empowered COMMUNITIES

Ngura Kunpu Ngaranytjaku

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

Response to the Remote Employment and Participation Discussion Paper

Background to NPY Empowered Communities

In 2013, Aboriginal leaders from around the country came together with a common vision –

> "*…for our children to have the same opportunities and choices other Australians expect for their children. We want them to succeed in mainstream Australia, achieving educational success, prospering in the economy and living long, safe and healthy lives. We want them to retain their distinct cultures, languages and identities as peoples and to be recognized as Indigenous Australians*."

Empowered Communities is an initiative devised by Indigenous leaders throughout Australia. It seeks to develop a new relationship with Government, based on the ideas and aspirations of local Aboriginal people in eight regions of Australia. Empowered Communities seeks to reform the 'top-down' approach to decision making, by listening to the ideas and worries of Aboriginal people and working with them to develop a more responsive, locally driven service system, that will deliver more positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The **goals** of Empowered Communities are:

1) To close the gap on the social and economic disadvantage of the Indigenous Australians of the Empowered Communities regions.

2) To enable the cultural recognition and determination of Indigenous Australians of the Empowered Communities regions so that we can preserve, maintain, renew and adapt our cultural and linguistic heritage and transmit our heritage to future generations.

Empowered Communities leaders across Australia agree that there are 5 priority areas for improving life for Aboriginal people –

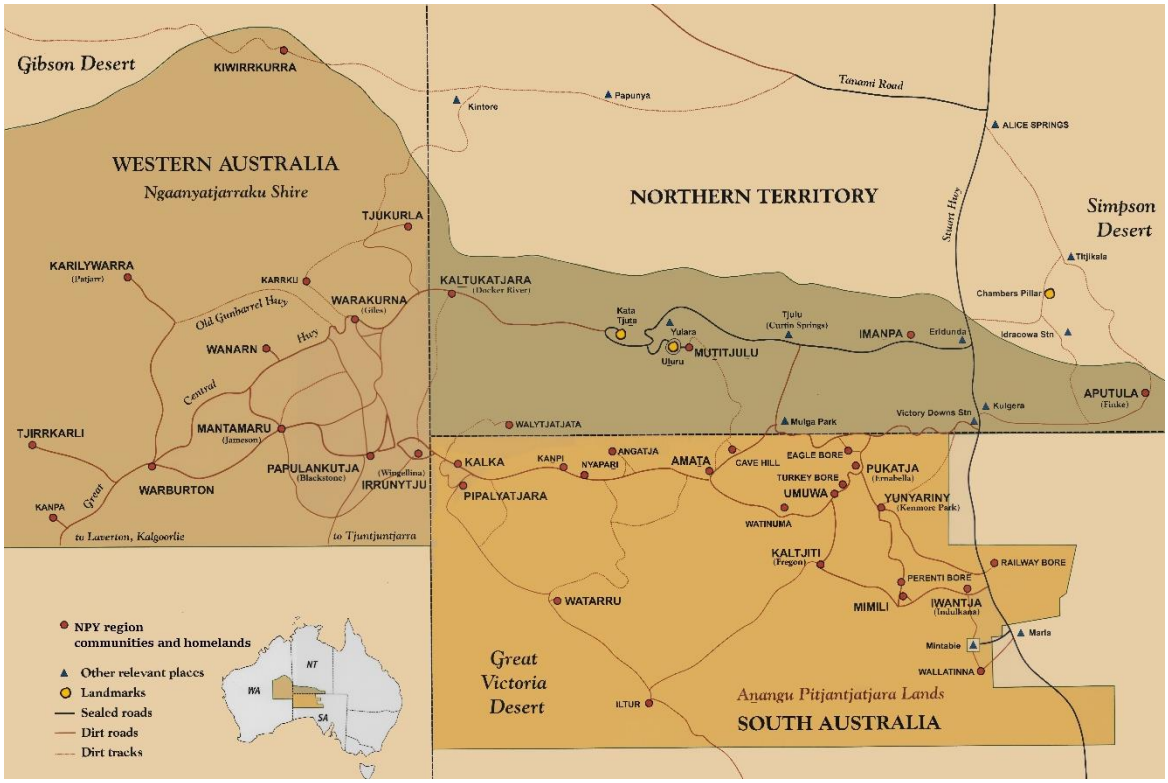
- Good education
- Safe communities
- Work or meaningful engagement
- Proper housing
- Care for children, elderly and the disabled

