboriginal population has grown by 2% (198) since 1996, which was significantly lower than expected. This could be the result of Aboriginal people migrating from Murdi Paaki to other regions (such as Binaal Billa) to seek better employment, education and health opportunities and facilities.

The median age of the population in 2001 was 21 years, compared to 40 years for the non-Aboriginal population of the region (i.e. half of the Aboriginal population in the region is 21 years old or less). The Aboriginal median age was one year higher than in 1996, while the non-Aboriginal median age was three years higher.

The following charts, sourced from ABS Census data for 2001, reveal the markedly different age spread amongst the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Murdi Paaki.

³ 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.

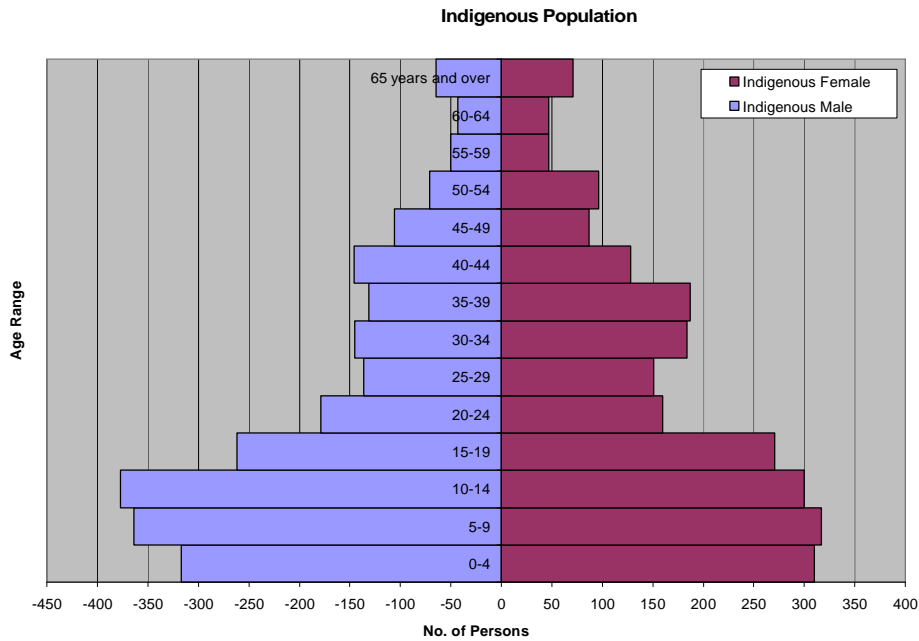


Figure 2: Age and Gender Distribution by Aboriginal Population

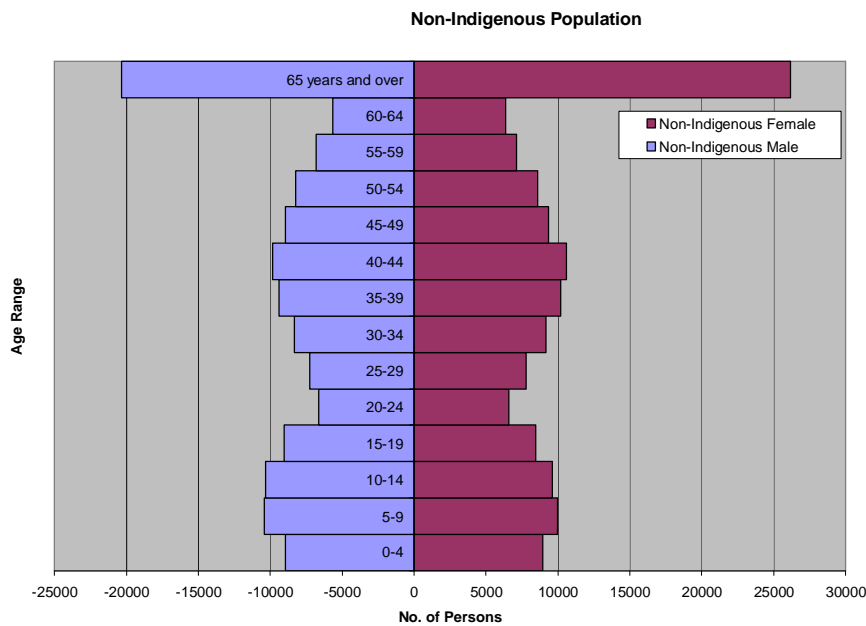


Figure 3: Age and Gender Distribution by Non-Aboriginal Population

This comparison of the age structure of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations highlights the youthfulness of the Aboriginal population in Murdi Paaki, with 54.8% of Aboriginal people in 2001 being less than 25 years old, compared to only 29.7% of non-Aboriginal people. In contrast, only 3.1% of the Aboriginal population was aged 65 years or over, compared to 14.9% of the non-Aboriginal population.

