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Our Ref: 225251

Monday 20 November 2017

Bronwyn Franklin
Commissioner
Service delivery in Indigenous communities
Queensland Productivity Commission
PO Box 12112
GEORGE ST QLD 4003

Lodged online: <http://www.qpc.qld.gov.au/inquiries/indigenous-services/>

Dear Commissioner

RE: Submission regarding QPC draft report - service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In response to the Commission's public invitation, Burke Shire Council presents this submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) 2017 report 'Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities'. In this submission we reply to your call for further views¹ – in particular how non-Indigenous councils with significant Indigenous populations can collaborate with ATSI councils to deliver municipal services and infrastructure with greater efficiency and transformative results.

Burke's submission during the initial public consultation process listed five key desired outcomes being: 1. Reduce the cost of transport, 2. Improve road access, 3. Share ATSI funding with non-discrete ATSI communities, 4. Incentivise collaboration between discrete and non-discrete communities, and 5. Reward good governance with reduced red tape.

Building on the above points 2-5, in this submission we focus on how non-Indigenous councils can collaborate with their ATSI neighbours in the delivery of municipal services and infrastructure such as water and sewer, roads and other transport (eg: ports, airports), asset management, and other capacity-building shared activities. We also make the point that addressing the issue of remote housing will be a critical enabler.

¹ Seeking further views - refer pxxxviii of the full report or p30 of the summary report

Burke Shire Council is a stable, well-functioning local government with a significant and empowered Indigenous population. According to the 2016 census, Burke local government area (LGA) has a population of 328 people of which 40.3 percent identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Anecdotally and empirically however we believe this percentage is much higher, and our community is deserving of ATSI funding in the same manner as the discrete communities of Aurukun and Mornington that are not Aboriginal Shires. 95% of students enrolled in Burketown State School in 2017 are Indigenous, as are around half of Burke Shire Council staff. This percentage jumps to 80% of the number of staff who are local in origin² and who clearly identify as either ATSI or non-ATSI. Our community is characterised by strong leadership at both the local government and traditional owner level.

On the other hand, the discrete Indigenous community of Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire experiences some of the highest levels of comparative socio-economic disadvantage. This is also true for the Waanyi Traditional Owners living on the Bidunggu Aboriginal Land Trust located at Gregory in Burke Shire. Both of these communities are within the geographic boundaries of Burke LGA. Burke provides treated drinking water to Bidunggu and has never received payment of water rates or water use – ie: Burke Shire Council is unofficially providing subsidised drinking water to this community. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) lists neither Burketown nor Bidunggu as a discrete ATSI community.

In speaking of comparisons between communities we note with interest the situation within our southern neighbouring LGA of Cloncurry, in that they have the township of Dajarra with an almost exclusively Indigenous population. Our interest centres around how this community is dealt with by Cloncurry Shire Council, and whether they receive additional ATSI funding, or funding of any type for that matter to improve the well being of the population in Dajara. Do they, for instance, receive a share of unmatched ATSI TIDS (Regional Transport Alliance/ Transport Infrastructure Development Scheme)? Do they share in the funding available for housing in Indigenous communities? We see a similarity with the Burke/Bidunggu marriage.

Burke shares the same low level of economic resources as our neighbouring Aboriginal Shire of Doomadgee, and the discrete community of Mornington Island. All three have a score of 1, which equates to most disadvantaged in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Index of Economic Resources (refer Table 1). In Burke however, the level of social disadvantage is considerably less extreme. Burke scores a 2 and 3 in indices relating to socio-economic disadvantage compared to Doomadgee and Mornington both scoring 1. A comparison of Burke and Doomadgee using QLD Government Regional Profiles data reveals glaring inequities in education and employment (refer Table 2).

Burketown State School, with its 95% Indigenous enrolment, is another example of the high capacity of the Burke community in comparison to our discrete neighbours. Despite the school's very low comparative ranking in the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), its academic results are exceptional. In semester 1 of 2016, 100% of all students in all years achieved a C or higher

² For this purpose staff are considered **not** local in origin if they have no local background and whose employment is generally short-term/itinerant in nature with little likelihood of the person settling permanently in Burketown. This notably applies to key qualified positions such as CEO.

in science. In term 1, 100% of year 2 students were at or above the benchmark for reading and NAPLAN results in 2016 for years 3 and 5 were above or near the QLD state average and well above like schools³.