At the heart of these priorities in the NPY region is a strong commitment to maintaining culture and traditional values, through *Tjukurpa* (Law), *Walytja* (Family), *Manta* (Country) and *Wangka Uti* (Language).

"*Empowered Communities seeks to create a genuine and balanced partnership between Indigenous organisations, government and corporate Australia, where everybody is working together on a level playing field and towards a shared strategy*"

Andrea Mason, CEO, NPY Women's Council

The NPY region covers 350,000 square kilometres in the cross border region of Central Australia, and is home to 26 remote Aboriginal Communities and homelands (see map below).



Over the past 18 months, the Empowered Communities team has been visiting communities throughout the NPY region, listening to people's concerns and ideas, with the view to developing a shared vision for an Anangu[1]-led Regional Development Roadmap for the region.

Parallel to this we are collecting and analysing data about the demographic and social indicators of development, as well as investment in programs and initiatives in the region.

[1] Aboriginal people

Employment and Meaningful Engagement are priorities for Anangu

During the past 18 months the NPY Empowered Communities team has facilitated community meetings with almost all of the 26 communities in the region, listening to Anangu. Work, and worries about CDP has been consistently raised by both men and women, and is the most commonly raised concern in all meetings held.

CDP was highlighted as a specific concern, amongst the overall work related themes including:

- *Not enough jobs for people in community*
- *A desire for jobs that contribute to community*
- *Support for young people to access jobs and training*
- *The failure of CDP to provide real jobs*
- *Challenges associated with access and interface for Anangu with Centrelink*
- *Centrelink penalties for CDP breaches are causing significant hardship on families*

Of the total population of 5276[2] Indigenous people in the region, 63% of the population aged 20-64 years are receiving Centrelink benefits[3].

We are aware of a significant proportion of the population who are eligible for, and in need of, Centrelink benefits, but have not accessed this support due to a range of barriers detailed in our submission to the recent CDP Senate Inquiry (Appendix 1). Nonetheless, the majority of the Anangu population in the NPY region are directly dependent on Centrelink benefits.

[2] 2011 Census

[3] December 2015, Centrelink Administration Records.

TABLE 1: DURATION OF INCOME SUPPORT PAYMENTS, NPY LANDS, DECEMBER 2015

	Female		Male		Total
	No activity required				
	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	
0-<12 months	<5	42	<5	20	68
12-<24 months	0	40	0	12	52
24-<60 months	<5	153	<5	56	212
60 months+	5	323	7	184	519
	Activity required				
0-<12 months	8	74	18	163	263
12-<24 months	<5	62	n.p	119	191
24-<60 months	<5	132	n.p	199	345
60 months+	6	331	7	147	491
	27	**1157**	**57**	**900**	**2141**

When researching our submission there was extensive anecdotal evidence that Anangu are experiencing intergenerational trauma which is exacerbated by the current program that sets up remote Aboriginal people to fail. The current model does not support remote communities' governance and business 'operating rhythm'. It is inflexible and imposes unrealistic and unachievable expectations on those communities and their people. Furthermore, the failure to recognise the unique social and cultural cultural norms of the NPY region results in overlooking the agency and aspirations of Indigenous people.

As we stated in our submission to the Senate Inquiry:

'while some experiences of CDP are positive, the current model unfairly discriminates against (mainly Indigenous) people living in remote Australia. It is harsh, unjust and unreasonable, impractical to implement in remote communities and is therefore contributing to considerable hardship and community stress throughout the NPY region.