Fifty-four percent of Aboriginal females in the region are 25 years or younger; the proportion for males is 55.7%. For non-Aboriginal females, 29.4% are 25 years or younger, while 30% of non-Aboriginal males are 25 years or younger.

An interesting aspect of the Aboriginal family unit in the region is the higher number of couples with children compared to non-Aboriginal couples. Around 74% of Aboriginal couples have either dependent or non-dependent children, whilst only 50% of non-Aboriginal couples have children. However, the proportion of Aboriginal families that are single parent families is much higher at 34%, compared to that of non-Aboriginal single parent families, which is 15%.

2.2 Population Projections

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 of age is a key demographic feature of the North West, Northern and Far West statistical districts (SDs) of New South Wales. Access to jobs and training are major contributing factors to movement into the city, while the lower costs of family housing stimulate a movement back in later years.

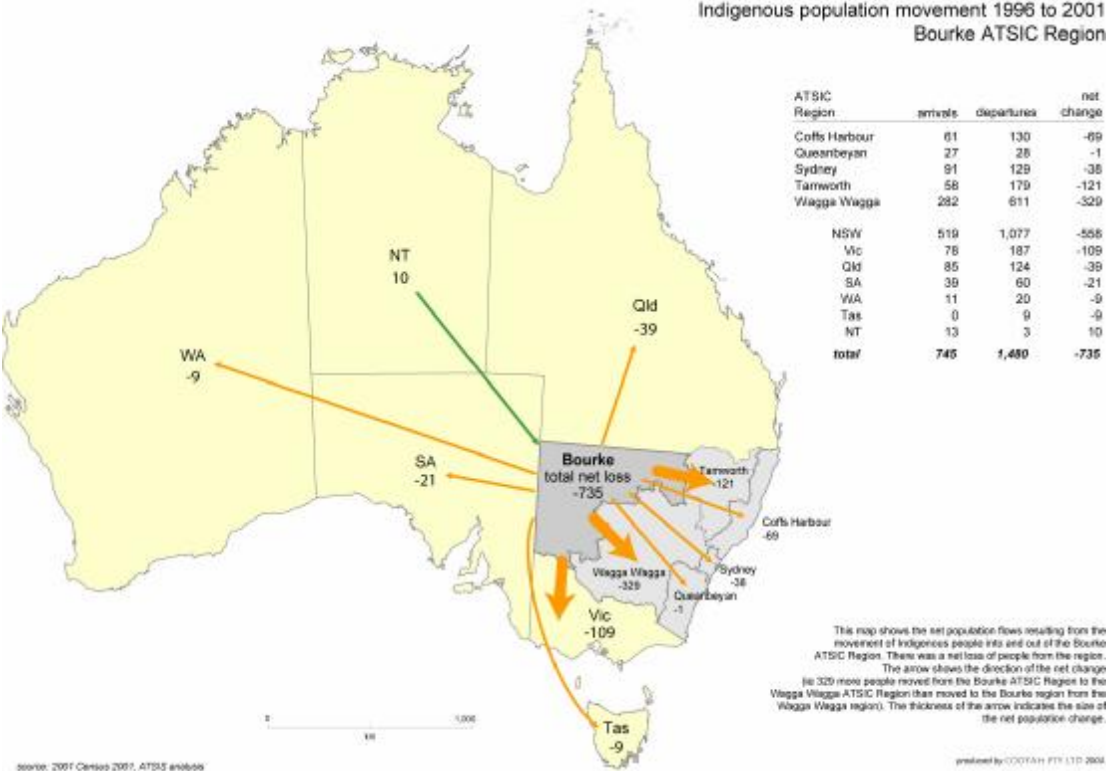


Figure 4: Aboriginal population movement 1996 to 2001, Murdi Paaki ATSIC Region

This pattern would contribute to the low series projection of a 2% decline in the Aboriginal population from 2001 to 2009 in the Murdi Paaki region (corresponding to the Far West and North West SDs). The high series for Murdi Paaki projects an estimated population increase of 18%, which is based on a lower Aboriginal out-migration rate.