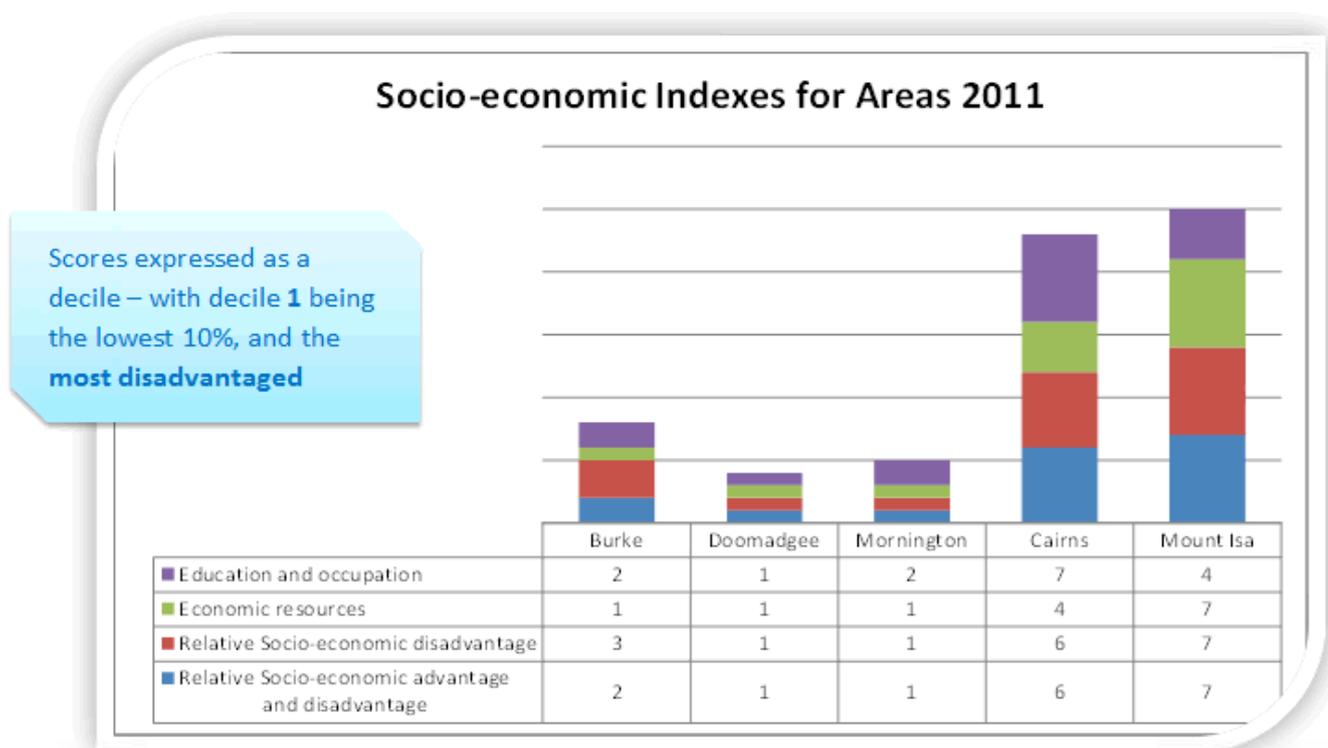


Table 1: SEIFA Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas 2011

Regional Indigenous Profiles by LGA⁴	Burke	Doomadgee
One-parent households	6.4%	16.1%
Dependent children in jobless families (notably in both communities there were NO non-Indigenous jobless families)	33.3%	59.7%
Time spent doing voluntary work	17.8%	2.8%
Completed year 12 or equivalent persons 15 years+	34.6%	10.3%
Non-school qualification persons 15 years+	38.6%	18.3%
Certificate Yr12, equivalent, or AQF cert 11 or above 20-24 yrs	76.9%	8.9%
Working, studying or training	64.7%	7.5%
Unemployment (notably in both communities there was NO unemployment for non-Indigenous)	7.5%	25.4%
Working as machinery operators/drivers	23.8%	4.7%
Overcrowding in housing	15.4%	44.8%

Table 2: Regional Indigenous Profiles

³ Statistics supplied by Burketown State School – school overview

⁴ Source: Queensland Government Statistician's Office, Queensland Treasury, Queensland Regional Profiles: Indigenous Profile for Burke (S) Local Government Area

Burke Shire Council, and the community of Burke, has evolved over recent years from dysfunctionality and broken relationships into its current stability, with a growing level of maturity and harmony. Much of the change can be attributed to strong leadership balanced by a commitment to tolerance and collaboration, and a developing understanding of the issues and power dynamics that enable or cripple positive change. Burke Shire Council and the Gangalidda and Garawa Native Title Aboriginal Corp (NTAC) signed a ground breaking Land Exchange Indigenous Land Agreement (ILUA) in 2014 following extensive collaboration between the two parties. The ILUA dealt with over 22,000 hectares of land in Burketown with the result that both the Local Government and Traditional Owners now have access to land to meet various residential, commercial, conservation, community, cultural, civic and industrial needs.

In 2017 Burke Shire Council and the Waanyi NTAC signed an ILUA that gave Council tenure over land for municipal services (waste site, and solar array to power the Gregory drinking water treatment plant). The Waanyi people assented to this ILUA without compensation; on the expectation of negotiating a further ILUA in Gregory that will meet the diverse land needs of both parties. Both the Burketown ILUA and the proposed Gregory ILUA are predicated on increasing opportunity for Indigenous economic development, and cultural preservation and enrichment.

