



TWO WAYS TOGETHER
REGIONAL REPORT
Public Report

Riverina/Murray

– November 2006 –



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 1 outlines the characteristics of the region, noting its geographical location, the local government areas that fall within its borders, and its population. It also outlines the Aboriginal cultural and language groups and the Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the region. There is a brief overview of the local economy, in which 28% of Aboriginal men are labourers and 40% of Aboriginal women are intermediate and elementary clerical, sales and service workers – which tend to be the lower paid, lower skill occupations in the manufacturing, agriculture and retail sectors which have low prospects for growth. The region also had the greatest increase in unemployment (24.6%) and the greatest decrease in participation rates (2.5% loss) versus regional (0.1% gain) and all of New South Wales (0.8% gain).

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

Chapter 2 presents a statistical profile of the region, focused on the demographics and population projections. This chapter reveals that Aboriginal people make up 2.7% of the total regional population and account for 6.1% of the NSW Aboriginal population. As in the rest of New South Wales, the regional Aboriginal population tends to be much younger than the non-Aboriginal population, with around 60% of the population being under 25 years of age.

In Chapter 3, socio-economic indicators are analysed to determine the areas in which Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in the region. The data reveal that Aboriginal people in the region are disadvantaged on the basis of health, housing and education indicators. There is poor access to prenatal care, a high rate of cardiovascular disease, and the third highest rate of adult imprisonment compared to Aboriginal people in other regions. The income of Aboriginal people is higher than people in remote areas and less than people in urban areas. Aboriginal people in the region are more disadvantaged than most other regions with respect to educational outcomes, with the worst retention rates in the State for Years 10 to 12 students, and average or below average rates of Years 3 and 5 literacy and numeracy. For many non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, Year 10 qualifications (or less) were their highest educational attainment, which is not unusual given the dominance of agricultural activities 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
- Hunter

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

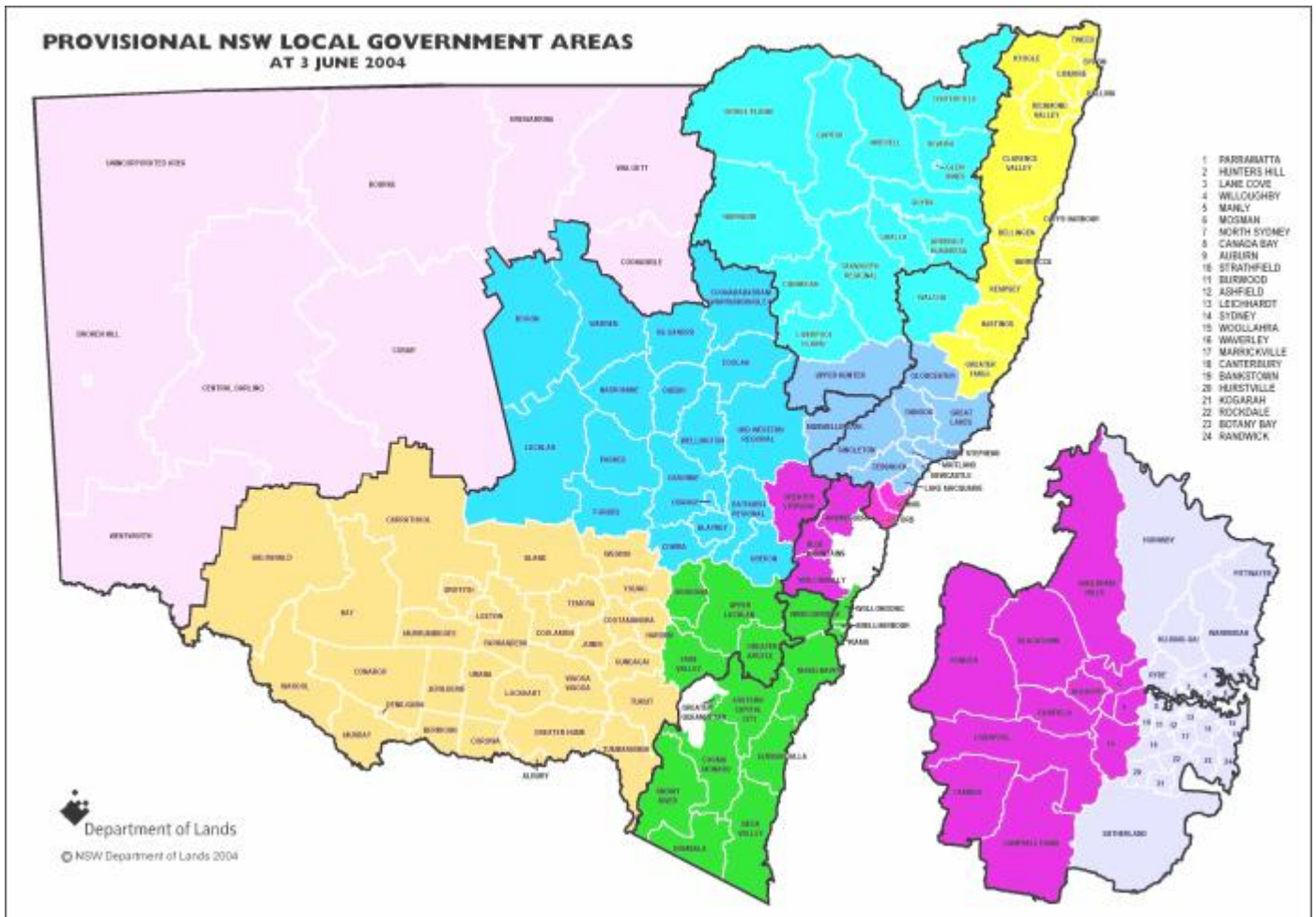


Figure 1: Map of RCMG, ATSiC and LGA boundaries

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 *The Riverina/Murray Region*

The Riverina/Murray region, shown on the map at **Figure 2**, covers a total land area of 144,178 square kilometres in the southern inland region of New South Wales. The region reaches from West Wyalong in the northern part of the region, west to Balranald, east along the New South Wales/Victorian border to the Great Dividing Range, and sweeps north past Young.

There are 30 Local Government Areas in the Region:

- Albury
- Balranald
- Berrigan
- Bland
- Carrathool
- Conargo
- Coolamon
- Cootamundra
- Corowa
- Deniliquin
- Greater Hume
- Griffith
- Gundagai
- Harden
- Hay
- Jerilderie
- Junee
- Leeton
- Lockhart
- Murray
- Murrumbidgee
- Narrandera
- Temora
- Tumbarumba
- Tumut
- Urana
- Wagga Wagga
- Wakool
- Weddin
- Young

Wentworth LGA is excluded from the Riverina/Murray RCMG region, but is included in the Murray LGA region by Australian Bureau of Statistics. As Wentworth has a large Aboriginal population, this will affect statistical analysis. The same applies for the addition of LGAs in the South-Eastern and Central West LGA regions, such as Tumut. Greater Hume is a new LGA amalgamated from Hume, Holbrook and Culcairn Shires on 26 May 2005.



Figure 2: NSW Local Government Areas in the Riverina/Murray Region

1.2 Local Planning for Aboriginal Communities

All local government councils in New South Wales are required to have social plans that make specific mention of local Aboriginal communities and issues of concern to the communities. In practice, some plans are out-of-date, some are still being drafted and newly created councils such as Greater Hume are yet to develop social plans.

Of the 29 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the region, some examples of councils which have produced plans are:

- the Wagga Wagga City Council, which has a Social Plan covering 2003 to 2008 available to download from www.wagga.nsw.gov.au;
- the Gundagai Shire Council Social Plan for 2004-2009, which is available to download from www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au/community;
- the Tumut Shire Council Social Plan for 2002-2006, which is available from www.tumut.nsw.gov.au/; and
- the Tumbarumba Shire Council Community Social Plan 2005-2010, which is available to download from www.tumbashire.nsw.gov.au.

Social plans vary widely in scope, but many include innovative arrangements. For example, the Wagga Wagga City Council has developed an Aboriginal Strategy that provides for Aboriginal community involvement in Council's plans, policies and services in the areas of culture and heritage, and economic and social priorities.² Wagga Wagga City Council also has an Aboriginal Consultative Committee that assists and advises in planning and other issues important to the Aboriginal community.

²

http://www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/viewfile.aspx?article=OA9EW1WZ5JFZASH6C8YX&file=WWCCindigenous_strategy.pdf.

There are no priority communities under the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) in the Wagga region. However, the ACDP’s capital works program has improved the water supply to Cummeragunja reserve at Moama. Sewerage works are also proposed for Brungle (near Tumut).

1.3 Aboriginal Cultural Groups of the Region

The Riverina/Murray Region is the traditional country of eight Aboriginal nations.