While many government agencies are planning for an ageing population, the data show that the Aboriginal population is affected by contrasting trends:

1. A Younger Population: Higher birth rates and a younger population will result in continuing strong demand by Aboriginal people for children's and youth services and family housing. When demand does decline, it will decline at a slower rate compared to the non-Aboriginal community.
2. Increasing Proportions of Aboriginal People: Higher Aboriginal population growth rates, combined with out-migration by non-Aboriginal people from regional and rural areas, will increase the proportion of Aboriginal people in many areas, especially the north and west of the State. This will result in persistent demand for Aboriginal-specific services, even while total demand decreases.
3. An Ageing Population: Like the general population, the proportion of Aboriginal people older than 55 is also increasing. An Aboriginal 'baby boom' occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s, which will generate intense demand for Aboriginal aged care services in the 2040s as it moves into retirement.
4. Senior citizens
As the total number of people in the 65+ group is projected to increase by 15%, providing aged-care services for this group will be a major challenge. However, the number of Aboriginal people in the 65+ group is also projected to increase, and at higher rates than the general population: 17% to 39%. This trend will result in rapidly increasing demands for aged-care services specifically designed for Aboriginal Elders.

3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The social and economic indicators confirm that Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki region are not only significantly disadvantaged compared to non-Aboriginal people, but are more disadvantaged with respect to most of these indicators when compared with Aboriginal people in other regions of the State. The following sections examine particular indicators in detail.

3.1 Health

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki region is generally worse than other areas of the State. In most respects, the region ranks poorly when compared to other regions of the State, and is below average or only average in most areas. For example, the region has a relatively high rate of low birth weight babies, which appears to be related to high rates of smoking amongst Aboriginal mothers, and a very low rate of antenatal visits by pregnant mothers.

While rates of hospital separations⁴ for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, infectious diseases, skin infections and alcohol-related problems have all decreased to a greater or lesser extent over the period 1993 and 2005, the overall rates are still far higher than the average for Aboriginal people throughout the State. Continuous and sustained efforts by the health services in the area are therefore required to keep these indicators trending downward.

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, unless otherwise indicated.⁵

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. Murdi Paaki had the third highest proportion of Aboriginal low birth weight babies in New South Wales in the period 2002 to 2004, after New England/North-West and the North Coast. The proportion of Aboriginal babies in Murdi Paaki that were born with a low birth weight decreased between 1993 and 1998, increased again between 1999 and 2001, and decreased again between 2002 and 2004. The period between 1993 and 2004 saw a 24% reduction in the number of Aboriginal babies born in the region.

Between 1999 and 2001, 14.3% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.6% of all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales.

⁴ 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 in patient completes and episode of care. A type change separation occurs when an episode of care ends because the type of care provided to the patient changes.

⁵ NSW Department of Health, Population Health Division, *The health of the people of New South Wales – Report of the Chief Health Officer*, Sydney, at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/public-health/chorep/atsi/atsi_anteprocatsi_rcmg.htm.

Between 2002 and 2004, 13.8% 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 165% higher than for non-Aboriginal babies in the region, only 5.2% of which were born with low birth weight in the period 2002-04.

The higher rates of Aboriginal babies born with low birth weights is related to a high incidence of Aboriginal mothers smoking in the second half of pregnancy (58% in 2000, compared with 15.3% of non-Aboriginal mothers), and the younger overall age of Aboriginal mothers (smoking rates among younger women are higher than among older women).

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, Murdi Paaki had the second worst figures in New South Wales for visits to antenatal clinics, with only 63% of pregnant Aboriginal women consistently having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is about 9% lower than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), and around 28% lower than that of non-Aboriginal mothers throughout the State, 87.3% of whom had their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks of pregnancy. It is also much lower than the average for non-Aboriginal mothers in the region, which is also the second lowest in the State, at 85.1%.

While the figures for the region have improved markedly over the period from 1993 to 2004 (i.e., from 43.4% to 63%), these data suggest that there is still a low awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst Aboriginal mothers in Murdi Paaki.

3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease

Murdi Paaki is the only RCMG region in the State where rates of hospital separation for cardiovascular disease have actually improved over the period from 1993 to 2005, and therefore demonstrate the better health outcomes that can be achieved for Aboriginal people when governments focus on Aboriginal disadvantage for an extended period of time.

While the rates of hospital separation for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Murdi Paaki region between 2002 and 2005 were still around 80% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 5,561 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. Interestingly, the rate is around 160% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 130% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in Murdi Paaki (2,408 per 100,000).

The rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has decreased by around 7% between 1993 and 2005, in contrast to the across-the-board increases in the incidence of this disease amongst Aboriginal people in all the other RCMG regions of New South Wales over the same period.

3.1.3 Diabetes

Diabetes is a major health problem. Murdi Paaki is the only RCMG region in the State where rates of hospital separation for diabetes have actually improved over the period from 1993 to 2005, and again demonstrate the better health outcomes that can be achieved for Aboriginal people when governments focus on Aboriginal disadvantage for an extended period of time.

The rate of diabetes amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki decreased significantly between the period from 1993-96 (1,455 per 100,000) to 1999-2002 (963 per 100,000), but increased again in the period from 2002 to 2005 (1,264 per 100,000). The rate in the period from 2002 to 2005 was therefore 13% lower than the rate from 1993 to 1996. However, it is still 70% higher than the rate for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the same period (236 per 100,000), and more than five times the rate of for the non-Aboriginal population in the region and the State, at 251 and 236 per 100,000, respectively.

While the diabetes rate for Aboriginal people in the region has improved, the fact that it continues to be far higher than the state average for Aboriginal people indicates that diabetes prevention and treatment should remain a high priority in the region.

3.1.4 Infectious Diseases

Hospital separation rates for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenzae meningitis throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have dropped by 80% over the period from 1993 to 2005, and by 95% in the Murdi Paaki region.

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki during the period from 2002 to 2005 is slightly lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 3.9 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000. However, it is still more than twice the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, and 30% higher than for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period.

Skin infections are related to the later onset of heart and kidney disease. Hospital separation rates for skin infections throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by 16% over the period from 1993 to 2005. However, there has been an almost 40% reduction in the rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki between 1993 and 2005, which once again indicates that focused attention upon Aboriginal health issues in the region over the last decade or so has resulted in improvements which can hopefully be sustained if continued.

Nevertheless, the rate of hospital separations for skin infections amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki during the period from 2002 to 2005 is still almost three times

the state average for Aboriginal people, at 1,582 per 100,000, compared with 583 per 100,000. It is also more than three-and-a-half times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (435 per 100,000), and almost seven times the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State (235 per 100,000). There is, therefore, a huge margin for further improvements.

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.

While the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki during the period from 1993 to 2005 has decreased by 45%, from 7,471 per 100,000 to 4,132 per 100,000, the rate is still more than twice the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 1,790 per 100,000. It is also almost eight times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region and throughout the State during the same period (579 and 537 per 100,000, respectively).

The rate of hospital separations for trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki during the period from 1993 to 2005 has seen a similarly dramatic decrease of around 38%, from 1,696 to 1,054 per 100,000. The rate is still more than twice that for Aboriginal people throughout the State, at 497 per 100,000. It is between three and four times the rates for non-Aboriginal people in the region and throughout the State during the same period (278 and 214 per 100,000, respectively).

Again, while the significant decreases in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 are encouraging, considering the extremely high rates from which they have decreased, alcohol-related problems for Aboriginal people should remain a high priority for attention by the health services in the region.

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 housing situation for Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki is marked by overcrowding, high dependence on social housing, low levels of home ownership and high rates of environmental health-related illnesses.

Aboriginal households are about half as likely to own or be purchasing their own homes as the total population. Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki are significantly under-represented as homeowners. In 2001, less than 30% of Aboriginal households in the Murdi Paaki region owned or were buying their own homes, compared to close to 70% of the total population of the region. Murdi Paaki had the lowest rate of Aboriginal home ownership of all the ATSI regions in 2001, followed

closely by Kamilaroi. The Sydney and Many Rivers ATSI regions had the highest rates, with close to 40% of Aboriginal households owning or purchasing their homes.⁶

In 2001, the rate of overcrowding in Aboriginal social housing in Murdi Paaki was extremely high, with 11.2% of households reporting overcrowding. This compares to a rate of 2.2% for all households in Murdi Paaki, 6.3% for the Aboriginal population of New South Wales, and an average of 2.5% across all social housing in New South Wales.⁷

Data provided by the NSW Department of Housing indicates significant Aboriginal over-representation in social housing in New South Wales, with the Murdi Paaki ATSI region having by far the highest proportion of Aboriginal people in social housing. In 2002-2003, over 39% of new allocations of public housing were to Aboriginal households, compared to 8.8% across the State. The next highest was Kamilaroi, at 33%, while the lowest was Sydney at 4.7%.⁸

3.2.1 Environmental Health

Illnesses that relate closely to poor housing conditions – such as acute respiratory infections, gastrointestinal infections and skin infections – can shed light on housing standards. These are often signs of overcrowding and houses with poor sanitation systems.

Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki have by far the highest rates of acute respiratory infections of all the RCMG regions in New South Wales, with hospital separations occurring at a rate of 3,404 per 100,000 in the period from 2002 to 2005. This was a substantial decrease from the rate during the period from 1993 to 1996 (4,798 per 100,000), and is far lower than the peak of 5,863 per 100,000 in the period 1996 to 1999. The rate has therefore decreased by almost 30% between 1993 and 2005.

It is, nevertheless, 55% higher than the state average for Aboriginal people during the period from 2002 to 2005 (1,504 per 100,000). It is more than three times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (990 per 100,000), and five times the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State (627 per 100,000).

Similarly, gastrointestinal infections were very high amongst Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki in 2002 to 2005, with hospital separations for these infections occurring at the rate of nearly 712 per 100,000, compared to a state average of 285 per 100,000 for Aboriginal people. This rate has increased by 75% between 1993 and 2005. It is around twice that of non-Aboriginal people in the region during the same period (356 per 100,000), and more than three times the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State (211 per 100,000).

⁶ 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, 2005, p. 84.

3.3 Justice

The data below were sourced from the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, June 2005, and refer to the Murdi Paaki ATSI region as a whole.

3.3.1 Victimization from Assault

Murdi Paaki had the highest rate of assault victimisation in New South Wales for Aboriginal persons and all persons in 2002. The Aboriginal victimisation rate for assault in Murdi Paaki (16,000 per 100,000 head of population) is more than double the Aboriginal victimisation rate anywhere else in New South Wales. The ATSI region with the next highest rate of Aboriginal victimisation is the New England/North West region, with 6,000 per 100,000. The rate of assault victimisation for all persons in Murdi Paaki in 2002 was 4,000 per 100,000.

It should therefore not be surprising that Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki have the highest rate of hospital separations for assault-related injuries of all the ATSI regions in New South Wales. The assault rate for Aboriginal people in this region in 2002 was in excess of 2,000 per 100,000 head of population, which is more than four times the rate for the regional population as a whole in the same year (under 500 per 100,000).

The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal assault rates is by far the largest in Murdi Paaki. The average for New South Wales as a whole is 500 per 100,000 for the Aboriginal population, and approximately 100 for the population as a whole.

3.3.2 The Rate of Adult Imprisonment

In 2002, Aboriginal rates of imprisonment were highest in the Sydney and Murdi Paaki ATSI regions, where more than 1% of the Aboriginal population was in prison. In 2003, the rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki was 1%, compared to 0.2% for the total population of Murdi Paaki.

In 2002, the proportion of Aboriginal defendants refused bail in Murdi Paaki was higher than that of the general population in the region, but lower than that for Aboriginal people in New South Wales and for the total population of New South Wales. In Murdi Paaki, approximately 23% of Aboriginal higher court defendants were refused bail, compared to 15% of the total regional population.⁹ The gap of eight percentage points was the second lowest of all regions (after Binaal Billa), with most regions having a 20 percentage point gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal defendants.

Murdi Paaki had the second highest rate of Aboriginal adults on remand in New South Wales in 2002, with Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki four times more likely to be on remand than non-Aboriginal people. In 2002, 2% of the Aboriginal adult population in Murdi Paaki were on remand.

⁹ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, *Proportion of persons refused bail at finalisation, NSW Higher Courts by Indigenous status, ATSI regions 2002*.

3.3.3 Juveniles

Murdi Paaki had the highest proportion of Aboriginal juvenile persons of interest diverted¹⁰ from court (almost 70%) of any region in the State in 2002, and compares to a diversion rate of 75% for the juvenile population as a whole. The gap between the Aboriginal and the total population (five percentage points) is lowest in Murdi Paaki – gaps in other regions range from 12 percentage points to over 30 percentage points.

3.4 Economic Development

3.4.1 Employment

According to the *2001 Census*, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki in 2001 was substantially higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people: 24% compared to 10%. Compared to other regions, however, the level of Aboriginal employment in the region was relatively good, with an unemployment rate that was lower than any other ATSI region except Sydney, and similar to the state average. The gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's unemployment rates were also smaller in Murdi Paaki (though still considerable): the gap was 13 percentage points in Murdi Paaki, compared to 21 percentage points in Kamilaroi. Only Sydney's gap was lower, at 10 percentage points.