There are many aspects of the current CDP regime that are cumbersome, confusing and very difficult to navigate, especially for those who are not fluent or confident English speakers.

English is the second or even third language for the majority of CDP participants in the NPY region. Real disadvantage is exacerbated by the harsh penalty regime. A review of the CDP model is therefore timely'.

As '*the design of a new model will also incorporate the findings of current reviews and Inquiries into CDP, including: the Senate Inquiry on the 'appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the CDP'* the NPY Empowered Communities submission to the above Senate Inquiry is included as an appendix to this submission. Another is a summary of a discussion with an Anangu youth worker who is a former employee of a remote communities CDP Provider and a community elder as well as the transcript of an Anangu worker's statement to the Alice Springs CDP Senate Inquiry hearing, which describes her experience of CDP.

As with our submission to the Senate Inquiry, this response does not particularly advocate for any of the three options offered. Rather it strongly advocates for a reframing of the notion of 'work' and 'employment' – moving from a deficit model to reframe the notion of work to include 'meaningful community engagement' that strengthens communities where it is simply not feasible to provide paid employment for all eligible working-age adults.

Remote communities have their own 'operating rhythm', a distinct set of structures driven by culture, kinship, and lore. A new model must recognise and nurture the strengths of remote communities and invest in their 'operating rhythm'. Such an approach would support Anangu to develop and build cultural competency by providing programs and opportunities that recognise the importance of connection to country and culture. Unlike the current program, this approachwould nurture important outcomes sought through participation I work including job satisfaction, self-fulfillment, self-worth and empowerment,; all of which have positive impacts on individual wellbeing, families and the broader community.

Using CDP as a vehicle to acknowledge and strengthen Aboriginal culture and society will help build a relationship of trust upon which broader elements of employment and economic participationcan be developed with participants who will consequently develop the mental and physical well-being and motivation to carry these responsibilities.

A new model would explore and develop the local Anangu workforce and foster commercial enterprises that make and maintain those connections, for example through:

- Creative pursuits through art, storytelling and music,
- Caring for country through rehabilitation and protective work such as Ranger programs,
- Intergenerational teaching to develop skills for young people to 'walk in both worlds', connecting mainstream and cultural learning.

To maximise the potential benefit to communities, a new model would have a local funding pool and structures to support communities to decide on the initiatives that strengthen their particular operating rhythm, with checks and balances from Aboriginal leaders who are reviewing the bigger picture.

Remote Employment and Participation

The **Remote Employment and Participation Discussion Paper** acknowledges that *"Remote communities offer unique challenges that mean mainstream employment and participation solutions have historically fallen short of community expectations. Remote communities feature weaker labour markets, geographic dispersion, language and cultural differences and service delivery challenges. Furthermore, Government payments are the main source of income in many communities."*

In seeking "*a new model that lifts the best parts from the CDP, past models such as the CDEP, and new thinking to ensure we not only maintain momentum, but also further improve outcomes for remote job seekers and communities*" **it must be acknowledged that '*weaker labour markets*' means there are simply not enough jobs in many remote communities to employ all the capable Anangu adults, even if they possessed the qualifications and skills to do the jobs currently occupied by others.**

Reframing of the Discussion: Remote Community Participation and Employment

Given the reality of minimal employment opportunities and the broader issues associated with supporting transition to employment in remote communities, a reframing of the discussion is required. The focus should shift toward an acknowledgement of the operating rhythm of communities and the strengths and abilities of individuals and families to be meaningfully engaged in the development and maintenance of community livelihoods, culture, and economy.

In her recent publication, *Better than Welfare (*2017:1), Kirrily Jordan states *"It is only since the 1970s that Indigenous engagement in the market economy has been statistically visible, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have been comprehensively included in the census. This has roughly coincided with an explicit policy aim of convergence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on a range of socio-economic indicators, including employment. There have been ongoing debates about whether such statistical equality is an appropriate goal, given the diverse livelihood aspirations of Indigenous people, and indeed whether 'improved livelihood' is a more fitting focus for policymaking than 'increased employment'.*

The current narrow stated focus of the Community Development Programme to have all capable adults in paid employment is unrealistic. It ignores the 'operating rhythm' of remote communities and relies on a set of unrealistic assumptions about remote communities and job seekers resident in them.