<u>Nation group</u>	<u>Clans or language groups</u>
Barapa Barapa	
Muthi Muthi	Dadi Dadi, Yida Yida, Gurendju
Ngarigu	Walaglu (or Wolgal)
Ngunnawal	
Wadi Wadi	Nari Nari
Wamba Wamba	
Wiradjuri	
Yorta Yorta	

Table 3: Aboriginal Nations in the Riverina/Murray Region

1.4 Land

The Riverina/Murray Region fits within the Murray River and Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council boundaries. There are 17 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the region. Balranald LALC is in the Western RALC but was originally in Murray River RALC.

Murray River RALC	Wiradjuri RALC	Western RALC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Albury and District • Cummergunja* • Deniliquin • Moama • Wamba Wamba 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brungle Tumut • Griffith • Hay • Leeton and District • Narrandera • Onerwal • Wagga Wagga • West Wyalong • Young 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balranald

* Cummeragunja LALC was formerly known as Yota Yota LALC

Table 4: Aboriginal Land Councils in the Riverina/Murray Region

1.5 Regional Economy

The Murray-Murrumbidgee statistical region roughly coincides with the Riverina/Murray RCMG region, and has an unemployment rate comparable to regional New South Wales, and is equal to the average for Aboriginal people across the State. The region has a higher participation rate than the NSW average and regional NSW average.

The Riverina/Murray region had the greatest fall in employment in all of New South Wales between September 2004 and September 2005. Employment fell by 4% versus a gain of 2.5% for the whole State and a gain of 1.6% for regional New South Wales. The region also had the greatest increase in unemployment (24.6%) and the greatest decrease in participation rates (2.5% loss) versus regional (0.1% gain) and all of New South Wales (0.8% gain).

There are significant variations in the regional economy between the inland cities of Albury, Griffith and Wagga Wagga, and the surrounding rural towns and hamlets. The regional split in total employment share indicates the spread of economic activity across the region. According to DEWR's September 2005 figures, the Central Murrumbidgee (Wagga Wagga and surrounds) had 38.3% of the region's employment, while Hume (Albury and surrounds) had 26%, Sturt (Griffith and surrounds) had 31.8%, and Murray-Darling (Balranald) had 3.9%.³

1.5.1 Industries and Occupations

There is some diversity amongst the major industries in the Riverina/Murray region. According to the *2001 Census*, the main industries in the region are:

Industry	% share
Grain, Sheep and Beef Cattle Farming	15.33
School Education	6.53
Government Administration	5.21
Horticulture and Fruit Growing and	4.36
Hospitals and Nursing Homes	4.15
Others	64.42

Table 5: Largest Employment Industries in the Riverina/Murray

This diversity is also distributed geographically in terms of the largest sectoral employer by industry and by occupation. The biggest employer in the Central Murrumbidgee (Wagga Wagga and surrounds) in 2001 was retail (16.5%), followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing (14%), while the leading occupations were sales assistants and storepersons (13%) and gardening, farming and fishing (13%). In Hume (Albury and surrounds), the biggest employer was retail (17%), followed by manufacturing (13%), while the leading occupations were sales assistants and storepersons (14%), and clerks, receptionists and secretaries (11%). In Sturt (Griffith and surrounds), the biggest employers were agriculture, forestry, fishing (27%) and retail trade (13.5), while the leading occupations were gardening, farming and fishing (23%), and sales assistants and storepersons (11%).

These data show that the Sturt sub-region is particularly vulnerable to changes in the agricultural sector. In the Central Murrumbidgee and Hume sub-regions, larger regional economies and diversity of economic activities makes the populations in these sub-regions more robust and less prone to being adversely affected by changes in a particular sector. Changes in the market (such as a fall in the commodity price), or changes in technology (such as automated harvesting) and regulation (such as water licensing), or a change in the industry in response to

³

<http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Category/ResearchStats/LabourMarketAnalysis/RegionalEmploymentProfileIndustryOccupation/RiverinaLabourMarketRegion.htm>

market, technology or regulatory drivers (such as changing from mixed cereal crops to flood-irrigated rice), have a direct impact on Aboriginal employment in the region.

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

<i>Aboriginal Men</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Men</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manufacturing (16.6%) • Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (14.7%) • Government Administration & Defence (9.4%) • Retail (8.8%) • Construction (8.3%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (22.6%) • Manufacturing (15.1%) • Retail (11.5%) • Construction (8.5%) • Wholesale Trade (6.9%)

Table 6: Industry Employers (Male)

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

<i>Aboriginal Women</i>	<i>Non-Aboriginal Women</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (13.1%) • Education (12.5%) • Health Services (9.8%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (9.7%) • Community Services (8.8%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail (18.7%) • Education (11.4%) • Health & Community Services (11.1%) • Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (10.9%) • Accommodation, Cafes & Restaurants (7.8%)

Table 7: Industry Employers (Female)

1.5.2 Discussion

The ABS statistics may not accord with anecdotal knowledge of sectors that employ Aboriginal people. The government sector is the most visible employer of Aboriginal people in the region, which is evident as the third highest employer of men. The same is true for women, who are employed in the education, health and community services sectors, which are predominantly public sector positions. However, Aboriginal people are 'invisible' in their largest employment sectors – manufacturing and agriculture for men and retail for women; 'invisible' because Aboriginal people are mostly employed in the low paying and low skilled parts of the sector.

The occupation statistics bear this out: 28% of Aboriginal men are labourers and 40% of Aboriginal women are intermediate and elementary clerical, sales and service workers. These tend to be the lower paid, lower skill occupations in the manufacturing, agriculture and retail sectors. As manufacturing and agriculture have low prospects for growth, and Aboriginal people are generally employed in the most vulnerable positions within the sector, future employment prospects for Aboriginal men appear poor.

Another interesting observation is that agriculture, forestry and fishing constitute the second largest employment sector for Aboriginal men despite being the largest sector in the region and the largest employer of non-Aboriginal men. This is because

land ownership has historically favoured non-Aboriginal people and the high skills required to manage a modern agricultural operation. Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Corporations may therefore have the landholdings but not the expertise to manage agricultural enterprises, which are consequently outsourced to non-Aboriginal farm management companies (see below). Changes in the structure and modes of operation of agricultural industries in the region have reduced the numbers of Aboriginal people employed in this sector, particularly as a result of the change from labour-intensive livestock production and cropping to capital-intensive agriculture.

Agricultural industries are susceptible to change through:

- natural events, such as floods and droughts;
- technology changes, such as automated harvesting;
- market changes, such as falls and rises in commodity prices;
- regulatory changes, such as water licensing and extraction rules;
- population changes, such as young people migrating out of the region to pursue educational or career opportunities, leaving older people to manage farm businesses; and
- commercial changes such as multinational agribusiness owning and managing farms instead of small family operations.

As the agricultural sector faces vulnerability from the factors listed above, so too are the industries dependent on the viability of the agricultural sector, such as manufacturing and retail industries. These are also the biggest employers of Aboriginal people (males and females), but in the lowest paid and least skilled occupations (labourers and clerical/sales workers). These factors make them especially susceptible to rises and falls in the agricultural sector.

However, looking at demographic trends (see below), the Aboriginal population of the Riverina/Murray tends to be much younger than the non-Aboriginal population.

1.5.3 Where are the job vacancies?

According to the Jobs Network, there is considerable geographical variation in job vacancies, in May 2006, there were 591 jobs in the Central Murrumbidgee (Wagga Wagga and surrounds), 556 jobs in Sturt (Griffith and surrounds), 143 jobs in Hume (Albury and surrounds) and 68 jobs in Murray Darling (Balranald). Of the 1,358 jobs available, 565 were for labourers, factory and machine workers and 153 were for gardening, farming and fishing.⁴

According to DEWR, the longer term employment prospects for the manufacturing and agriculture sectors are below the prospects of other sectors, such as retail and health and community services. This means that in future Aboriginal men in the Riverina/Murray region will have lower employment prospects than Aboriginal women. Additionally, future employment prospects for labourers are well below the prospects for other occupations such as tradespersons, managers and professionals. This means that Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray will have lower employment prospects than non-Aboriginal people.

⁴ <http://jobsearch.gov.au/maps/maps.aspx?WHCode=0&TextOnly=0&st=11&rgn=rive#>

1.5.4 Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP)

CDEPs in the region employ about 339 Aboriginal people, split between the Murrumbidgee (115) and Murray (234) sub-regions. This amounts to 1% of all Aboriginal men and 1% of all Aboriginal women. Only 42% of Aboriginal men and 31% of Aboriginal women were counted as employed. An equal majority of Aboriginal men (42%) and an overwhelming majority of Aboriginal women (59%) were counted as 'not in the labour force'. As the demographic data demonstrates, most of the Aboriginal population is below the age of 18, which has big impacts on labour market participation.