Employment participation rates for Aboriginal people were lower than for the non-Aboriginal population (48% compared to 60%). Participation in the workforce rates increased by 3% for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations between 1996 and 2001.

3.4.2 Income

The median Aboriginal family income in Murdi Paaki in 2001 was \$548 per week, compared to \$699 for non-Aboriginal families.¹¹ The lower incomes are likely to be the result of lower employment rates, employment in lower paying occupations and the younger age of the Aboriginal population.

In 2001, 35% of Aboriginal households in the region were below the poverty line, with just over half of the children in Aboriginal households living below the poverty line.

3.5 Education

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

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 ATSI, *Murdi Paaki Regional Statistical Summary*, 2001.

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5 for Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki in 2005 are between twenty-five and thirty-six percentage points lower than the state average for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students in the region are currently performing between forty and fifty-three percentage points lower than the state average for all students (Band 2 and above for Year 3, and Band 3 and above for Year 5).

With respect to overall literacy results for Year 3 students in the region, 4.7% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 4.8% 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, 26.5% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 37.5% 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, 7.9% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 8.9% 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, 32.6% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 38.3% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

3.5.1 School Retention Rates

The retention rates for Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 10 by ATSI region in 2001 were 66% in Murdi Paaki compared to 80% for New South Wales overall. Murdi Paaki not only had the lowest Years 7 to 10 retention rate for Aboriginal students, but also the largest gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The retention rates for Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 by ATSI region in 2001 were also lower in Murdi Paaki (21%) compared to New South Wales overall (30%), and compared to non-Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki (nearly 50%). While Murdi Paaki had the lowest Years 7 to 12 retention rate of all ATSI regions, the gap of 30 percentage points was not the largest gap: the gap was close to 40 percentage points in Sydney.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate across all schools for Murdi Paaki Aboriginal students in Years 10 to 12 was 32.2%, compared to 53.6% for all students in the region. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki are remaining in school at a rate around 18% lower than the state average.

These data indicate that Murdi Paaki schools need to make far greater efforts to assist 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 Year 10 Attainment

The percentage of Aboriginal students who attained a Year 10 certificate in Murdi Paaki in 2001 (approximately 65%) compares unfavourably with the average for Aboriginal people in New South Wales overall (82%). The percentage of Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki who attained a Year 10 certificate in that year was also considerably lower than the percentage of non-Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki who attained a Year 10 certificate (88%). Of all regions, the gap between the performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students was largest in Murdi Paaki.

3.5.3 Year 12 Attainment

Some 57% of Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki in 2001 attained a Year 12 certificate, compared to 67% for Aboriginal students in New South Wales overall. The percentage of Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki who attained a Year 12 certificate in that year was also considerably lower than the percentage of non-Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki who attained a Year 12 certificate, which was almost 85%. The gap between the performance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Murdi Paaki was second only to the Kamilaroi ATSIC region.

3.5.4 Tertiary Education

Levels of attainment in post-school education and training in 2001 were lower for Aboriginal people than for the total population in Murdi Paaki, as the following table reveals.

<i>Aboriginal</i>	<i>Total Population</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate (0.1%) • Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate (0.2%) • Bachelor (1.2%) • Advanced Diploma/ Diploma (1.5%) • Certificate (5.5%) • Unclear (13.7%) • Not Qualified (77.9%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate (0.5%) • Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate (0.8%) • Bachelor (4.8%) • Advanced Diploma/ Diploma (3.5%) • Certificate (14.4%) • Unclear (13.7%) • Not Qualified (62.4%)

The data reveals that almost 80% of Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki did not have post-school qualifications in 2001, compared to 62.4% of the regional population as a whole. These were the lowest rates of post-school educational attainment in all ATSIC regions, for both the Aboriginal population and the population as a whole.

3.6 Culture and Heritage

An Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee was recently established under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. The Committee will advise the Minister for

the Environment and the Director General of the Department of Environment and Conservation about any matter relating to Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in New South Wales. The Committee will not replace existing local, regional and state-wide consultative processes of the Department of Environment and Conservation or other NSW government agencies. The Committee will provide strategic advice about the development and administration of Aboriginal culture and heritage programs, policies and projects.

3.6.1 Environmental and Natural 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 4,625 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the eight LGAs in the region.