The following are some examples of the kinds of activities that a new CDP model could incorporate that would build resilience in communities, families and individuals through the foundations of Anangu identity: culture, language, kinship, land and lore.

- CDP activities should be designed for Anangu to experience their own medicine, by embedding wellbeing activities that are not soft opt-in activities, but rather the threads of Anangu identity that offer affirmation and context to our place in this country.
- Participants learning and performing song lines and their many layers in family, law, lore and land.
- Participants understanding the governance and business history of Anangu regions and communities, creating resources in language to inform the next generation of these core foundations, that encourages optimism and pride.
- Harvesting and producing bush food, bush medicines and productive foods for our consumption and for markets wherever possible.
- *Ngangkari* (traditional healers) program as a foundation for learning skills that could create a career path into mental health, youth work, police work, administration, teaching, caring for country and community service.
- Activities could be structured through training and internship programs. Art centres are ideally placed to manage such an arrangement because of the potential for teaching and passing on knowledge to the next generation.
- Providers can work with other Aboriginal organisations to foster entry level work experience and employment opportunities for school leavers.
- CDP could supply a workforce for basic level minor bicycle and tyre repair and maintenance in the community, offer yard maintenance, create spaces for enjoyment such as walking paths and common green squares for community events and family gatherings in the centre of the community.
- Working with communities to develop a work plan for their community, based on the priorities of that community, and training local work CDP teams to take ownership of and carry out the works to fulfil their CDP participation requirements eg:
    - **Grounds Maintenance Teams**: to undertake ground maintenance works: at Cemetery, Sorry Camps, playgrounds, school grounds, aged care grounds, art centre grounds, youth centre grounds, clinic grounds, etc;
    - **Maintaining Community and Cultural history** eg: Recording Anangu culture – feed into Ara Iritja work)

A new CDP program should be an asset for communities by using a synergistic approach to supporting the community bringing the knowledge from Anangu and *piranpa* (non-Anangu) society together for optimum outcomes.

The Assumptions Driving the Review

Assumptions about Remote Communities and Community Resources

- There are enough jobs in remote communities to accommodate all eligible 'job seekers'
- Appropriately pitched and accessible training opportunities for skills development and acquisition of the mandatory qualifications required for some of the community based positions are available in communities

- All communities have adequate, reliable local resourcing, in terms of both personnel eg: fully staffed Centrelink office, properly qualified CDP providers; and infrastructure eg: telephones (NB: Many remote communities don't have mobile coverage) functioning computers and internet access for participants to communicate with Centrelink and access their MyGov portal

Assumptions about Employers

- Flexible and part-time roles, commensurate with job seeker skill levels are available that accommodate people's competing cultural and other family responsibilities
- Employers in remote communities have the adequate resources and flexibility to support and mentor 'job seekers' into employment

Assumptions about 'job seekers'

- All CDP participants have functional English language skills to understand their obligations and the ability to converse about them with a Centrelink representative over the phone or in person explaining reporting and job-seeking obligations
- Participants are literate and can read and fill in forms
- Participants have the confidence to explain their particular current circumstances which may be quite stressful, traumatic or personal in nature
- There is somewhere participants can have such conversations confidentially
- Participants have household mail delivery service - most don't
- Participants have personal phones (only two APY communities have mobile phone coverage)
- They have personal computers and internet at home and so can access personal emails (as well as the MyGov portal)

Assumptions about the reporting requirements

- Centrelink has appropriately qualified personnel who can communicate clearly and respectfully with job seekers from different cultural backgrounds.
- Centrelink has enough appropriately qualified personnel to respond to job seekers in a timely and respectful manner (many people report waiting on hold for several hours when calling in for information or to report to meet their obligations)
- MyGov portals are available to all remote job seekers
- Interpreters are readily available and accessible