Most non-Aboriginal people are in employment, 69% of men and 53% of women, while only 27% of men and 44% of women are not in the labour market. The demographic trend accounting for this is the ageing population.

2.0 STATISTICAL PROFILE OF THE REGION

The Binaal Billa ATSIIC region includes the Mid-Western and Riverina/Murray RCMG regions, as well as parts of the Illawarra/South-East region. The data to follow were drawn from the 2001 Census, or the *Two Ways Together Report 2005*, unless otherwise indicated.

2.1 Demographics

In 2001, there were approximately 7,291⁵ Aboriginal people in the region, of whom 3,671 were men and 3,620 were women. Aboriginal people make up 2.74% of the total regional population of just over 284,000.⁶ Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray region account for 5.4% of the NSW Aboriginal population. The population density of the region is very low, at 1.82 persons per square kilometre.

Aboriginal population statistics are problematic to interpret because the population is small and widely dispersed, highly mobile and reluctant to identify as Aboriginal. This is borne out in the Aboriginal population statistics for the Riverina/Murray region.

There are 11 communities in the region with significant Aboriginal populations. Some of these communities still reside in, or have close associations with, former Aboriginal reserves or missions, such as Cummergunja (Moama) and Brungle (Tumut). Some reserves with significant Aboriginal populations are also priority communities for addressing capital works and housing needs.

The Aboriginal population is predominantly young. About 60% of Aboriginal people are less than 25 years old, of whom 38% are school-aged (5-19 years). This demonstrates the high birth rate, lower life expectancy and higher death rates within the Aboriginal population. This has considerable implications for planning and delivery of services, such as education and employment. The total Aboriginal population of the Riverina/Murray region has increased since 1996 because of the increased likelihood of individuals identifying as Aboriginal, and because of a rising birth rate.

Aboriginal population declines sharply with increasing age, indicating a high mortality or migration rate. Elderly women (65 years and older) exceed elderly men for both populations. However, the trend is especially obvious for Aboriginal people, where the ratio is three women for every two men, a sign of the lower life expectancy and higher mortality of Aboriginal males.

The non-Aboriginal population has peaks at school-age and over 65 years, but is generally flat between 25 and 60 years of age. It rises slightly to a peak in middle age (40-44 years) and gradually declines toward 60 years. There is a sharp peak in the older than 65 age category, which represents both the higher proportions of elderly people in regional and rural areas (because of migration by young and middle-aged people) and the cumulative effect of a broad age category. The current priority is the provision of services to the aging population as the 'baby-boom' peak moves closer to the over-65 age group.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Department of Local Government figures

Figure 3: Age Distribution of Aboriginal population

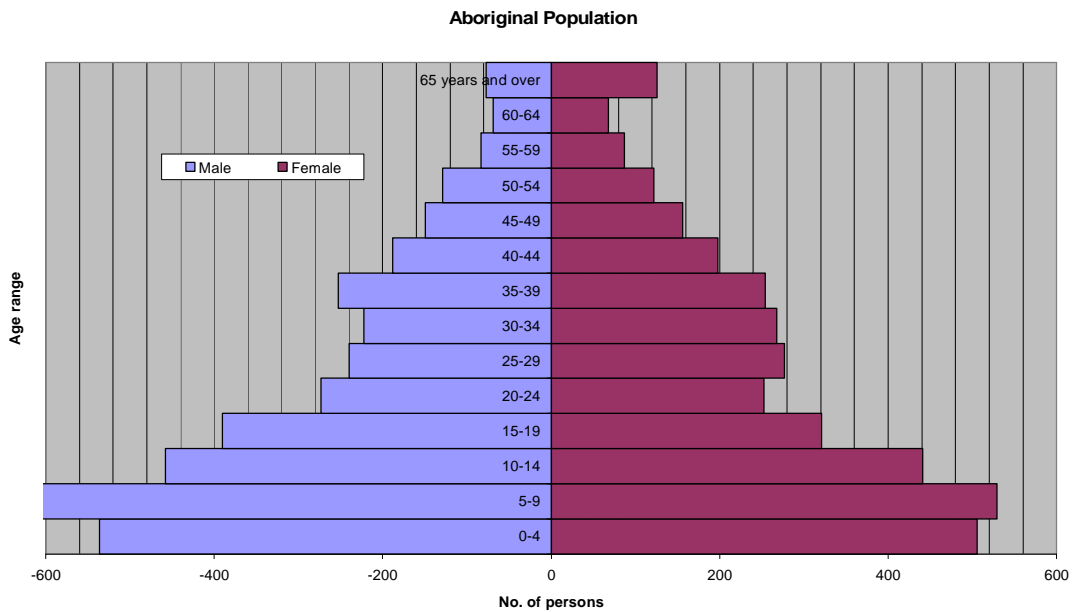
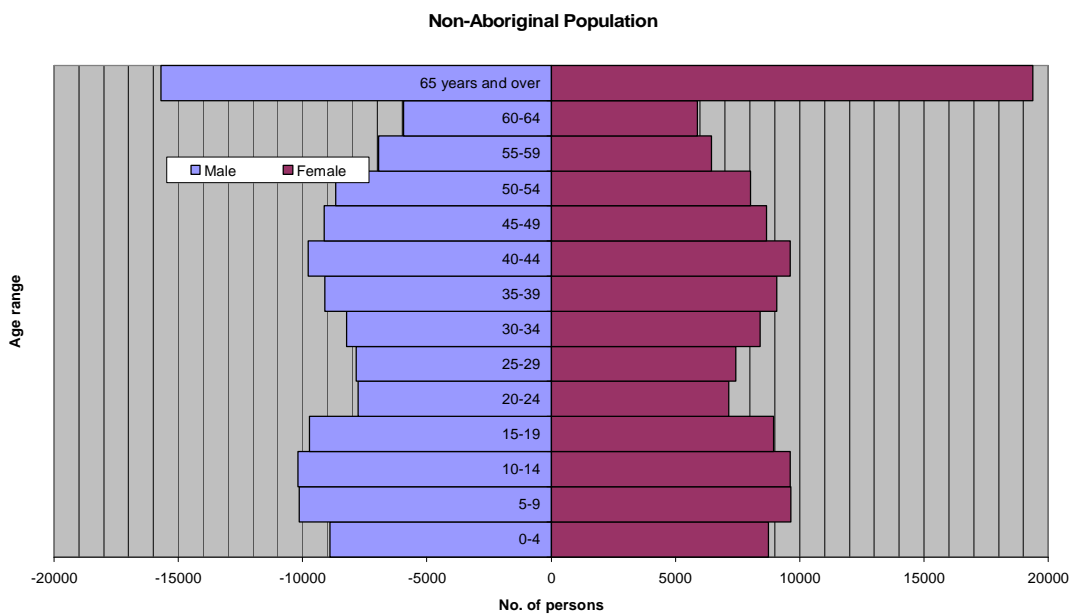


Figure 4: Age Distribution of non-Aboriginal population



2.2 Migration Patterns

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 regional New South Wales, with “access to jobs and training seen as contributing to movement into the city, and the lower costs of family housing seen as stimulating a movement back in later years”.⁷

Aboriginal girls are most likely to migrate out of the region, leaving a population dominated by Aboriginal males. The deviation in gender balance shows that migration has mostly occurred in the 5-9, 15-19, 25-29 and 30-34 age groups.

According to Wagga Wagga City Council's Social Plan, migration into the city for education and training, such as the city's university and military facilities at Kapooka and the RAAF base, could explain the peak in the non-Aboriginal population of high-school and tertiary-aged persons (15-19 and 20-24 years). This would account for the gender deviation for the non-Aboriginal population in that age group.