Under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, two Management Agreements are in place as of December 2003, totalling 70,277 hectares, i.e., Mootawintji and Mt Grenfell, and seven Aboriginal Places:

- 1) Jack's Lookout Aboriginal Place
- 2) Surveyor's Lake Rocks Aboriginal Place
- 3) Moordale Wells Aboriginal Place
- 4) The Pinnacles Aboriginal Place
- 5) Mt Drysdale Aboriginal Place
- 6) Dippo Ceremonial Ground Aboriginal Place
- 7) White Lady Rock Aboriginal Place.

There is also one Aboriginal Area declared within the region, ie Pindera Downs Aboriginal Area, and two Historic Sites:

- 1) Mutawintji Historic Site.
- 2) Mount Grenfell Historic Site

Mutawintji National Park (near Broken Hill) was the first Aboriginal-owned conservation reserve in NSW, declared in 1998. The second Aboriginal-owner-majority Board of Management is caring for and managing Mutawintji National Park on behalf of its Aboriginal Owners and the community at large.

The second Aboriginal-owned conservation reserve was Mt Grenfell Historical Site (near Cobar), which was returned to Aboriginal Ownership on 17 July 2004. Like at Mutawintji National Park, Mt Grenfell is under the care, control and management of an Aboriginal-owner-majority Board of Management.

3.6.2 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.

Under the *NSW Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983*, approximately 151 land claims have been granted in the Murdi Paaki region (in whole or part) as of October 2005.

As of October 2005, the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC), holds 4 properties in the Murdi Parki region which comprise 37,502 hectares in total.

3.7 Families and Young People

3.7.1 Violence, Abuse and Neglect

The victimisation rate for domestic violence for Aboriginal children and young people was higher in Murdi Paaki (27 persons per 1,000 population) than any other region of the State in 2001-02. The victimisation rate for domestic violence for the total population was also higher in Murdi Paaki (9 persons per 1,000 population) than any other region in New South Wales. These figures reveal a domestic violence victimisation rate for Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki that is almost three times that of non-Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki, a gap that is substantially larger than that of any other region.

In 2001-02, Murdi Paaki had the highest rate of Aboriginal children and young people involved in reports where assessment determined abuse or neglect issues in New South Wales, with nearly 37 Aboriginal children per 1,000 population involved in reports where assessment determined abuse/neglect issues. This is more than twice the regional average for non-Aboriginal children – the largest gap of any region

3.7.2 Kinship care

The Binaal Billa (87%) and Murdi Paaki (86%) ATSI regions had the highest proportion of Aboriginal children and young persons placed with Aboriginal families or kinship care in 2001-02.

4.0 CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

4.1 Community Priorities

In terms of local planning through the COAG Trial, the 16 communities of the Murdi Paaki region have each developed a Community Action Plan which is being used to develop regional and local priorities by the COAG lead agencies, i.e., the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Commonwealth Department of Education Science and Training, supported by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Premier's Department, the Regional Coordination Management Group, the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination.

An analysis of the strategies from the 16 Community Action Plans has revealed 1,066 action items and 324 outcomes. A Regional Matrix which relates to the seven priority areas of *Two Ways Together*, identifying the themes from the Plans, has been developed. Every action has been collated in this matrix under the themes.

Major Theme	Number of times issues arise in the Plans
Community	331
Employment	319
Health	220
Culture	174
CWP governance	170
Education	166
Service Providers	138
Community Facilities	129
Housing	102
Social Welfare	86

In response to the completion of the Community Action Plans (CAPs) by the sixteen Murdi Paaki communities, the Regional Group has been reconfigured to a Regional Coordination Group (RCG) with four sub-groups responsible for the implementation of each Plan.

The Regional Coordination Group is comprised of representation from:

- the two lead agencies for the Trial, the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Department of Education and Training (DET);
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA);
- Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC);
- NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs;
- NSW Premier's Department;
- Chair, Regional Coordination Management Group (RCMG); and

- one lead agency from each sub-group.

The four sub-groups are:

- Education, Training, Employment and Economic Development
- Health, Housing, Families and Young People
- Law and Justice
- Environment, Culture and Heritage.

Sub-groups will comprise representation from:

- Commonwealth and State Government agencies at a regional or state level as a lead agency or a partner agency;
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (four representatives per sub-group);
- relevant non-government organisations that represent key Aboriginal interest groups that operate in the region; and
- COAG Action Team.

A Regional Partnership Agreement between the key agencies and the Assembly is currently being developed. Regional Strategies that address Economic Development and Employment has been developed. Regional Strategies that address Education and Health are being finalised. Work on the development of Regional Strategies to address Law and Justice, Culture and Heritage, Environment, Families, Children and Young People will commence shortly.