Whilst Burke has no appetite or capacity to become involved in delivery of social services, we believe that working collaboratively to manage municipal assets, supported by appropriate training and mentoring, will self-generate improvements in social and economic capacity. Burke is already consulting with Doomadgee to develop a regional approach to waste management. Doomadgee proposes to build a regional waste facility that will receive Burke's waste; and Burke proposes to collaborate with Doomadgee in developing waste transfer stations in our LGA. There is future potential for local income-generating management of the transfer facilities, along with haulage of waste from Burketown and Gregory to Doomadgee.

In Burke LGA 24% of the Indigenous population work as machinery operators/drivers, compared to less than 5% in Doomadgee (refer Table 2). Burke Shire Council employs around 21 Indigenous staff who are achieving milestones as they pursue the career paths that Burke offers. Burke's current executive assistant to the CEO began as a trainee straight out school at the age of 17, was appointed EA at age 19, and is now studying a Diploma in Local Government Administration. Migate awarded Apprentice of the Year last year to Burke's apprentice plumber. Burke's finance officer is currently being mentored into a senior role including studying for a tertiary qualification. Another Indigenous staff member recently completed a mechanic's apprenticeship and went on to secure a permanent mechanic's position with Council, and we have just offered another apprenticeship.

With 550 kilometres of road across more than 40,000 square kilometres, Burke will deliver over \$20 million in road repairs, maintenance and betterment in the two year period from 1 July 2016. In comparison, Doomadgee covers less than 2,000 square kilometres with a concomitantly smaller road network; but has a population of around four times greater than Burke. It makes sense for Burke and Doomadgee to combine forces in delivering roadworks - Doomadgee has the population and Burke has the economic opportunities through its road network along with strong organisational capacity. We have already successfully delivered much of this \$20m+ program and maintained compliance with the various state and federal grant funding agreements.

Burke is also keen to investigate opportunities to share resources, knowledge and capacity in the area of governance with a particular focus on asset management. Like roadbuilding; sharing knowledge and systems in asset management makes sense and should result in improved capacity, reduced duplication and lower costs. Joint use of assets, and further shared services in other areas, are further opportunities to explore.

Burke is keen to work with individual neighbours and also to develop partnerships in conjunction with DATSIP in order to share knowledge, interactions and connections. DATSIP and Burke have expressed the same interest in delivery of shared services across Indigenous and remote Councils. In this regard, Burke has accepted DATSIP's invitation to be a member of their Shared Services Hub – Stakeholder Reference Group that has a particular focus on effective delivery of land related services in the Gulf region. I believe that we all have the same end-game and a partnership would strengthen our ability to achieve a regionally beneficial outcome.

For any such initiative to succeed, the issue of lack of housing will need to be addressed. As a non-ATSI Shire, Burke has missed out on the state support provided for housing in ATSI communities. As a result, Council has become a provider of social housing – primarily to house its own staff – and the Mougibi Housing Co-op Society have been unable to maintain or expand their small social housing portfolio. Council owns 28 units of housing – around one quarter of the entire housing stock in Burketown. We are unable to charge sufficient rent to cover the cost of this housing and the annual loss contributes to our unsustainable financial position. This is a major issue that requires a multi-departmental approach; and another opportunity to share in the funding that ATSI communities enjoy along with potentially partnering to build a local workforce for housing repairs and maintenance. Perhaps together our communities can manage and deliver the services currently provided through the state Business Asset Services model.

In order to achieve equality with other discrete communities, it is essential that the Queensland Government recognises the Indigenous population of Burke Shire with ATSI funding, particularly – although not limited to - the area of housing. In this regard, and to reiterate comments in our first submission, Burke seeks a share in the \$1.8 billion housing strategy (refer <https://budget.qld.gov.au/budget-highlights/housing/>) for both Burketown and Gregory. This will need to include a share in the \$1.2b to renew social housing, \$420m for housing construction, and \$75m to progress home ownership in discrete communities. Our housing shortage is so extreme that Council and other employers are unable at times to fill positions – in other words, there are jobs available but no housing. Providing housing in Burketown has the potential to take some pressure off Doomadgee, and enable Burketown locals to return to live and work in their home town. Providing housing in Gregory will tie in with the proposed Gregory ILUA to complement economic development activities for the Waanyi people.

Burke Shire Council is positioned culturally, geographically and organisationally to work with the Doomadgee Aboriginal Shire on our common issues, that have disparate solutions. Together we can capitalise on the strengths and relationships that exist in our Gulf communities and begin to equalise capacity by partnering in the provision of municipal services and infrastructure. We will need assistance, particularly in the area of housing and we look forward to positive outcomes, and effective implementation of recommendations, from the Productivity Commission's Inquiry.

On behalf of Council and community I express my appreciation to the Productivity Commission, not only for conducting this enquiry, but also for your willingness to be flexible in your arrangements in order to offer opportunities for all stakeholders to engage in the process.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any enquiries or require further information on the matters within.

Yours sincerely


Er Ernie Camp
Mayor

Figure 1 Map of Burke (S) LGA