More marked in the non-Aboriginal population is the out-migration of persons aged 20-24 years, possibly to pursue educational and employment outside of the region. DEWR compared the 1996 and 2001 Census data for this age group in this region and found a 19% decrease in those aged 15-19 in 1996 and those aged 20-24 in 2001, as well as 7.8% decrease for those who were five years older. DEWR stated that these figures "imply an outflow of younger people from the region." DEWR also noted a small fall (of 0.3%) in the proportion of the region's population at prime working age (20-54 years), and a much smaller rise in the total working population (15-64 years) compared with all of New South Wales and regional New South Wales.⁸

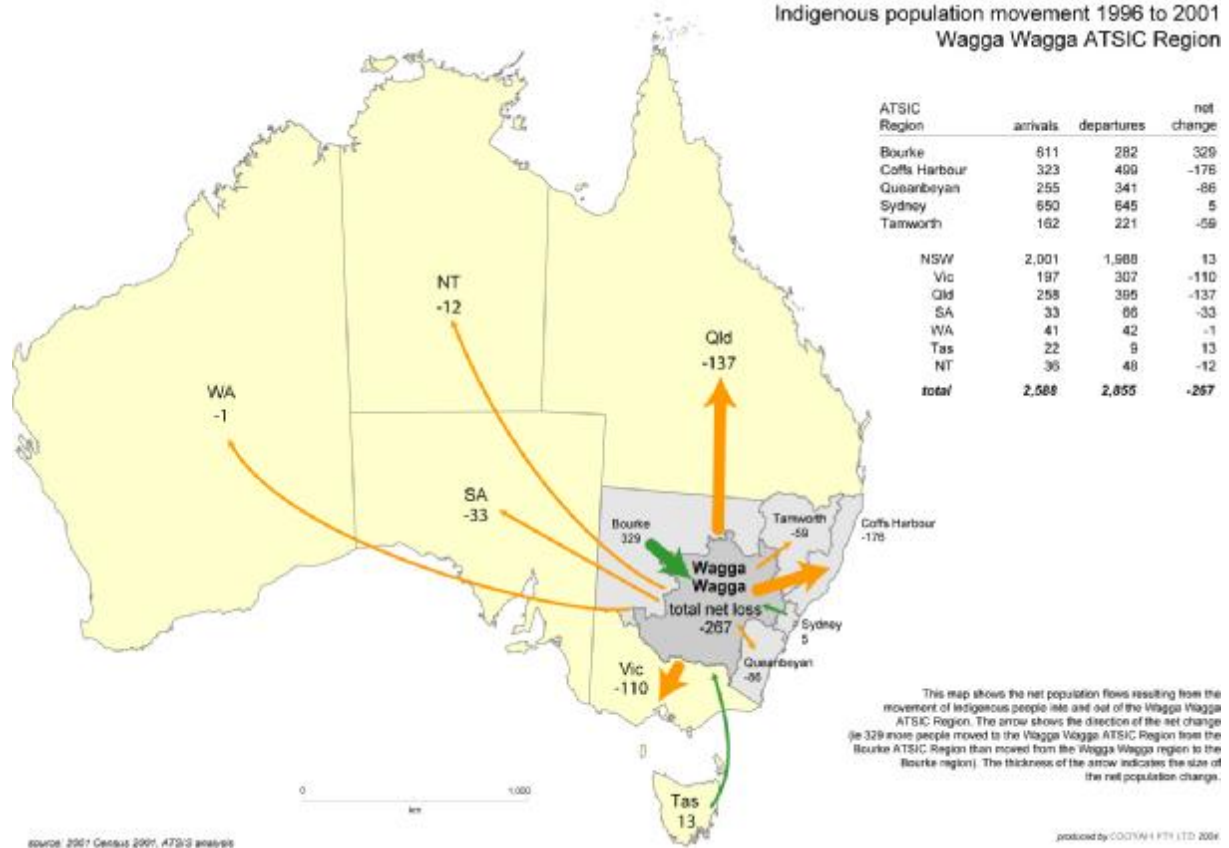
As CAEPR noted, there is a trend for families to move back into regional areas for the better lifestyle and affordable housing. This trend is detectable in the family structure statistics presented below and in the non-Aboriginal population through the correlation between the "baby boom" peak in the 30-54 age range and their children in the 5-19 age range. This "tree-changers" migration is not apparent, except as a plateau in the 25-39 age range.

Provision of education services is closely related to the size of the 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19 age groups. The Aboriginal population has its peak at the 5-19 age group, creating a significantly larger demand for Aboriginal education services. The numbers of Aboriginal tertiary students and job seekers in the 20-29 age group is also forecast to grow in the Riverina/Murray region. As noted above, many Aboriginal people in this age group are leaving (or have left) the region in pursuit of educational or employment opportunities.

Figure 6: Aboriginal Population Migrations into and out of Wagga Wagga ATSI Region

⁸ <http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/B3E25685-58A0-4F1A-B834-785CFE090024/0/RegionOverviewRiverina.pdf>).

Indigenous population movement 1996 to 2001
Wagga Wagga ATSI Region



3.0 SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS

The social and economic indicators confirm that Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray region are significantly disadvantaged compared to non-Aboriginal people in the region and throughout the State. They are also 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 Health⁹

The health profile of Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray region is generally average to below average when compared to other areas of the State, although in a few areas, such as antenatal visits by pregnant mothers and rates of skin infections, the region ranks relatively well compared to other regions of the State.

For example, rates of low birth weight Aboriginal babies and hospital separations¹⁰ for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenzae meningitis are significantly higher than the state average. On the other hand, rates of cardiovascular disease in the Aboriginal population are around the state average, and diabetes rates are somewhat lower than the state average.

The Riverina/Murray region is within NSW Health's Greater Southern Area Health Service (GSAHS). The boundaries are not identical with the Riverina/Murray RCMG region due to the inclusion in the latter of areas within the South-Eastern ATSI Region (all areas east of Tumut) and Central West ATSI Region (areas north east of Gundagai). The GSAHS does not include Balranald.

The data below provide clear evidence that more needs to be done to address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray 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 Riverina/Murray that were born with a low birth weight increased significantly between 1993 and 2004. The period saw a 50% increase in the number of Aboriginal babies born in the region, while the number of babies born declined by about 30%.

Between 1999 and 2001, 7.4% of Aboriginal babies in the Riverina/Murray were born with low birth weight, which is 40% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal babies born in New South Wales during that period. Between 2002 and 2004, 11.5% of Aboriginal babies in the region were born with low birth weight, compared to 12.7% of

⁹ All material in the Health Section of this report was sourced from: 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.

¹⁰ 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.

all Aboriginal babies in New South Wales. Although this is the third lowest figure for RCMG regions in the State after the Central Coast and Hunter, it is 86% higher than for non-Aboriginal babies throughout the State, only 6.2% of which were born with low birth weight in the period 2002-04.

While it is perhaps too early to judge trends in the figures, they appear to have worsened 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).

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 Riverina/Murray had the second highest figures in New South Wales for visits to antenatal clinics, with 74.7% of pregnant Aboriginal women having their first antenatal visit before 20 weeks. This figure is significantly higher than the average for Aboriginal mothers throughout the State (69.3%), but is 14% 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 Riverina/Murray, which is actually the third lowest in the State for non-Aboriginal women, at 90.7%. These data suggest that while the awareness of the need for antenatal visits amongst Aboriginal mothers in the Riverina/Murray is higher than the average for the State, there is still a significant gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mothers.

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

3.1.2 Cardiovascular Disease

Between 2002 and 2005, rates of hospital separation for cardiovascular disease amongst Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray were around 18% higher than the NSW average for Aboriginal people: 3,127 per 100,000, compared to 3,071 per 100,000. The rate is 45% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population of New South Wales over the same period (2,164 per 100,000), and 9% higher than the rate for the non-Aboriginal population in the Riverina/Murray (2,878 per 100,000).

The rate of hospital separations for cardiovascular disease in the region has increased by around 28% between 1993 and 2005, which appears to reflect across-the-board increases in the incidence of this disease amongst Aboriginal people in New South Wales over the same period.

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

Riverina/Murray rose by 50% between 1993-96 (448 per 100,000) to 2002-05 (671 per 100,000). However, it is 40% lower than the average rate of 746 per 100,000 for the total NSW Aboriginal population in the period from 2002-05, and is almost double the rate for the total NSW non-Aboriginal population (236 per 100,000).

The 50% worsening of the statistics for the Aboriginal population of the region over this period is comparable to the significant overall worsening of the statistics across the total NSW population over the last decade or so. These statistics indicate a major public health crisis in relation to diabetes across the whole population.

3.1.4 Infectious Diseases

Hospital separation rates for pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenza meningitis throughout the State amongst Aboriginal people have increased by more than 150% over the period from 1993 to 2005.

The rate of hospital separations for these infections amongst Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray during the period from 2002 to 2005 is more than three times higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 13.9 per 100,000, compared to 4.2 per 100,000, and is almost four times the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region (3.6 per 100,000). It is also more than four times 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 Riverina/Murray region during the period from 2002 to 2005 is 57% higher than the rate of non-Aboriginal people in the region, at 392 per 100,000, compared to 249 per 100,000. It is around 67% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State (235 per 100,000), and around 30% lower than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales (583 per 100,000).

The 50% worsening of the statistics for the Aboriginal population of the region over the period 1993 to 2005 is comparable to the significant overall worsening of the statistics across the total NSW population over the last decade or so.