As part of the COAG Trial, the following four priorities were identified through the community consultations in the Murdi Paaki region:

- improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people;
- improving educational attainment and school retention;
- helping families to raise healthy children; and
- strengthening community and regional community organisational governance structures.¹²

When compared to other regions of New South Wales, Murdi Paaki is more disadvantaged in almost every area of need. Some exceptions are rates of juvenile diversions, unemployment rates, and access to bail. However, Aboriginal people still face disadvantages across all of the indicators relative to non-Aboriginal people (with access to bail the only exception).

The 16 Community Action Plans have identified a range of issues in addition to those cited above:

¹² Shared Responsibility Agreement between the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training and the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Murdi Paaki Regional Council 22nd August 2003, see: http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/2884DD08-D92C-41FC-8CD5-39042BF33682/2493/Murdi_PaakiRegional_Agreement.pdf

4.1.1 Health

Health outcomes for Aboriginal people in Murdi Paaki are substantially worse than those of other regions in NSW, and are a high priority for the community. This includes, in particular, low birth weight babies, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and environmental health. Health and justice issues associated with alcohol and substance abuse are also critical issues.

4.1.2 Youth Development

An overview of the demographic information and the community's prioritisation detailed previously suggests that, with a high proportion (54.8%) 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, employment programs, housing and disease prevention programs. Socio-economic data also points to areas of need in relation to families and young people, with high rates of domestic violence amongst children and young people in this region, as well as high rates of substantiated child abuse and neglect.

4.1.3 Justice

Justice is an area of particular need in the Murdi Paaki region, as it had the second highest rate of Aboriginal incarceration of all regions, with 1% of Aboriginal people from the region in prison compared to 0.2% for the total population in Murdi Paaki. Assault and victim of crime rates in Murdi Paaki are also substantially higher than other regions. Inappropriate attitudes expressed by the judiciary in the region during sentencing have been raised as an issue by Aboriginal communities.

4.1.4 Education

Education is a priority for the Aboriginal communities of the region. The data indicates particular disadvantage in relation to literacy and numeracy, Years 10 to 12 retention, Years 10 and 12 attainment, and post-school education and training. An increased emphasis on school retention programs which include alternative learning modules, school community engagement and partnerships, as well as parent involvement, have been identified by the communities as the basic requirements to overcome the barriers to better educational outcomes for Aboriginal young people in the region.

4.1.5 Community Organisation Governance

The community has given high priority to community organisation governance and community building. It is difficult to obtain comparative data on these areas, so the extent of disadvantage with respect to them is difficult to ascertain. However, as part of the implementation of the COAG Trial, initial evaluations suggest that community organisation governance structures in the region have benefited from the establishment of Community Working Parties (CWPs) in the sixteen Murdi Paaki communities. The CWPs are overseen by a Regional Governance Structure in the form of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly.

4.1.6 Housing

While not an identified community priority, but invariably identified as an unmet need, the socio-economic data and the growing young population in Murdi Paaki suggest that housing need is significant in the region.

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 high correlation between Aboriginal community priorities and areas of need identified through the data.

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

The socio-economic indicators also identify the Murdi Paaki 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 • Culture and heritage issues • Employment • Juvenile diversions from court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and child health • Cardiovascular disease • Diabetes • Skin infections • Alcohol use • Housing • Environmental health • Assault, sexual assault & domestic violence rates • Adult incarceration rates • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy • Years 10-12 retention rates • Tertiary education

4.3 Issues for Consideration

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

1. The effectiveness of the programs focusing on families and communities, given there are large numbers of programs targeting this issue, but disadvantage is still very high.
2. Whether it is possible to determine if current education initiatives are having a positive impact on rates of literacy and numeracy and school retention and

attainment, and to revisit existing service delivery levels if no positive correlation is found.

3. While there have been improvements across a number of the health indicators in recent years, considering the continuing high rates of low birth weight babies, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, skin infections, drug and alcohol and environmental health problems, serious consideration should be given to whether the current level of services and programs is sufficient to address these problems.
4. Whether it is possible to determine if current justice initiatives are having a positive impact on rates of adult imprisonment and juvenile detention.
5. The need to direct employment programs into occupations with high job prospects, such as hospitality, welfare, retail, accounting, finance, management and metal and engineering trades.

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.

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.

The Regional Coordination Group and its membership are recommended to give careful consideration to these factors when developing a response to the issues identified in this report.

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