Appropriate 'capacity assessments' are available in communities as a large part of the participation requirements placed on job seekers are determined by these capacity assessments. **ese often erroneous assumptions have contributed in around 350,000 breaches - more cuts to payments for the 35,000 CDP participants than the equivalent JobActive programme that has 750,000 participants nationally**

The reality is:

- There are simply not enough jobs in communities to absorb all job seekers;

- There are not enough suitably qualified local job seekers to fill most of the existing vacancies
- Appropriate, accessible training opportunities are few and far between and often not available in a timely fashion or at a local community level
- Current employer incentives do not adequately acknowledge the increased resources required to support new employees
- The existing Centrelink structures and processes present numerous barriers for Anangu with low levels of English language, literacy and numeracy

The Discussion Paper acknowledges that individuals have different levels of capacity but there is a lack of suitable capacity assessment options in remote communities (in the form of medical assessors or other trained DHS capacity assessors) for these 'capacity assessments' to be undertaken in a timely and effective manner.

In the meantime, job seekers are 'assumed' to have capacity!

The Discussion Paper acknowledges that:

"Any new model would adopt a tailored, community based approach, with greater local control and decision making.

The aim is to build skills, employability and opportunity; strengthen communities to achieve their goals and aspirations; enable greater community control and decision-making; and ensure good protections for job seekers.

*It is envisaged that local community boards and community leaders, as key participants in the delivery of a new programme, would work closely with service providers. This includes involvement in setting activities, identifying priority industries for employment and advising on investment needs in enabling support services, such as literacy and numeracy. By encouraging community involvement, it is expected that services will be more responsive and better targeted, and the challenges and cost of remote service delivery will significantly reduce."*In light of the assumptions and contexts set out in the Discussion Paper NPY EC provides the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

Support for individuals

- A range of genuine options for community participation are explored as participation requirements.
- Clear plain language resources explaining the roles and relationships of various players in 'the system' are available (Many CDP participants mistakenly believe that a discussion or interview with the CDP provider equates to a discussion with Centrelink and therefore don't understand why a breach has occurred)
- Rights and responsibilities of job seekers are shared in a variety of clearly presented and accessible media

- Such rights should be in line with the National Employment Standards that provide minimal annual leave, personal leave, public holidays, etc.
- Additional paid leave of up to four weeks p.a. is available for cultural commitments
- Interpreter services should be readily accessible and regularly advertised locally
- Timely and appropriate capacity assessments are essential

Support for prospective employers

- Subsidised full and part-time positions are available options
- Regular and ongoing post placement support is provided
- The potential for high staff turnover often means that local employers commit considerable time and resources to support workers who may not stay for the mandatory 13 or 26 weeks. Subsidies should therefore be paid at least fortnightly, recognising the additional resourcing required to support new employees and trainees in the workplace, especially in the first weeks.

Consult with a range of stakeholders and remote communities on any new model through a number of different channels

- We strongly recommend that 'Target community consultations' occur in the NPY region to gain an accurate and in depth sense of the impracticality of the current Community Development Programme.
- The Expert Working Group should also include Anangu representatives – experts from the NPY communities

The New or Revised Program

- A new CDP model must acknowledge the operating rhythm of remote communities and foster activities for participants that are based in culture, language, land and lore as a basis for strengthening wellbeing and resilience among individuals, families, and communities.
- When the new model is agreed upon, investment in appropriate resources that clearly set the parameters of the new program are vital to its success.
- Communities have the right to know and understand its scope and possibilities. It is critical that the obligations and rights of all parties involved, and importantly, the assessment processes that determine the expectations and participation requirements that are placed on the program's target group, are clearly understood by Anangu.

Appendix A

NPY Empowered Communities CDP Inquiry submission

Appendix B

- Summary of discussion with an Anangu Youth Worker, formerly a remote communities CDP Provider employee
- Observations from a community Elder
- An excerpt from the transcript of the CDP Inquiry hearing in Alice Springs