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 Riverina/Murray during the period from 2002 to 2005 is around 4% higher than the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 1,865 per 100,000, compared to 1,790 per 100,000, but is more than three times the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (617 per 100,000), and 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 Riverina/Murray during the period from 2002 to 2005 is virtually the same as the rate for all Aboriginal people in New South Wales, at 499 per 100,000,

compared to 497 per 100,000, but is 74% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region (287 per 100,000), and 133% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people throughout the State during the same period (214 per 100,000).

The 40% increase in the rate of hospital separations attributed to alcohol and 38% increase in trauma attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region between 1993 and 2005 appears generally consistent with the general upward trend in the statistics for Aboriginal people across the State. These statistics indicate that alcohol-related problems are on the increase in the Aboriginal population.

3.2 Housing

Aboriginal households are about half as likely to own or be purchasing their own homes as the total population. In 2001, the proportion of Aboriginal households who owned or were buying their own homes in the Riverina/Murray region was approximately 25%. The proportion of Aboriginal people who owned or were purchasing their own homes in the Riverina/Murray region was less than half the average for the non-Aboriginal population in the region.

Aboriginal families are more than twice as likely to be living in overcrowded dwellings as the total population. In the Riverina/Murray 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.

The *2001 Census* found that most Aboriginal families in the region live in one-family households. However, the *Binaal Billa Regional Data Report 2004* states that multi-generational families could be living in one residence in overcrowded conditions.

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.

3.2.1 Environmental Health

In 2003, the Department of Environment and Conservation conducted an audit of environmental issues within Aboriginal communities. The audit's findings for the Riverina/Murray region were:

Community	Environmental issues
Griffith	Odour issues with sewer works Litter Respiratory problems linked with crop-dusting Waste collection Contaminated LALC lands
Narrandera	Illegal dumping and litter Town water poor quality Sewerage and waste collection problems Wetlands not being flushed
Tumut	Sewerage problems (Brungle) No recycling
Wagga Wagga	Water quality and quantity

	Fish habitat modification Illegal dumping Respiratory problems linked with crop-dusting Urban stormwater
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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 improving Riverina/Murray statistics for acute respiratory infections over the period 1993 to 2005 may reflect a genuine improvement in the incidence of these diseases in the Aboriginal population, although there has been a dramatic increase in the rate of gastrointestinal infections over the same period.

Hospital separations for acute respiratory infection amongst Aboriginal people during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 1,303 per 100,000, but had risen to 1,619 per 100,000 for the period from 1999 to 2002: a 24% increase over nine years. However, the period 2002 to 2005 saw a 25% decrease in the rate to 1,216 per 100,000. The Riverina/Murray figures for the period 2002-05 are around 20% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (1,504 per 100,000), and 24% higher than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (924 per 100,000).

Hospital separations for gastrointestinal infection amongst Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray during the period from 1993 to 1996 were 58 per 100,000, but had risen to 176 per 100,000 for the period from 2002 to 2005: a more than three-fold increase over twelve years. The Riverina/Murray figures for the period 2002-05 are 38% lower than the NSW average for Aboriginal people (285 per 100,000), and 34% lower than the rate for non-Aboriginal people in the region over the same period (267 per 100,000).

3.3 Justice

The data below were sourced from the *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators* (June 2005), unless otherwise indicated, and refer to the Binaal Billa ATSIC region as a whole.

According to crime statistics for the entire region, there were higher rates for assaults (domestic violence), assaults (not domestic violence), sexual offences, break and enter (non-dwelling), stealing from dwelling, and malicious damage to property. The murder rate is misleading because there were only four recorded murders in 2004 and none for 2003. An explanation for the break and enter (non-dwelling) statistics could be the higher rates of thefts of farm machinery and equipment.¹¹

3.3.1 Victimisation from Assault

The rate of hospitalisations for assault-related injuries by Aboriginal status in the Riverina/Murray region is just under 500 per 100,000 population. The Riverina/Murray region had the equal second highest rate of assault victimisation in

¹¹ <http://bocd.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocd/cmd/crimetrends/lnit>

New South Wales. In 2002, the rate of assault victimisation in the Riverina/Murray region was just below 6,000 per 100,000 by Aboriginal status.

3.3.2 The Rate of Adult Imprisonment

The rate of adults on remand in the Riverina/Murray region was approximately 175 per 100,000. This rate was lower than the Sydney and Murdi Paaki regions but higher than other regions.

The rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal adults in the Riverina/Murray region was similar to the North West and North Coast regions, lower than the Murdi Paaki and Sydney regions, but higher than the neighbouring Illawarra/South-East region. The rate of imprisonment by Aboriginal status in the Riverina/Murray region was almost 800 per 100,000.

The Riverina/Murray region had the lowest proportion of persons refused bail by Aboriginal status at under 10%.

3.3.3 Juveniles

The following data were sourced from the Department of Juvenile Justice's *Aboriginal Over-Representation Strategic Plan* (2001), unless otherwise indicated.

The Riverina/Murray region has an imprisonment rate for Aboriginal juveniles lower than the North Coast, Mid-Western, and Sydney Metropolitan ATSIC regions.

Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre

The Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre (Tirkandi Inaburra) is a residential centre for Aboriginal youth that aims to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system by strengthening cultural and personal identity and resilience. The Centre is located on 780 hectares of land near Coleambally, and opened in January 2006.

Tirkandi Inaburra is a facility for young Aboriginal males who have potential to do well in life but are just starting to "get into trouble", or showing signs of being at risk of contact with the criminal justice system. Participants will come from communities located between the Lachlan and the Murray Rivers and between Balranald and the western side of the Blue Mountains. Up to 16 Aboriginal males aged 12 -15 years of age will voluntarily reside at Tirkandi Inaburra for between three to six months.

Educational, vocational mentoring and cultural programs will be provided by teachers (from nearby Coleambally Central School) and Aboriginal elders. Families will be provided with support through the centre and other agencies and services.

3.4 Economic Development

The statistical information in the section to follow was drawn from the *2001 Census*, unless otherwise indicated.

According to the Department of State and Regional Development, there are 19 Aboriginal businesses in the Riverina/Murray region. Of the businesses that provided details of their enterprise activities: five Aboriginal businesses are involved in arts

and craft retail trade, one business recycles green waste, another business provides cultural education and training services, and one is an Aboriginal building company.

3.4.1 Employment and Unemployment

The Riverina/Murray region had the third lowest unemployment rate in New South Wales of all the RCMG regions in 2001. The unemployment rate of Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray region in 2001 was 25.2%, compared to 6.9% for the non-Aboriginal population (see Chapter Two for more discussion of the Riverina/Murray labour market.)

3.4.2 Income

Most Aboriginal people in the region earned between \$120 and \$399 per week in 2001. Aboriginal females on average earned more than males, \$120-\$199 for males compared to \$200-\$399 for females. The range of income levels for Aboriginal males indicates the variety of occupations and industries in which they are employed, i.e., mostly low paying jobs, but also some higher paying ones (such as trades or government jobs). Despite the average income level being lower, more Aboriginal males were earning incomes in the higher income groups compared with Aboriginal females.

This difference in income levels is evident in the graphs below, with male income distribution being much broader across the income spectrum than the narrower distribution for Aboriginal females. Dr Allan¹² attributes this to “a greater number of women caring for children in one-parent families and receiving family allowance”. This is supported by the fact that about 60% of Aboriginal women were not in the labour force in 2001, and 9% were unemployed. Dr Allan’s hypothesis is also supported by the graph below for Aboriginal females, because the peak income level of \$200-\$399 is most evident in the 25-34 year old age group. This income level persists for Aboriginal females up to age 64, and is the greatest of the two income levels for Aboriginal females 65 years and older. It must be remembered, however, that the population for Aboriginal males and females over the age of 60 is very small.

¹² Binaal Billa Regional Data Report 2004

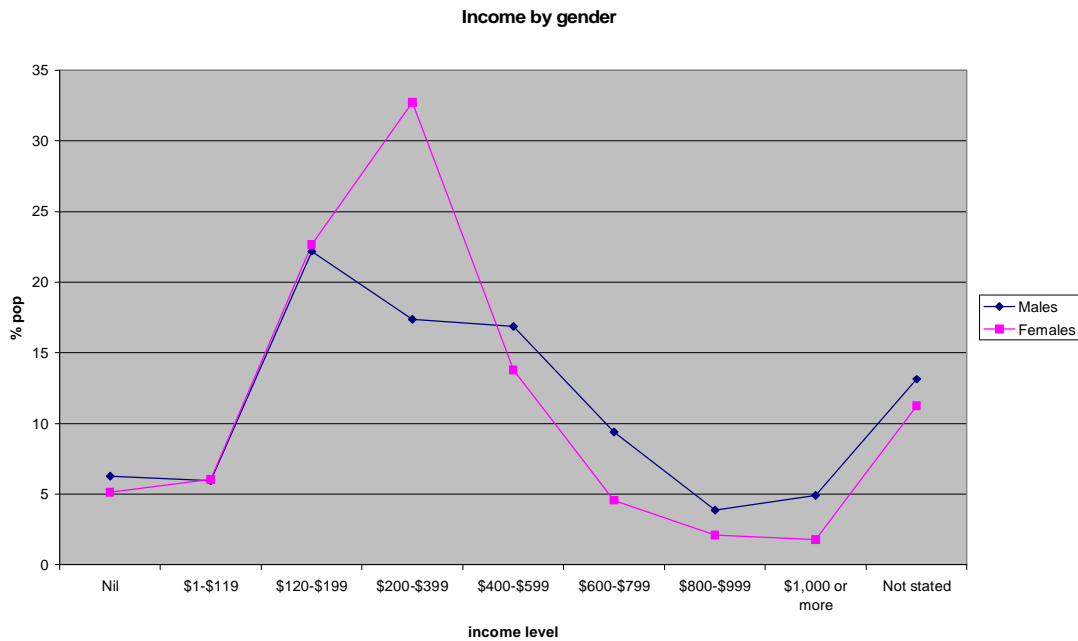


Figure 7: Individual Aboriginal Income by Gender

Another explanation for these differences is that the 31% of Aboriginal women employed are mostly in clerical and shop assistant positions that pay on average more than the low-skilled labouring positions in which many Aboriginal men are employed. The retail and educational sectors (the biggest employers of women) have higher average wages than the manufacturing and agriculture sectors (the biggest employers of men). However, Aboriginal women seem not to progress up the income scale with age (and increased skill and experience) as some Aboriginal men have appeared to do. The anomaly is that 14% of Aboriginal women describe their occupation as 'professional' but this is not evident in the Aboriginal female individual income distribution.

Household income best illustrates the disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal families compared with other families in the region. The peak income level for Aboriginal households in 2001 was between \$300-\$399 per week (12%). Also, 13% of Aboriginal households earned less than \$300 per week, and 20% earned more than \$1,000 per week. Peak income levels for non-Aboriginal families were \$300-\$399 per week (10%) and \$800-\$999 per week (10.5%), while 10% earned less than \$300 per week, and 30.5% earned more than \$1,000 per week. It should be noted that Aboriginal families' incomes also tend to support more individuals than non-Aboriginal families. It should also be noted that there is a tendency for Aboriginal households not to state any or all of their income (1.3 times more likely than non-Aboriginal households).

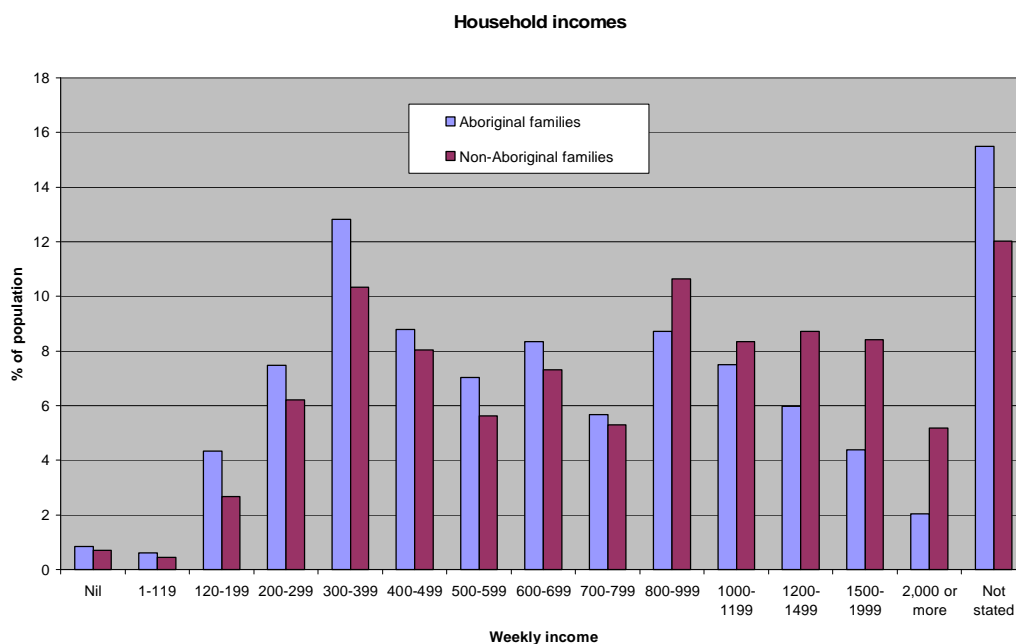


Figure 8: Household Incomes in the Riverina/Murray Region

Overall, household income, family income and individual income levels of the Aboriginal population in the Riverina/Murray are similar to other Aboriginal populations in rural areas. They are higher than for people in remote areas and lower than for people in urban areas. Dr Allan (using the former wards of the ATSI Binaal Billa Region) illustrated differing levels of income across the region, so that people in the Deniliquin ward (roughly the Murray LGA region) earned on average less than people in the Lachlan/Murrumbidgee ward (roughly the Murrumbidgee LGA region). She attributed the intra-regional variation to household and family composition, the seasonal or temporary work opportunities in the region, and migration into and within the region (and into and out of households).

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.

Levels of literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5 for Aboriginal students in the Riverina/Murray in 2005 are in most cases around the state average for Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students in the region are currently performing between eleven and twenty-two 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, 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, 38.2% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 40.5% 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, 13.4% of Aboriginal students were placed in the two highest skill bands, while 21.2% 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, 43.2% of all students in the region were placed in the two highest skill bands for literacy, 48.8% in the two highest skill bands for numeracy, and 47.4% and 50.7% respectively, for all students across the State.

3.5.1 School Retention Rates

The region has the worst performance in the State when compared with other RCMG regions for retention rates for Years 10 to 12 Aboriginal students in 2005.

In 2005, the full-time equivalent retention rate across all schools for Riverina/Murray Aboriginal students in Years 10 to 12 was 29.7%, compared to 59.9% for all students in the region. The NSW average for all Aboriginal students was 39.3%, and for all students was 74.2%, indicating that Aboriginal students in the Riverina/Murray are remaining in school at a rate around 25% lower than the state average for Aboriginal students, and around 60% lower than the state average for all students.

These data indicate that Riverina/Murray schools need to greatly 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

As **Figure 9** shows, Aboriginal people (males and females) are highly likely not to complete high school (about 70%), compared with 45% for all non-Aboriginal people. For many non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, Year 10 qualifications (or less) were their highest educational attainment, which is not unusual given the dominance of agricultural activities in the region. For New South Wales in 2001, about 69% of Aboriginal people aged over 15 years had no post-school qualifications, compared with 53% for non-Aboriginal people.

The dominance of non-Aboriginal men and Aboriginal men in the trades is evident in the proportion of the population with (trade) certificates. For higher school education, a greater proportion of non-Aboriginal people had completed Year 12. But interestingly, a greater proportion of Aboriginal females had completed Year 12 (and Year 11). This preference for Aboriginal females obtaining higher education is also evident in the tertiary qualifications of a TAFE diploma and university bachelor degree, but still a far higher proportion of non-Aboriginal people had higher educational qualifications. This means that non-Aboriginal people have the better occupational opportunities and ability to migrate out of the region into high paying high skilled jobs.

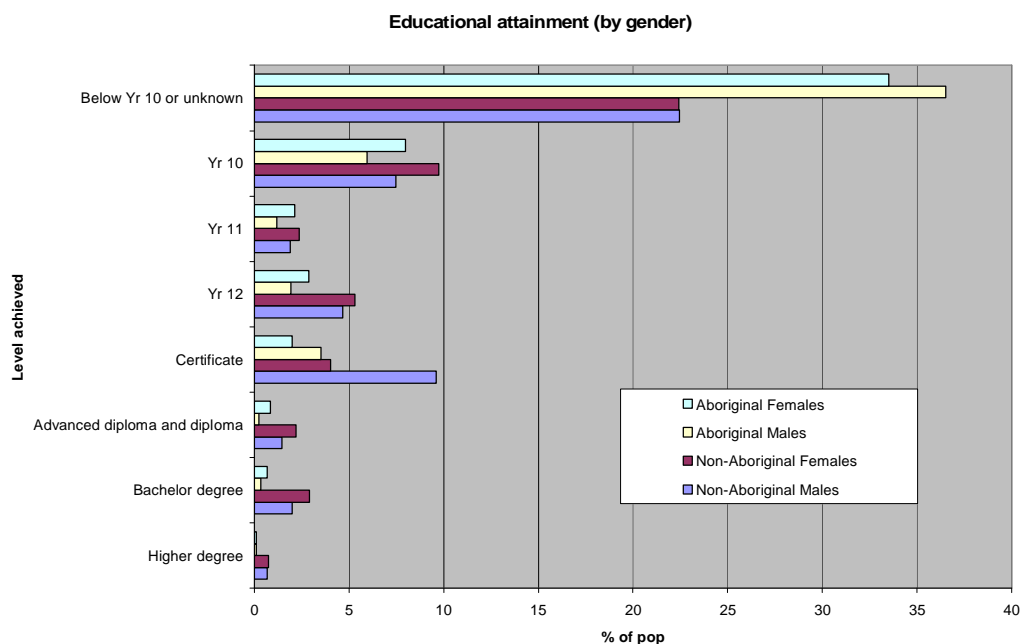


Figure 9: Educational Attainment for the Riverina/Murray Region by Gender and Aboriginality

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.

There have been several recent disputes in the Murray-Riverina region over who has authority to assert cultural authority in which areas. The number of native title claims and the diversity of claimant groups indicate the level of disputation in the region.

Claim Details	LGA(s)	Status
Yorta Yorta Clans (VC94/1) (see also VPA94/1 – which is an active compensation claim)	Berrigan Conargo Corowa Deniliquin Greater Hume Jerilderie Murray Wakool	Finalised - Full Approved Determination
Walgalu/Ngunnawal, Wiradjuri (NC98/18)	Tumut Shire Council (an area at Adelong)	Finalised - Withdrawn
Wiradjuri (NC96/19)	Narrandera Shire Council	Finalised - Discontinued
Mutthi-Mutthi People (NC97/29) and Muthi Muthi People	Carrathool Hay	Finalised - Dismissed

(NC97/27) (see also, Muthi Muthi People # 1 (NC00/3), Muthi Muthi People # 2 (NPA97/1), and Muthi Muthi People # 4 (NPA97/7) - Muthi Muthi People # 3 only covered Balranald Shire)	Wakool	
Wiradjuri People (NC97/25) (see also NC02/3 – covers only Bland Shire)^	Bland Shire Council Weddin Shire Council	Finalised - Discontinued
Ngunawal People (NC00/1)	Cootamundra Gundagai Harden	Finalised - Discontinued
Mooka Traditional Owners Council (NC02/2)	Bland Cootamundra Gundagai Harden June Temora Weddin Young	Finalised - Discontinued
Robinvale Aboriginal Community (VC96/1)	Wakool	Active
Wadi Wadi (VC97/9)	Wakool	Finalised - Discontinued
North West Nations (VC97/17)	Wakool	Finalised - Discontinued
Wamba Wamba, Barapa Barapa and Wadi Wadi Peoples (VC00/5)	Wakool	Active
Mooka and Kalara United Families Claim (Mooka #2) (NC02/4)^	Bland, near West Wyalong	Finalised - Discontinued
Richard & William Gilbert Family Claim (NC02/13)^	Bland (specifically Lake Cowal)	Finalised - Discontinued
Goolagong Family Claim (NC02/16)^	Bland (specifically Lake Cowal)	Finalised - Discontinued
Sloan Family Claim (NC02/15)^	Bland (specifically Lake Cowal)	Finalised - Discontinued
Mrs Betty Atkinson Family Claim (NC02/14)*	Bland (specifically Lake Cowal)	Finalised - Discontinued
Tumut Brungle Area Agreement (NIA1998/001)	Gundagai Tumbarumba Tumut Wagga Wagga	An area agreement for mining activity

* In 2002, the controversial gold mine at Lake Cowal resulted in much community conflict over assertion of rights and interests leading to many overlapping native title claims (see below).

Table 5: Native Title Claims and Agreements within the Riverina/Murray Region

Source: National Native Title Tribunal

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 3,907 known and recorded sites of Aboriginal cultural and heritage significance listed on the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) for the 30 LGAs in the region.

Aboriginal people are actively involved in the protection of Aboriginal heritage and rights in the management of land and natural resources. For example, there are three Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in the Riverina/Murray (Lower Murray Darling CMA, Murray CMA, and Murrumbidgee CMA), and each has projects on Aboriginal heritage and other issues. There is also a Mungo National Park Co-Management Agreement.

Projects in Lower Murray Darling CMA (<http://www.lmd.cma.nsw.gov.au/>) Cultural Vegetation Project

This project, based in Mutthi Mutthi country to the east of the catchment, provides increased opportunities for traditional owners and the broader Aboriginal community to pass on cultural knowledge between generations through recording biodiversity and places of spiritual, cultural, economic and social significance. This twelve-month project is in its final stages, with the final review of the report by the Mutthi Mutthi participants to be undertaken during March 2006.

LMD Cultural Biodiversity Project

This project targeted a cultural biodiversity strategy with participants of Barkindji (Paakantji) communities in natural resource management to implement actions for effective land and water management policies. The plotting of tribal boundary lines and recording sites of significance was part of the process. The updating of vegetation references in the language of the local Aboriginal people and the removal of references to other tribal groups was an important step. This project is nearing completion with the assistance of the Barkindji participants.

There are four Aboriginal Places declared within the region:

- 1) Algeboia Aboriginal Place
- 2) Koomaringa Aboriginal Place
- 3) Koonadan Aboriginal Place
- 4) Hannibal Hamilton Grave Aboriginal Place.

There is one Historic Site declared within the region, i.e., Koonadan Historic Site.

3.6.2 Inland Development

Increased migration into regional centres such as Albury, Griffith, Wagga Wagga and Young 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.

For the Riverina Murray, there have been 453 Aboriginal Land Claims lodged (or 6% of total claims) and six claims granted.

The amount and value of land held by LALCs is not evenly distributed. In the Western Division, the nature of land tenure has meant that little land has been available for claim. LALCs in coastal areas have benefited from greater opportunities to claim land and from the boom in land prices of the past decade. The following figures graphically illustrate these differences

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act Review Taskforce noted in its *Land Dealings Discussion Paper* that LALCs in this region had mainly acquired and owned lands that were “town periphery settlements [and that] town expansion plans add value to Aboriginal land”.¹³ As the Federal Agriculture Minister noted in 2005, “demand for peri-urban lifestyles is forcing up the price of agricultural land”.¹⁴ This is true for major regional centres such as Albury, Deniliquin, Griffith and Wagga Wagga – where the region’s LALCs have smaller parcels in terms of land area, but are much more valuable holdings. Nearby LALCs in smaller towns, such as Hay and Moama have land which is of lower economic value, or less land overall.

Balranald is the LALC that seems well placed in terms of both the overall value of their landholdings and their net area. This could be because of the numbers of rural properties it owns.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) also owns and manages four rural properties in the region, including Appin Station near Balranald. NSWALC acquired responsibility for the operation of rural properties from Regional Aboriginal Land Councils about 14 years ago. In 2002, NSWALC appointed independent farm management experts, Riverina FARM Pty Ltd, to provide advice and expert assistance.

Property Name	Location (LGA)	Area (ha)	Land holding body	Date Granted
Culpra Station	Balranald	15,884	ILC	

¹³ Aboriginal Land Rights Act Review Taskforce, *Land Dealings Discussion Paper*, p. 8.
¹⁴ Hon W Truss MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, “Speech to Outlook 2005 Conference”, National Convention Centre, Canberra, 1 March 2005, see: <http://www.maff.gov.au/speeches/2005/outlook05.html>

Jarwonga (Billa Downs)	Balranald	6,492	Billa Downs Aboriginal Corporationxx	12/11/01
Toogimbie and Lorenzo	Hay	1,016	Nari Nari Tribal Council	15/12/00
Glenhope	Hay	4,570	Nari Nari Tribal Council	15/12/00
Menera	Wakool	4,508	ILC	
Elimdale	Conargo	509	Larnangurag AboriginalAssociation Inc	20/10/00

Table 12: ILC Properties in the Riverina/Murray Region¹⁵

There is one Aboriginal Land Use Agreement in the Riverina/Murray region at Tumut Brungle.

3.7 Families and Young People

Most Aboriginal families in the region have children younger than 15 years of age. According to the *2001 Census*, there are almost twice as many Aboriginal families as non-Aboriginal families per capita with children under 15, or with non-dependent children. A larger proportion of non-Aboriginal families are family couples without children, meaning they have greater capacity to earn and save wealth.

Almost three times as many Aboriginal families per capita have only one parent with children under 15 years of age. For Aboriginal families, about 17% of the Aboriginal population are in one-parent families with children less than 15 years of age, compared with 6% of the non-Aboriginal population. This is an important issue, because in these families there are no older children to help raise younger siblings, which means they are more likely to need government services and assistance.

¹⁵ http://www.ilc.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Land_Acquisiton_Activity_NSW_Oct05.pdf and <http://www.ilc.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=38>

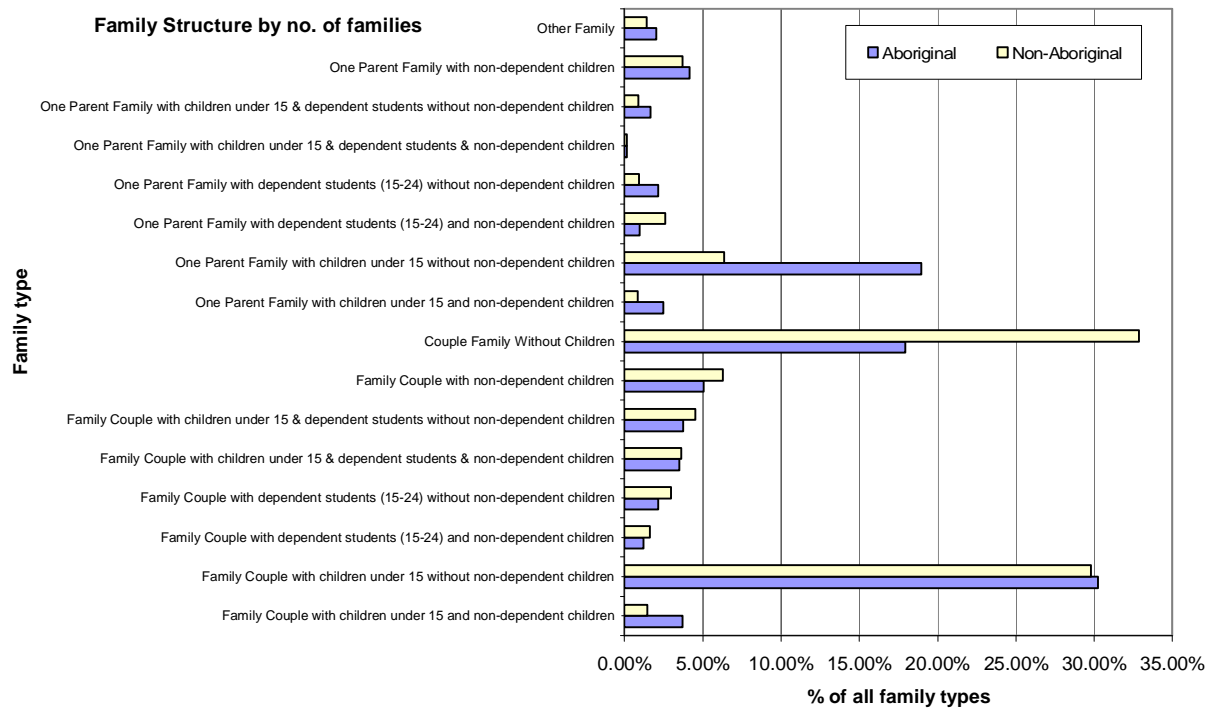


Figure 10: Family Structure by Numbers of Families in Binaal Billa ATSIC Region

Dr Juliane Allan in the *Binaal Billa Regional Data Report 2004* noted this high proportion of single parent families, commenting that “single parent status has a negative effect on a family’s income levels, resulting in diminished access to housing, education and health services... [additionally] the one parent families frequently have several children to be responsible for, and given the age profile of the population [that is young [see graphs 16 and 17 above], these children are likely to be under 15 years and dependent on the adult’s income and support for some time.”

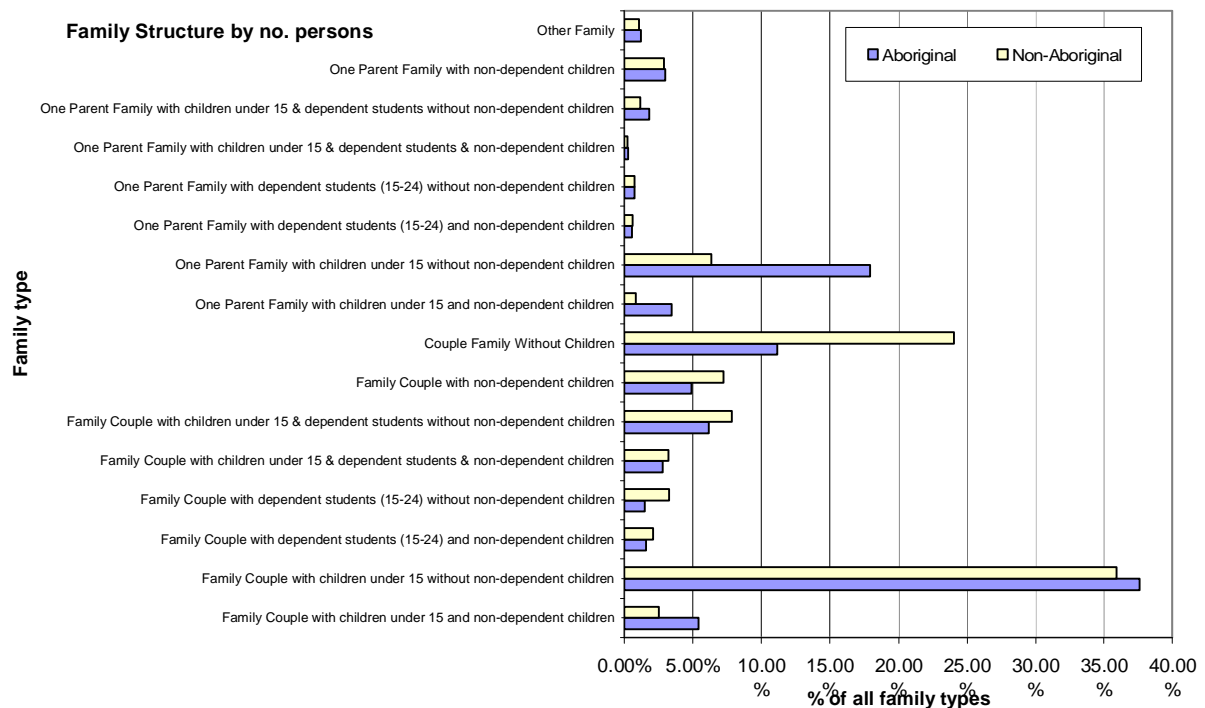


Figure 11: Family Structure by Numbers of Persons in Binaal Billa ATSIC Region

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.

¹⁶ *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators*, p. 60.

¹⁷ *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 consultation report covered the entire Binaal Billa region, the identified priorities were developed with involvement from Aboriginal people in the Riverina/Murray region. The consultations found that the most important priority was education. Aboriginal people see education as the key to overcoming disadvantage, leading to the improved wellbeing of Aboriginal communities and creating a better future for Aboriginal children.

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

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 (*Binaal Billa Regional Council Strategic Plan 2004-05*).

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 Coastal Sydney 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"> • Diabetes • Skin infections • Environmental health • Involvement in cultural heritage & land management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maternal and child health • Cardiovascular disease • Pertussis, measles and Haemophilus influenza meningitis rates • Sexual assault & domestic violence rates • Housing • Adult incarceration rates • Median income • Employment • Years 3 & 5 literacy & numeracy • Years 10 to 12 retention rates • Surveys of cultural heritage

The areas of greater disadvantage are generally also community priorities, according to the information provided by the Binaal Billa Regional Council during community consultations. In addition to housing, justice issues, drug and alcohol counselling, and services for families, the community has given high priority to transport, education and employment opportunities.

4.3 Issues for Consideration

It is recommended that the Riverina/Murray Regional Engagement Group undertake further investigation into the following issues:

1. A serious and concerted reassessment of the educational needs of Aboriginal people in the region. As the Binaal Billa Regional Council found, education is the Aboriginal community's highest priority and has the greatest effect on social and economic opportunities.
2. A major reassessment of health funding priorities for, and levels of expenditure on, Aboriginal people in the region, especially for mothers and babies.
3. The low levels of home ownership and high dependence on social housing of Aboriginal people in the region suggest that the expected increase in housing demand resulting from the high youth demographic and pregnancy rates will ensure the need for a continued high focus on housing programs.
4. An assessment of whether there are sufficient services and programs in the region targeting Aboriginal victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault, including the provision of crisis accommodation.
5. As future prospects for labourers and low skilled occupations in agriculture and manufacturing are expected to be below average, Aboriginal men and women should be encouraged to undertake further education, training and career development in the trades and professions. Aboriginal single mothers also require support programs to better enable them to participate in education, training and the labour market. Such employment initiatives will help slow the rate of out-migration from the region.

6. Develop opportunities for Aboriginal landholders (Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Corporations) to better use their land for conservation and economic purposes.

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.

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

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